

Changes in Japanese attitudes toward North Korea since “9/17”

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出る釘は打たれる

A nail that sticks out will be hammered down

– Japanese proverb

Abstract

This thesis sets out to explore how Japanese attitudes toward North Korea have changed since North Korean leader Kim Jong-il admitted that North Korea systematically abducted Japanese citizens during the 70s and 80s. The shocking abduction confession was made on September 17, 2002, and similarly to 9/11 in the US one year earlier, this day came to be known simply as 9/17 in Japanese abduction issue rhetoric.

By providing statistical data and giving an insight to the opinions of the most relevant voices in the Japanese North Korea debate, the thesis points out several changes brought forth by 9/17. The transformation of the abduction issue from suspicion to fact spurred a domestic “witch hunt” for people who had denied or doubted North Korea’s involvement in the disappearances before Kim Jong-il’s admission. The abduction issue came to be used as an ultimate standard of morality which had the power of stripping the doubters of legitimacy while it made the hardliners nearly untouchable. Since 9/17 the North Korea debate has become extremely one-sided as the Japanese government, the media and the public opinion have found common ground in advocating tough measures against North Korea.

The new climate of opinion is a far cry from the reconciliatory mood of the 90s when normalization of diplomatic relations with North Korea was on top of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ agenda. As the bilateral relations have bogged down in animosity and distrust, many actors affiliated with the political right have seen their chance to exploit the abduction issue for personal gains.

By going through a substantial amount of Japanese literature on the abduction issue, I seek to unravel these agendas and find out how anti-North Korea sentiments have come to be the only tolerated attitudes in today’s North Korea debate. In doing so, I discuss the transformation from assailant to victim in the minds of the Japanese, the public opinion’s hijacking of Japan’s North Korea policy and a threat perception which has reached unprecedented heights and resulted in key actors’ calls for remilitarization and even military action against North Korea.

Finally, I assess the future prospects for the Japan – North Korea relationship.

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Abbreviations

6PT – The Six-Party Talks. Talks between Japan, North Korea, China, the US, Russia and South Korea on denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. Lasted from 2003 to 2009.

9/17 – September 17, 2002. The day when Japanese PM Koizumi met with North Korean leader Kim Jong-il in Pyongyang for the first top level summit between the two nations. Kim Jong-il admitted that North Korea had abducted 13 Japanese citizens in the 70s and 80s.

BMD – Ballistic Missile Defense. An advanced rocket shield aimed at intercepting and neutralizing eventual incoming, airborne threats. Implemented under Koizumi.

COMJAN – Commission on Missing Japanese Probably Related to North Korea (led by Araki Kazuhiro).

CS – Chōsen Sōren (The General Association of Korean Residents in Japan).

DPJ – The Democratic Party of Japan.

DPRK – The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea).

KKAI – Kazokukai, The Family Association. An interest organization consisting of the family members of the abducted Japanese (currently led by Iizuka Shigeo)

LDP – The Liberal Democratic Party of Japan.

MEXT – The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology.

MKRI – The Modern Korea Research Institute (led by Satō Katsumi).

MOD – The Ministry of Defense (Japan).

MOFA – The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Japan).

NPT – The Non-Proliferation Treaty.

PM – Prime Minister.

RGIREN – (Kitachōsen ni Rachi sareta Nihonjin wo sōki ni Kyūshutsu suru tame ni Kōdō suru Giin Renmei) The Parliamentarian League for early [sic] Repatriation of Japanese Citizens Kidnapped by North Korea.

SDF – The Self-Defense Forces.

SDP – The Social Democratic Party (previously known as the Japanese Socialist Party).

SKAI – Sukūkai, The Rescue Association. A support group for KKAI (led by Nishioka Tsutomu).

WFP – The World Food Program.

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1. Introduction

After Koizumi's Pyongyang visit on September 17th, 2002 (hereafter 9/17) where North Korean leader Kim Jong-il confessed the long-suspected abductions of Japanese citizens, a great number of sources have commented on their observations of a change in Japanese public opinion toward North Korea. Japanese relations with North Korea have never been good, as the lack of normalized, diplomatic relations indicates, but during the Cold War and at least in the first half of the 1990s an atmosphere where North Korea-sympathetic sentiments were tolerated existed. This can be witnessed from the close ties between the North Korean Workers Party and the Japanese Socialist Party and at times the LDP, and further from the existence of groups like the Parliamentarians' League for Promotion of Japan-DPRK relations, and finally from Japan's food aid to North Korea during the Great Famine. This atmosphere has now disappeared. Due partly to North Korea's 1998 Taepodong missile launch which flew over Japan and forced the Japanese to rethink their security policy, but mainly to the "*abduction shock*" brought by 9/17.

When the "*abduction suspicion*" turned into an "*abduction issue*", the Japanese people were outraged. The media feasted on this new act in the North Korea drama and it ran news updates, documentaries, debate programs, exclusively hostile toward North Korea. The North Korea debaters became louder and more collectively outspoken. Finally they became so unison that the words "*North Korea debate*" seemed to lose their meaning. The commentators who had supported the families of the abductees from the beginning rode an unstoppable wave of legitimacy and lashed out against the people who had doubted the existence of the abductions. On the other hand the doubters, many of which had (to a varying degree) been sympathetic to North Korea's cause, altered their stance toward Kim Jong-il's regime or fell silent in order to shun the public ridicule. This led to a remarkable one-sidedness in the Japanese public opinion, a one-sidedness which has manifested itself so strongly that even by the slightest deviation from the hard line norm one runs the risk of social isolation.

This process is what the German public opinion researcher Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann has called the "*spiral of silence*". In short, the spiral of silence-theory argues that people whose opinion on a certain topic is in line with the opinion of what they perceive to be the majority

– will become more confident and assertive in stating their opinion, whereas people whose opinion breaches with the opinion of what they perceive to be the majority opinion – will fall silent. If the mechanics of the spiral of silence are allowed to proceed unhampered, the opinion of the perceived majority will finally have gained so much momentum that it comes to be regarded as the established public opinion. Noelle-Neumann defines public opinion as the “attitudes or behaviors one **must** express in public if one is not to isolate oneself; in areas of controversy or change, public opinions are those attitudes one **can** express without running the danger of isolating oneself”¹. So when the North Korea debate ceased to be a debate and turned into a unison condemnation, anti-North Korea sentiments ceased to be an attitude one **could** express, and turned into an attitude one **had to** express in order to avoid public ostracism.

One of the main goals of this thesis is to demonstrate how the mechanics of Noelle-Neumann’s spiral of silence have operated in the Japanese North Korea debate. The public outrage has targeted not only North Korea, but also three domestic agents: the Japanese government, the mass media and certain individual North Korea commentators. The main criticism against these agents is that they have neglected the North Korea problem², and most often that means having doubted or ignored the abductions in the past. All three agents have certainly experienced the loneliness of being on the wrong side of public opinion, and have attempted to break the isolation by either conforming, as the government and the media have done embracingly, or by retreating into the shadows and keeping quiet as most of the ridiculed individuals have done.

Personal interest

During my three exchange programs in Japan I have had the dubious privilege of observing first-hand the pariah status North Korea has in Japan. What struck me most profoundly was the importance the Japanese attach to the abduction issue. North Korea is by no means held in high esteem by any of the Western European nations either, but no European nation seriously regards North Korea as a military threat. We know of the security concerns

¹ Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, *The Spiral of Silence: Public Opinion – Our Social Skin* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 178.

² The North Korea problem (Kitachōsen Mondai) is a vague, but often used term usually understood as a collective expression for the abduction issue, the nuclear issue, the missile issue, the normalization issue and sometimes the so-called Japanese wives issue.

centered around North Korea's missiles and nuclear weapons and from time to time we are updated on the latest succession developments through the scant media coverage available. In Japan, I soon experienced, the situation is radically different. Japan too naturally has a heavy focus on security matters, but they are almost without fail always in some way linked to the abduction issue. During my latest stay in Japan I was amazed by the massive media salience of the abduction issue nearly a decade after 9/17 and I decided to make Japanese attitudes toward North Korea the topic of my study.

Research question

The impact of 9/17 on Japanese attitudes toward North Korea is a much debated topic in Japan, but largely overlooked by Western japanologists. I believe that adding to the scant Western research pool on the abduction issue is purposeful in itself as hardly any Western japanologist have to date tackled the problem of how significant the abduction issue has been the last decade. The omnipotent abduction issue appears in every aspect of the North Korea problem and even matters far removed from the topic of North Korea. How could North Korea – with whom normalization was on top of the Ministry of foreign Affairs' (MOFA) to-do list during the 90s – end up like the loathed pariah it is today? I believe we need to look to 9/17 for answers. In this thesis I will attempt to answer the following question:

“How did 9/17 change Japanese attitudes toward North Korea?”

2. Theory

The spiral of silence

I will attempt to explain the one-sided anti-North Korea public opinion in Japan (especially since 2002) by applying Noelle-Neumann's spiral of silence theory.

Noelle-Neumann argues that one's readiness to express one's opinion on a topic correlates to whether or not this opinion is consistent with what one perceives to be the opinion of the public. In other words, if one perceives the majority to front another opinion on a certain topic than one's own opinion, one will become less inclined to express one's own opinion on that topic publicly. This notion rests on the assumption of what Noelle-Neumann calls "*the fear of isolation*³", an individual's fear of being socially isolated or ostracized. Noelle-Neumann argues that the "*fear of isolation seems to be the force that sets the spiral of silence in motion. To run with the pack is a relatively happy state of affairs, but if you can't because you won't share publicly in what seems to be a universally acclaimed conviction, you can at least remain silent, as a second choice, so that others can put up with you*⁴".

According to the spiral of silence theory, an inevitable consequence of this fear of isolation is that, as perceived minority opinions are held back, perceived majority opinions gain legitimacy and eventually come to be regarded as the established, predominant public opinion. When the spiral "*has run its course*" does an atmosphere arise in where a person of the majority opinion speaks his mind freely regardless of whether his conversation partner is like-minded or opposed to that opinion. Reversely, a person of the minority opinion ceases to utter this opinion publicly, even in situations where he is surrounded by like-minded people. "*Only when a spiral of silence has practically run its course and one faction has total public visibility while the other has withdrawn to its shell, only when the tendency to talk or keep quiet has stabilized, are people liable to participate or remain silent regardless of whether or not the others in the situation are expressly friend or foe*⁵."

³ Noelle-Neumann, *The Spiral of Silence*, 37-58.

⁴ Noelle-Neumann, *The Spiral of Silence*, 6.

⁵ Noelle-Neumann, *The Spiral of Silence*, 31.

5 Assumptions of the spiral of silence

Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann points to 5 hypotheses⁶ which are assumed to trigger the dynamism of the spiral of silence.

1. Threat of isolation: The spiral of silence is based on Jeremy Bentham's (1748-1832) notion that public opinion works as a form of social control. Noelle-Neumann builds on this idea which holds that in order for a complex society to function sustainably, a number of checks must at all times be imposed on its participants who all have differing attitudes and motives. A certain degree of conformity must be upheld to avoid social chaos and unrest. Noelle-Neumann sees the public opinion as such a check on the individuals who compose a society. She asks, "*really, how independent do we want good citizens to be? Would it be best for society if people were not in the least concerned about the judgments of others?*"⁷ The method through which public opinion acts as a social control on society's individuals, she claims, is the threat of isolation. The pressure toward conformity is provided by each individual's fear of being socially isolated. Rather than the individual's urge for being on the winning side, she holds, it's his fear of being on the losing side, the fear of deviation that drives a society towards conformity.

2. Fear of isolation: That brings us to Noelle-Neumann's second hypothesis. In order to apply the spiral of silence theory one must assume that individuals are afraid of being isolated from the society they belong to. Noelle-Neumann refers to the social psychologist Solomon Asch's conformity experiments in the 50s. Asch asked the test subjects which one of three lines best matched a fourth line in length. One of the three lines was always exactly the same length as the fourth whereas the two other lines were noticeably shorter. Ten people were lined up and asked which one of the lines corresponded to the fourth line, however everyone except the last person asked were Asch's assistants. In the two first rounds everybody agreed on the obvious match, but in the third (of 12 rounds) Asch's assistants all pointed out a line which was obviously too short. Asch's experiment was centered on the reaction of the last

⁶ As quoted in Dietram A. Scheufele and Patricia Moy, "Twenty-five Years of the Spiral of Silence: A Conceptual Review and Empirical Outlook", *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 12 (2000): 3-28.

⁷ Noelle-Neumann, *The Spiral of Silence*, 182.

subject who wasn't a part of the play. Two of every ten subjects stuck to their own impressions. Another two agreed with the rest of the group once or twice throughout the ten rounds where they stated the wrong answer. But six of every ten test subjects frequently announced the answer of the rest of the group as their own, despite the fact that the selected line was visibly shorter than the fourth line. Noelle-Neumann employed psychological experiments like the Asch experiment as arguments to support the claim of individuals' fear of isolation.

3. The quasi-statistical sense: When people are asked by pollsters questions about majority opinions like *"do you think most people are for or against abortion?"*, why is it that so few people answer *"how the heck should I know?"* According to Noelle-Neumann it is because human beings are equipped with a quasi-statistical sense organ which constantly monitors the climate of opinion and changes in the trends of opinion distribution.

Dietram A. Scheufele and Patricia Moy have called the quasi-statistical sense *"probably the most widely misinterpreted concept of the spiral of silence"*⁸. Scheufele and Moy argue that many scholars misinterpret the quasi-statistical sense to be a model that *"can predict the complete accuracy of a respondent's perception of majority opinion"*, but in reality Noelle-Neumann never stated that the quasi-statistical sense can correctly gauge the climate of opinion, however it does give people some kind of indication, false or correct notwithstanding, of the opinion trends. The point is that this indication is what people base their decisions on in their attempts to escape the threat of isolation. Sometimes this perception of the majority opinion is correct, sometimes it is not. It is important to bear in mind that the spiral of silence dynamism is driven by how people perceive the climate of opinion, not necessarily the actual climate of opinion itself.

4. Willingness to speak out and tendency to remain silent: People who perceive their opinion on a certain topic to be the majority opinion will be more inclined to state that opinion publicly, than people who perceive their opinion to be the minority opinion. Again, we are talking about perceptions of the climate of opinion and not

⁸ Scheufele and Moy, "Twenty-five Years of the Spiral of Silence", 3-28.

necessarily the real climate of opinion itself. Noelle-Neumann also argued that a perception of one's opinion as the majority opinion isn't the only condition through which people become more willing to speak their minds. She argued that it is enough for a person to sense that the opinion he holds is on the rise. If one senses that one's opinion is gaining support and popularity one will become increasingly apt to state this opinion publicly, and reversely, people who perceive their opinion to lose support and popularity will tend to convert to the majority opinion or fall silent.

5. Spiral of silence: Through the realization of all the assumptions mentioned above the spiral of silence mechanism is activated. As the majority opinion grows stronger, the minority opinion starts to plummet. *"The tendency of the one to speak up and the other to be silent starts off a spiraling process which increasingly establishes one opinion as the prevailing one"*⁹. When the spiral of silence has *"run its course"*, the majority opinion has become so dominant that it is perceived as *"common knowledge"*.

It needs to be pointed out that it is beyond the scope of this thesis to test for the existence of a spiral of silence in Japan through the guidelines provided by Noelle-Neumann as that would require years of polling of Japanese attitudes toward North Korea, preferably before and after 9/17, which is something no academic work to date has done. Rather, this thesis takes aim at comparing Noelle-Neumann's explanation of the spiral of silence process with behavioral shifts and developments in Japan. A more thorough, empirical test which includes regular public opinion surveys and media content analysis is a task which I encourage future research to grapple with, and which I would like to take on in an eventual Ph.D. dissertation.

Cultural differences

One frequent observation about the spiral of silence is that the theory is usually only tested in Western societies. That is, democratic societies with a strong focus on the individual rather than the collective. Newer spiral of silence research has revealed that there could be a stronger inclination in collectivist societies to *"run with the pack"*, and a greater fear of

⁹ Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, "The spiral of silence: A theory of public opinion". *Journal of communication* 24. (1974): 43-51. As quoted in Scheufele and Moy, "Twenty-five Years of the Spiral of Silence", 3-28.

social isolation. But even at the time of the conception of the spiral of silence theory Noelle-Neumann herself suspected that *“it is possible that societies differ in the degree to which its members fear isolation”*¹⁰. C. Harry Hui and Harry C. Triandis argue that *“Collectivists are more likely to pay attention to the influencing agent than are individualists. As a result, collectivists are more conforming than individualists. [...] It may be safe to say that the former are more willing to go along with the group, to avoid being rejected”*¹¹.

It has also been hinted that this trend could stem from a history of Confucian thought¹².

Against that backdrop it's tempting to jump to the conclusion that the Japanese people would be extremely exposed to the spiral of silence effect. However, the notion of the Japanese society being ultra-collectivistic and anti-individualistic is a controversial one, and not one that one should uncritically adopt as the foundation of one's hypothesis. The public opinion theorists Everett Carll Ladd and Karlyn H. Bowman have jointly written about public opinion in the US and Japan, and came to the conclusion that the American and Japanese *“national characters”*¹³ bore more similarities than differences. In the book's final chapter they state that *“a massive assemblage of literature, both in popular and academic, on the United States and Japan, argues a variant of “east is east and west is west...” America and Japan are portrayed as vastly different social systems, animated by sharply contrasting values. It is often said that the Japanese have not embraced (and perhaps never will embrace) the central assumptions of individualism that are so dear to Americans. At the time we began reviewing Japanese survey findings three years ago, we were prepared to accept at least a substantial part of this argument. Now, as we conclude the book, we reject it”*¹⁴.

The *“collective-minded”* Japanese are perhaps not *more* vulnerable to the effects of the spiral of silence than the *“individualistic”* Westerner, but on the other hand they are certainly not any *less* vulnerable either. The spiral of silence seems to be an appropriate tool

¹⁰ Noelle-Neumann, *The Spiral of Silence*, 88.

¹¹ C. Harry Hui, Harry C. Triandis, (1986) Individualism and collectivism: a Study of Cross-Cultural Researchers, *Journal of Cross-cultural Psychology*, 17, 225-248. Quoted in Scheufele and Moy, “Twenty-five Years of the Spiral of Silence”, 19.

¹² Scheufele and Moy, “Twenty-five Years of the Spiral of Silence”, 19.

¹³ By *“national character”* they basically mean values.

¹⁴ Everett Carll Ladd, Katlyn H. Bowman, *Public Opinion in America and Japan: How We See Each Other and Ourselves*, (Washington, D.C., AEI Press, 1996), 138.

for explaining the seemingly near unanimous denunciation of North Korea and its sympathizers in Japan.

Victimology theory

The hardening of Japanese attitudes toward North Korea after 9/17 was observed and commented on by nearly everyone who wrestled with the so-called “North Korea problem”, regardless of the commentators’ political affiliations. But there is one of the attitude changes 9/17 brought which has been indicated exclusively by people who have a predisposition toward the political left. This is the perceptual transformation of Japan from an assailant to a victim in the relationship to North Korea. This change in mentality is discussed in chapter 9 and the theoretical framework this argumentation rests upon is the teachings of victimology.

Victimology theory took on a life of its own in the 1940s as a spin-off product of the more firmly established criminology discipline. The first victimology pioneers argued that it was due time to attach an appropriate focus on the “other half of crime” – the victim – which had been neglected and overlooked as little more than a witness to the crime by criminologists. Although the expressed goal of the earliest victimologists was to explore the victim’s role in the occurrence of crime, their approach was anything but victim-sympathetic. The earliest attempts at a deeper inquiry of the victim role often ended up in what is called “victim precipitation”, or “victim blaming”. Rather than trying to understand how crime could dramatically affect and traumatize the victim, the early victimologists tended to focus on the victim’s responsibility for his own victimization. With only minimal, empirical proof to back up their statements, the victim precipitation theorists argued that by provocative behavior, carelessness, alcohol and drug abuse, the victim often instigates his own victimization¹⁵. The victim precipitation tendency in victimology caused a rather shaky offset to this new academic discipline as many felt that the victimologists were unreasonably harsh toward the crime victims. In 1971 Menachem Amir wrote his book *Patterns in Forcible Rape* which would become so controversial that it dealt a near-deadly blow to victimology as a credible genre. Amir claimed that as many as 19% of all forcible rapes were victim-precipitated and further hinted that some victims may have an unconscious need to be

¹⁵ William G. Doerner, Steven P. Lab, *Victimology*, 4th. Ed. (Cincinnati: Anderson Publishing, 2005), 3-13.

sexually controlled through rape¹⁶. The ensuing criticism, particularly from women's rights activists, forced victimologists to reevaluate their principles and eventually the field of victimology distanced itself from its earlier insistence on victim blaming and arrived at a more neutral position which made endeavors to highlight the plight of the victim and victims' rights.

Although victimology today enjoys a general acceptance as an independent, academic discipline, there are critical voices within the field that challenge the established perceptions of victim and offender. Addressing the shortcomings of general victimology, the sub-genre called "critical victimology", or sometimes "radical victimology", seeks answers as to why victimology has become so fixated with interpersonal crime when a far greater number of people are being victimized by corporate crime, pollution, natural disasters, drug abuse, work related accidents, traffic accidents and so forth.

Why is this relevant to the perceptual change from offender to victim in the minds of the Japanese? Because, in order to answer the above-mentioned question about the narrow focus of general victimology, critical victimology began analyzing the psychology of the victim. Or rather, the traits that are able to evoke sympathy and gain someone legitimacy as a victim. Why do certain people come to be regarded as victims while others don't? Why are certain types of victims more attractive to the media and the public opinion than others? In short, what makes a victim a victim?

Many victimologists have since tackled the problem of what public representations of the victim are built upon. In doing so, Nils Christie's concept of the "ideal victim" is almost without fail brought up. Christie lists five preconditions for innocence which, if met, guarantee an unquestionable victim status (see chapter 8). The characteristics of the ideal victim perfectly overlap the traits of the most famous abductee, Yokota Megumi, and to a certain extent also the relatives of the abductees which can help to explain the massive support the family association (Kazokukai) has enjoyed since 9/17 when their cause became publicly known. However, a large part of the agenda of the radical victimologists consists of criticizing the black and white picture of victim and offender that is operationalized in the legal system. They argue that most of the criminal cases are not made up by one ideal victim

¹⁶ Menachem Amir, *Patterns in Forcible Rape* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), quoted in Doerner and Lab, *Victimology*, 10-11.

who is completely innocent and one ideal offender who is completely culpable. Marilyn D. McShane and Frank P. Williams III contend that in the public mind there is a dichotomy between victim and offender, and the popular and legal concept of victim is based on this middle class imagery, but in reality participants in a criminal relationship can, at all times, switch between being victim and offender (see chapter 9). The victim role and the offender role are by no means static, but within the current framework which necessitates the appointment of one victim and one offender, it is always the party which has been victimized at the latest point in time which ultimately is singled out as the victim, regardless of matters past.

It is exactly this tendency of allowing the abduction issue to overshadow Japan's past crimes against Korea during the colonial period which alarms scholars and historians on the left. The abduction issue has rekindled Japan's historical amnesia after a dawning willingness to admit guilt and take reconciliatory steps during the 90s.

3. Japan – North Korea relations before 9/17

Japan and Korea

Japan and the Korean peninsula share an intertwined history demographically, linguistically, politically, economically and culturally. Both Japan and Korea were for centuries content to be tributary states under the protection of China. However, as the Western imperialist nations gradually became more and more focused on North-East Asia throughout the 19th century and the scenario of ending up as a colony seemed increasingly realistic, intellectuals in Japan called for action. Japan needed to break out of the status quo and modernize before it was too late, they claimed. Failure to do so would most surely mean that Japan would be eaten up by one of the menacing Western powers. Japan had to leave Asia, so to speak, and join the new world order of imperialism, the supporters of the new "datsu-a" argument (de-asianization) urged. At this critical juncture Japan took a radically different path than Korea. While Korea seemed unwilling or unable to cope with the new climate of imperialism, Japan acted resolutely. Japan underwent a rigid militarization process, modernized all aspects of

statehood and civil life and began expanding geographically. Encouraged by impressive military victories over China and Russia, Japan set its eyes on Korea. While promising to protect Korea's national interests Japan dispatched both its large conglomerates and military personnel to the Korean peninsula. Through heavy political and military pressure against Korea Japan forced through the 1910 Japan – Korea annexation treaty which effectively put Korea under Japanese rule. The Japanese colonial rule which lasted to the end of WWII in 1945 became increasingly discriminatory toward the people of Korea who were forced to adopt both the Japanese language and Japanese names. Thousands of Korean women were forced to serve the Japanese military as so-called “comfort women”, a euphemism for sex slaves. Many of the Korean men fared no better as they were put to heavy labor in Japan and other areas of Japan's steadily increasing empire. All attempts at opposition against the Japanese were severely clamped down upon and despite the initial promises of securing Korean national interest it became increasingly clear that Korea would reap little from Japan's rapid industrialization. Many Koreans saw collaboration as their best chance of a prosperous life. The Koreans who cooperated with the Japanese managed to obtain privileges during the colonial era, but in the post-war period measures were taken both in North and South Korea to expose the collaborators who were branded as traitors. Especially in North Korea were people with past links to the Japanese delegitimized and purged. The hunt for collaborators has been an important element in upkeeping anti-Japanese fervors in the post-war era on the Korean peninsula.

When the over-zealous Japanese war-machine eventually was defeated in WWII and Korea was liberated after 35 years of Japanese rule, it quickly found itself torn between the Soviet Union and the US which both struggled for ideological influence. Korea was hurled into war in 1950 between the Soviet-backed North and the US-backed South. When the Korean war finally came to a ceasefire in 1953 millions of lives had been lost, much of the infrastructure which had been built up by the Japanese was laid in ruin and the border between the communist North and the military dictatorship in the South was consolidated at around the 38th parallel, close to where they had been loosely set before the war. This signaled the beginning of the yet another world order, the Cold War.

Japan and North Korea in the Cold War

With the Korean peninsula divided Japan which was rebuilding after the devastating war under the supervision of the US recognized South Korea as the legitimate government in Korea and they normalized diplomatic relations in 1965, accompanied by a significant amount of compensation money from Japan for damages and injustices committed under colonial rule. The lack of normalized relations with North Korea did however not prevent Japan from launching the so-called “repatriation campaign” between 1959 and 1984. During the repatriation campaign close to 100.000 people were sent from Japan to North Korea voluntarily. Actually, of the repatriated Koreans, the people originating from South Korea far outnumbered the people with North Korean origin. This was made possible not only by the North’s propaganda, but also by North Korea’s impressive industrialization which was at the time superior to that of South Korea. The repatriated Koreans were initially welcomed as returned heroes in North Korea, but as the cameras stopped filming, the reality of a North Korea far from the “workers’ paradise on earth” as the propaganda had promised became painfully clear. A slow, but steady flow of letters to relatives in Japan hinting that something was suspect began slipping through the North Korean censorship. As reports of discrimination and even purges against the people with Japanese ties came to the fore, people in Japan started questioning the humanitarian aspects of the repatriations. The repatriation campaign is by some regarded as the single most irresponsible act of the Japanese government in the postwar era, and although the issue has now been overshadowed by the abduction-, nuclear- and missile issues, it is far from forgotten.

Japan’s relations to North Korea were tightly restricted by the East-West dichotomy of the Cold War world order in which Japan largely was militarily dependent on the US. The very nature of the dichotomy made diplomatic contact between Japan and North Korea very difficult and no serious attempt at normalization was ever undertaken during the Cold War.

Japan – North Korea relations during the 90s

Throughout the Cold War almost all contact between Japan and North Korea went through three channels. The most important of these was Chōsen Sōren (The General Association of Korean Residents in Japan (hereafter CS)). CS often functioned as North Korea’s de-facto embassy in Japan when correspondence between the two nations was needed. The second

channel was the Japanese Communist Party. However the ties to the Korean Workers' Party gradually deteriorated over the issue of Kim Il Sung's personality cult and North Korea's involvement in international terrorism, and in the mid-80s the ties between the two parties were completely severed¹⁷. Today the Japanese Communist Party is a staunch opponent of the North Korean regime. The third channel was the Social Democratic Party (former Japan Socialist Party (hereafter SDP)). SDP has gone through a hail of abuse for its friendly relations with the Korean Workers' Party in the past (see chapter 11). Up until the end of the Cold War North Korea would frequently approach SDP, but as the new world order saw the light of day, SDP, which till then never had been in power, saw its influence in North Korea vain. SDP was finally stood up by North Korea which began its fling with LDP from the beginning of the new decennium. SDP has by many contemporary commentators on the North Korea problem been characterized as naïve and subservient toward North Korea. Araki Kazuhiro would later paint the following gloomy picture of SDP's sorry existence before the 90s: "*SDP was like snow under [the North Koreans'] soles; it followed them around no matter how much it was stomped and kicked on*"¹⁸. SDP suffered a massive loss of face in 2002 when the existence of the abductions was revealed to be a fact. Many SDP members had been doubtful about or denied that North Korea was behind the disappearances, including Party Leader Doi Takako. But SDP's fall from grace as a North Korea authority began as the Cold War ended. That would signal a new era of an apprehensive quest for conciliation between the Korean Workers' Party and LDP.

As the Cold War structure collapsed North Korea's closest allies, China and Russia, began approaching South Korea, and to North Korea's great dismay Russia normalized relations with South Korea in 1991 and China followed suit the next year. This was a humiliating slap in the face for North Korea and in response it sought to thaw the cool relations with the US and Japan. Therefore an unprecedented window of opportunity arose for Japan in the beginning of the 1990s to realistically pursue normalization with North Korea, the only country in the world with which Japan still had no diplomatic relations.

Throughout the 90s Japanese delegations on political party level were thus frequently dispatched to North Korea to sound them out on the possibilities of normalization. The quest

¹⁷JCP Central Committee Chai, an interview with Fuwa Tetsuzō from January 2004.

http://www.jcp.or.jp/english/jps_weekly2/FuwaonNKorea.pdf

¹⁸ Kazuhiro Araki, Mizuho Ishikawa, "Anatara no hijō ha wasurenai!" *Seiron* 12, (2002): 86.

for normalization would be the most consistent trait of the Japan – North Korea relations during the 90s.

In order to normalize diplomatic relations – a feat which unquestionably was just as connected to the political prestige of putting down the final piece in Japan's puzzle for normalizing relations with all the countries of the world as it was connected to national interest – Japan sent normalization delegations to North Korea in 1990, 1995, 1997 and 1999 on political party level. The fiercest opponents to Japan's quest for normalization was the think tank called the Modern Korea Research Institute (MKRI) which saw no need to normalize relations with a terrorist state like North Korea and much less yield monetary compensation. MKRI was lead by Satō Katsumi and contained profiled members like Araki Kazuhiro and Nishioka Tsutomu who interestingly are perhaps the most outspoken commentators on the political right side of the abduction issue today.

With the loss of the special trade benefits North Korea had enjoyed from China and the Soviet Union under the Cold War its economy fell into a terrible slump and famine soon ensued. Katō Kōichi who was in charge of the normalization matter for LDP at the time decided to send 300.000 tons of rice as emergency aid. MKRI criticized Katō for uncritically sending rice to North Korea which could easily end up in the hands of the military as long as no monitoring system was in place to guarantee that it was distributed to the suffering citizens. Katō, they claimed, was using the rice donations to gain the necessary goodwill to force through normalization.

Despite MKRI's frequent rants and critical articles in Japan's weeklies and monthlies, the public opinion in general paid relatively little interest to both the normalization attempts and the humanitarian aid Japan was donating, so Japan's policy makers were allowed to act fairly unrestricted in a quiet environment. This can be witnessed by Katō's arbitrary decision to send 200.000 tons more than the 300.000 initially agreed upon despite discord within LDP. The additional rice donation was also much more than the estimate WFP deemed necessary.

The first mention of the abductions on a diplomatic level was made in 1992 when the Japanese side for the first time confronted the North Koreans with questions regarding the abduction issue. The issue about the whereabouts of a certain Lee Un Hae who was believed to be the missing Taguchi Yaeko was brought up discreetly, but much to the Japanese

negotiators' surprise their North Korean counterparts instantly got up and left the room claiming angrily that there were no abductees. This denial was to become North Korea's official stance for the next ten years. Thus the Japan – North Korea Normalization Talks came to an abrupt end.

There are three important traits in the relations between Japan and North Korea during the 90s. Firstly, Japan's main agenda was normalization of diplomatic relations, a merit which became possible with the upheaval of the Cold War structure.

Secondly, Japanese policy makers were allowed to take liberties in their dealings with North Korea without being interrupted by an angry public. In fact, up until the 1997 abduction testimony by An Myung-jin (see chapter 8) and the 1998 Taepodong launch (see chapter 12), the Japanese public did not pay much interest to any North Korea related matters except perhaps the nuclear development suspicions which came to the fore in 1993. This relaxed environment allowed the normalization brokers to take liberties in its food aid policy and, in the view of the critics at MKRI, use the humanitarian crisis to pave the way for normalization negotiations. There was likewise no political risk involved in venturing in talks with the North Korean side on party level, as can be witnessed by the number of unofficial delegations. These delegations were mainly led by LDP and SDP, but members from other parties such as the Communist Party, DPJ and Kōmeitō did also participate. These delegations took aim at reopening the normalization negotiations which had been stalled since the 1992 abduction inquiry, and some of the members took rather spectacular liberties in proposing compensation money for colonial rule without ever obtaining the proper authorization from MOFA to discuss such matters. Despite the blatant arbitrariness many of the normalization brokers displayed, they were rarely criticized by people outside of MKRI and their diplomatic free-wheeling had little or no political consequences (this stands in sharp contrast to the mood after 9/17. See for example chapter 6).

Thirdly, North Korea denied the abductions for ten years and the issue was unknown or, at best, of little interest to the Japanese public. The lack of enthusiasm stemmed from a failure by the Japanese media to pick up on and actively pursue important clues about the abductions given in testimonies by defected North Korean ex-spies in 1985 and 1987 as well as failure to investigate LDP politician Kajiyama Seiroku's 1988 claim at a hearing in the Diet

that there were “*sufficient grounds for suspecting that North Korea is behind the disappearances*”¹⁹. As a matter of fact the media didn’t cover the abduction issue at all until another North Korean ex-spy, An Myung-jin, in 1997 claimed to have been tutored in Japanese by none other than Yokota Megumi – the girl who would later become the poster child of the abduction issue (see chapter 8). The An testimony put the abduction issue on the map, but even at this stage the media coverage was half-hearted at best (see figure 5). Nonetheless, the scant media coverage was enough to divide the public (those who cared, that is) into two camps, the doubters who held that there wasn’t sufficient evidence to claim that North Korea was behind the disappearances, and the believers who claimed that there was. This split would have a major impact on the North Korea debate after 9/17.

All in all, the period between the end of the Cold War and 9/17 is characterized by an atmosphere in which one could, privately, academically and even politically, support the efforts toward unconditional humanitarian aid and normalization of diplomatic relations without running a risk of social isolation. With the emergence of the abduction issue as the dominating issue in the North Korea debate this was to change drastically, as we shall see from the following chapters.

4. Spiraling attitudes and growing assertiveness

The spiral of silence gets moving

With the Kim Jong-il abduction confession the abduction issue turned from suspicion to fact. The doubters were in turn hunted down by the believers and suffered public ridicule and slander through a mass media which had become increasingly one-sided on this issue. This led many of the more conciliation-seeking commentators²⁰ to alter their previous stances

¹⁹ Takeshi Inagaki, “Koitsura no “Nimajita” wo hikkonuke: “Kitachōsenzoku” no Danmatsuma”. *Shokun!* 12 (2002): 78.

²⁰ I will refrain from using terms like “pro-Pyongyang” or “pro-North Korea commentators” because, frankly, there are extremely few people who fit this into this category. Quite a few politicians, notably in the Social Democratic Party, but also the Liberal Democratic Party, have been eager to improve ties between Japan and North Korea and have insisted on rice aid, but ideologically North Korea has very few friends in Japan, much less influential ones (although many rightists often claim the opposite).

toward North Korea into more condemning ones, or to fall into silence by withdrawing from the public North Korea debate. At the same time, the government sought to redeem itself as a growing number of commentators on the North Korea debate, influential ones as well as strictly amateur ones, blasted the Japanese government and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for having been too passive in handling the abduction issue, for example by referring to the matter as the “abduction suspicion” rather than the “abduction issue”, and by insisting on sending rice aid to North Korea during the 1990s despite a growing assembly of evidence on the abduction issue pointing toward North Korean involvement. After the truth about North Korea’s crimes came to the fore, and particularly with the inauguration of the Abe government, the official North Korea policy became increasingly uniform with the demands of the organization of the abduction victims’ families (Kazokukai) and their right-wing support group, Sukūkai. This redemption pattern is observable in the Japanese mass media too which also have come under fire for giving the abduction issue the silent treatment pre-2002.

There could be multiple reasons for the worsening perceptions of North Korea since 2002. This period has seen North Korea’s withdrawal from the NPT (2003), a Taepodong missile launch and North Korea’s first nuclear test in 2006, furthermore North Korea repeated these undertakings in 2009 and as a response to the ensuing international criticism and UN-led sanctions, North Korea withdrew from the denuclearization talks known as the Six-Party Talks (hereafter 6PT). It has been a busy decade for North Korea watchers worldwide, and especially in Japan, but I shall argue that despite many controversial North Korea-triggered occurrences which have gained a lot of international attention, the major reason for the Japanese dislike toward North Korea is a matter of a much more personal and emotional character, namely the abductions of Japanese citizens. This issue put a human face to the so-called North Korea problem and the media soon realized the market value of the abduction story. The Japanese people were shocked to learn that a neighboring country had systematically abducted fellow citizens as young as 13 years old. Even today, 9 years later, the abduction issue still features prominently in the nation’s various news outlets. The media through one-sided North Korea bashing, and the government through various abduction issue enlightenment campaigns, have refused to let the Japanese people forget about the abduction issue, and the people have willingly let themselves be carried away.

Since the abduction admission, the Japanese media, government and people have become remarkably monolithic in their stance toward North Korea.

This one-sidedness is what Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann would have explained as a result of the spiral of silence effect. That is, in short, when the majority opinion comes to be so accepted that it's impossible to express conflicting opinions without running the risk of being publicly ostracized. The majority grows more and more vocal, whilst the minority falls into silence and eventually disappears from the public. This is what Noelle-Neumann describes as the spiral of silence having "*run its course*", and the debate ceases to be a debate and turns into common knowledge.

I shall argue that, the Japanese media, government and people have become so one-sided in their stance toward North Korea that there are almost no opposing opinions in public and "anti-North Korea-ism" has become a common and expected behavior. This hardening stems from a dominant focus on an emotional issue (the abduction issue), rather than security issues like the missile issue and the nuclear issue. Finally, I argue that this uniformity is a result of a spiral of silence which has run its course.

The Japanese stance toward North Korea

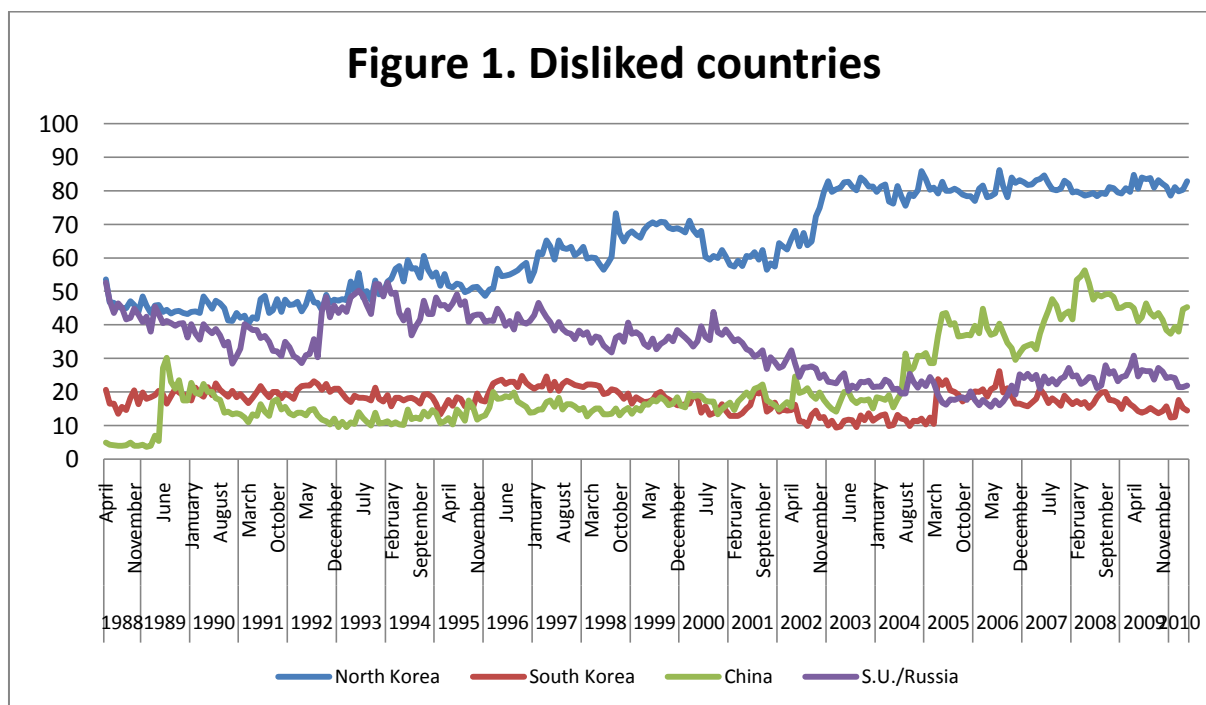
The news agency Jiji Press has conducted a survey called "Jiji Seron Chōsa" (Jiji Public Opinion Survey) every month from 1960. This survey covers various fields, but the most relevant for my research is the part which asks the respondents to "*chose up to 3 countries which you dislike (kiraina kuni)*". On the list of possible options are the US, the USSR/Russia, England, France, Switzerland, India, China, South Korea and from May 1970 North Korea was added. One of the weak points of the survey is that although it does include a "no particular country/don't know" option, it does not contain an "others" option. However, as most of the controversial countries are given, I assume that the lack of an "others" option has a very limited effect on the final outcome. The average size of the sampling group is approximately 1400 people over the age of 20. The survey is conducted at the end of each month. The Jiji Public Opinion Survey started appearing in the Seron Chōsa Nenkan (Public Opinion Survey

annual Collection) from April 1988, so for convenience sake I will utilize the data from that point onward²¹.

The survey results are given in numbers each month, so to make it more readily understandable I turned the numbers into a graph. I only included the most disliked countries, that is, North Korea, the USSR/Russia, South Korea and China. The other optional countries were statistically of little interest on this topic as none of them (with the exception of the US) were ever close to reaching the 10% dislike rate.

It goes without saying, but controversial events that receive negative international attention cause remarkable movement in the dislike rates. One of the more spectacular leaps on the chart is China's rapid unpopularity after the 1989 Tienanmen Square Massacre. Before this incident escalated only 3.9% of the Japanese answered that they disliked China (March 1989), but by July 30.2% reported the same notion (see figure 1).

"Name up to 3 countries which you dislike"



North Korea enters my analysis at a very turbulent time. It finds itself in the international spotlight as it had just been revealed that North Korea was behind the November 1987 bombing of Korean Air Flight 858 in which all 115 passengers died. Therefore North Korea

²¹ From 2007 onward the surveys were published in the quarterly *Jiji Chōsa Tokuhō*, (Tokyo: Jiji Tsūshinsha).

enters the timeframe under study at a dislike rate of 53.5%, and it's worth having in mind that the North Korea's dislike rate of 55.7% just two months earlier (February 1988) was (at that point) the highest since North Korea was added to the survey in 1970.

In the 10 first years of the graph's timeframe we can spot a steady dislike growth in North Korea's case. The first notable rise is a result of the so-called first nuclear crisis on the Korean Peninsula in 1993/1994 in which the Clinton administration claimed that North Korea was developing nuclear weapons. It has been said that this crisis is the closest the world has come to a nuclear war since the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis²². The next wave of unpopularity is seen in 1997. This is probably a result of the shocking testimony by former North Korean spy An Myung-Jin who claimed to have met several of the abductees while in North Korea. This was the first time the abduction issue received serious coverage by the Japanese media, and this year also saw the establishment of abduction issue focus groups like Kazokukai, Sukūkai and Rachi Giren.

From 1998 onward one sees events that set rough standards in the dislike pattern toward North Korea. The 1998 Teapodong missile launch which flew over Japan's mainland created a sense of vulnerability among the Japanese people and spurred an intense debate on Japan's national security. The missile launch roughly set the dislike rate at 70%, where it remained till 2000 when South Korean President Kim Dae Jung, as a culmination point of his famous "sunshine policy", went to Pyongyang for a meeting with Kim Jong-il in the first top level summit to ever take place between the two countries' respective leaders. Kim Dae Jung's summitry led to a tremendous optimism surrounding the future prospects of ending the Korean War (which is still in a state of armistice between the two Koreas), exchanging separated family members and perhaps even reunification. This optimism was of course strongest felt on the Korean Peninsula, but nonetheless seems to have had a substantial impact in Japan as well as the dislike rate toward North Korea dropped and established itself at around 60%. This grew slightly as the so-called second nuclear crisis on the Korean Peninsula began in 2002, in which the US once again claimed to have evidence that North

²² Glyn Ford and Soyong Kwon, *North Korea on the Brink: Struggle for Survival* (London: Pluto Press, 2008), 150.

Korea was developing nuclear weapons (and thus had breached with the nuclear freeze which was agreed upon at the conclusion of the first nuclear crisis).

But the real trend setter was the already mentioned September 2002 Pyongyang summit between Japanese PM Koizumi and Kim Jong-il. September 17, 2002, the day the abductions changed from suspicion to fact, has been imprinted onto the abduction issue rhetoric as “9/17”, much like “9/11” in the US one year prior. The North Korea dislike rate jumped from 63.8% in August to 82.8% in January 2003, but more importantly it has remained there ever since. Koizumi’s second North Korea visit in 2004 and the Taepodong launch and nuclear test in 2006 have caused short-term fluctuations, but unlike the shaky pattern before 2002 the dislike rate has quickly reestablished itself at around 80% again. Why this stability?

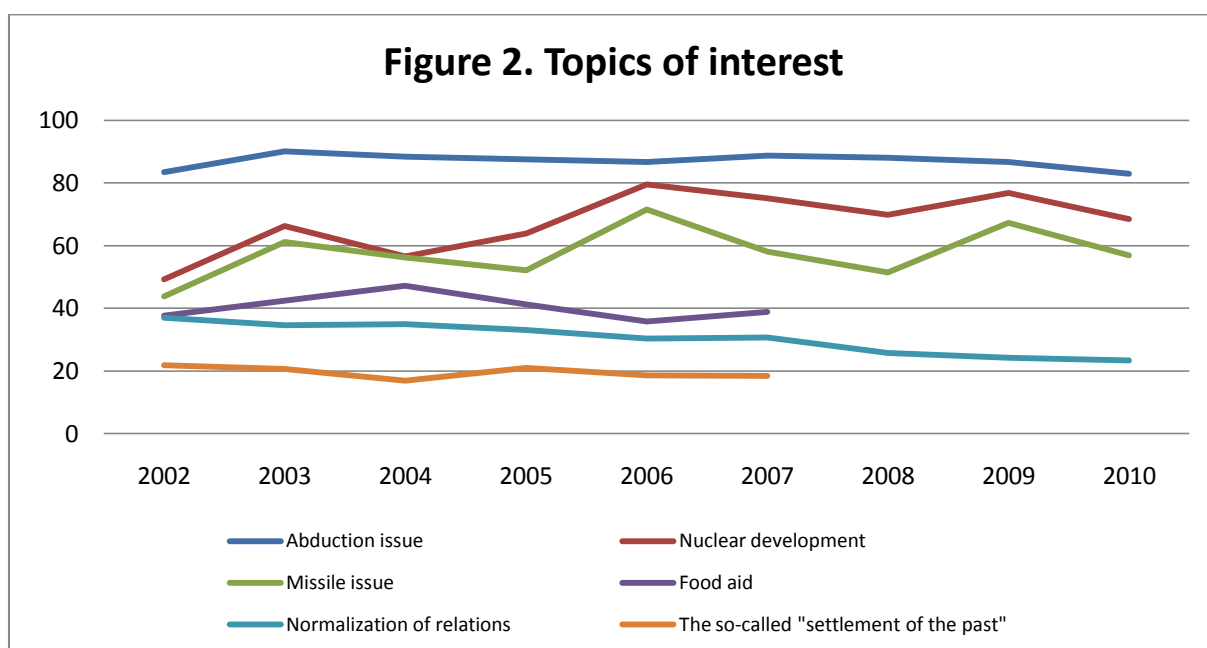
My assumption that it is the abduction issue that has caused this stable dislike rate toward North Korea is perhaps not very surprising considering the amount of focus the abduction issue has gotten in literature focusing on Japan’s foreign relations. However non-Japanese literature on the issue has been characterized ever since the immediate aftermath of 9/17 by an expectation that interest in the abduction issue will fade with time and Japan’s foreign policy will gradually again return to the “norm” and abandon the emotional populism it has been caught up in for a more security oriented realpolitik. A South Korean scholar wrote in 2004 that *“it is likely that the intensity of the abduction issue in dominating the minds of the public will gradually subside”*²³. In 2006 James L. Schoff predicted that *“additional DPRK missile launches over Japan’s airspace or a DPRK test of a nuclear weapon would likely diminish the prominence of the abduction issue in the public’s mind when it comes to negotiating priorities”*²⁴. Just months after his paper was published North Korea would in fact both launch a missile over Japanese airspace and conduct a nuclear test, however this did not produce lasting changes in the relevance pattern by neither the public nor the government. It is inevitable that the interest in the abduction issue will begin diminishing at some point, but thus far it has shown a remarkable stability. I argue that as of 2011, there are very few signs that the abduction issue will lose its saliency anytime soon.

²³ Seung Hyok Lee, *Shifting of Japan’s National Security Norm and the Issue of North Korean Abduction of Japanese, 2002-2004*, Creation of New Contemporary Asian Studies, Working paper, Graduate School of Political Science, Waseda University, Tokyo. (2004): 60.

²⁴ James L. Schoff, “Political Fences and Bad Neighbors: North Korea Policy Making in Japan and Implications for the United States”, Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis (IFPA), Cambridge University IFPA Office, (2006), 25, <http://www.ifpa.org/pdf/fences.pdf>

On the official web pages of the Cabinet Office, the Government of Japan²⁵ there is a survey called “public opinion survey on diplomacy” (gaikō ni kan suru yoron chōsa) which assesses the Japanese interest in various topics related to various countries, including North Korea. This survey has been conducted annually each October since 2002 (in North Korea’s case) and addresses all the important points which constitute the complex and somewhat vague term “the North Korea problem”. I will touch upon the various elements of this problem later in this thesis. As for now it is sufficient to notice the stability in the interest in the abduction issue compared to the other two major issues stated by the respondents (the nuclear and missile issue).

“Which North Korea related topics do you have an interest in?” (Multiple answers)



The most striking feature of this graph (see figure 2) is the stability of the interest in the abduction issue. The first survey was conducted in October 2002, a mere month after the abduction confession, but the interest rate was nonetheless at a staggering 83.4%. In the following years it has hovered steadily around the 90% mark. Note that this time span covers the period which has seen a steady dislike rate at around 80% in figure 1. There seems to be a clear correlation between the abduction issue and Japanese people’s negative sentiments toward North Korea. This data shows that the Japanese dislike toward North Korea mainly is

²⁵ The Cabinet Office of Japan, “Gaikō ni kan suru Yoron Chōsa”, Tokyo, 2002 – 2010. <http://www8.cao.go.jp/survey/index-gai.html>

fueled by the abduction issue, not the nuclear and missile issues which have received a lot more attention internationally. As a matter of fact, the nuclear and missile issues seem to have little lasting effects on the Japanese people's negative sentiments toward North Korea in the period under study.

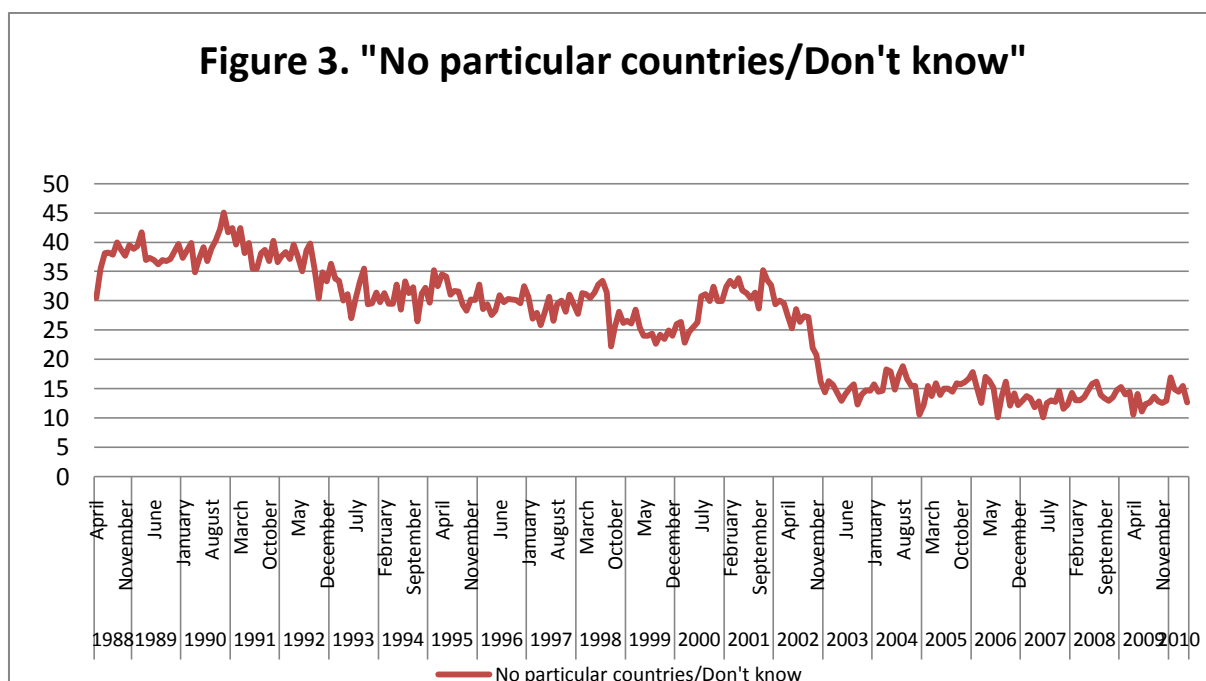
Admittedly, the dislike rate saw an all time high (86.2%, July 2006) after North Korea's July Taepodong missile launch, but this sudden rise was followed by a just as sudden drop and come September the dislike rate was back down again at 78.1%. The nuclear test the following month managed to keep the dislike rate up slightly longer, but eventually it dropped back to the "norm" at around 80% again. Judging from the stability of the abduction issue in figure 2, it seems reasonable to assume that it's the abduction issue that has stimulated the dislike toward North Korea the longest and most powerfully.

The options "food aid" and "the so-called "settlement of the past"" were taken off the survey in 2008. The average size of the sampling groups throughout the 9 surveys is at 1901 people. The number of eligible items has gradually shrunk, but in the first survey in 2002 it included, in addition to the items I have already given in the graph, "the mystery ship issue", "the political structure", "problems between North and South Korea", "the Japanese wives issue", "the refugee issue", "trade and economic exchange", "cultural exchange", "sports exchange", "tourism", "others", "nothing in particular" and "don't know". The respondents could choose as many answers as they wanted.

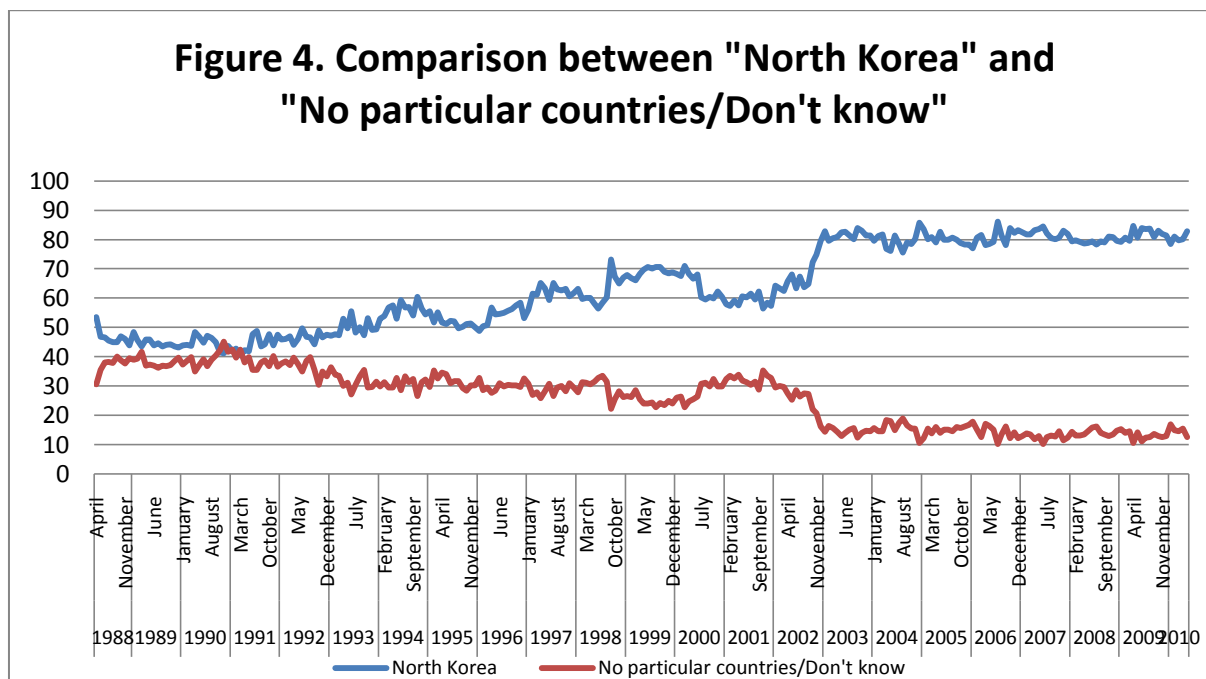
An anti-North Korea consciousness takes root

Ever since the Jiji survey was conducted for the first time in 1960, the "no particular country/don't know" option has always been among the top categories. Throughout the 389 surveys between the first survey in June 1960 and the one conducted in July 1993, this category's average score was as high as 43.4%, with the lowest score recorded being 26.8% and the highest 64%²⁶.

²⁶ Ichirō Miyake, Yoshitaka Nishizawa, Masaru Kono, *55 nen Taisei moto no Seiji to Keizai: Jiji Seron Chōsa Dēta no Bunseki* (Tokyo: Bokutakusha, 2001), 94.



However since the end of the Cold War the respondents have become increasingly aware of which countries they dislike. The “no particular country/don’t know” category has shrunk drastically, especially since the abduction confession in 2002 (see figure 3). One may argue that this growing assertiveness in picking out countries one dislikes could stem from other reasons than the increasing dislike toward North Korea, for example the rapid and spectacular growth in China’s dislike rate from 2004 onward as a result of Chinese anti-Japan demonstrations over biased textbooks in the Japanese education system. And one could be forgiven for thinking that the serious dispute which broke out between Japan and South Korea over the Liancourt Rocks in the somewhat ironically titled “Japan – South Korea Friendship Year” of 2005 – could have had a heavy impact on the “no particular country/don’t know” category. However if one compares the “no particular country/don’t know” category with North Korea’s dislike rate, the reason behind the newfound assertiveness is crystal clear. The “no particular countries/don’t know” category is almost a carbon copy of North Korea’s dislike rate, meaning that those who previously didn’t dislike any country, or simply didn’t know, have now increasingly come to select at least North Korea (one can pick up to 3 countries) from the list of possible countries (see figure 4). Particularly after the 1998 Taepodong launch do these two categories take on an inverse proportional relationship. This indicates that it’s none other than North Korea that has shrunk the indecisiveness among the Japanese respondents.



This among many other statistical materials gives us an indication of just how important 9/17 has been in shaping a public consciousness that is hostile toward North Korea. In the next chapter I will take a closer look at the phenomenon simply known as “9/17”.

5. 9/17

In many ways September 17, 2002 signified a milestone for Japan and especially the Japanese public opinion. This was the day which saw the historical first summit on the very top governmental level between Japan and North Korea. Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi Junichirō and North Korea’s Supreme Leader of the National Defense Commission (North Korea’s de facto no. 1) Kim Jong-il met in Pyongyang and signed the Pyongyang Declaration aiming at the settlement of the two nations’ “*unfortunate past*”²⁷, and ultimately normalization of diplomatic relations. But more importantly for the Japanese public opinion,

²⁷ For the declaration in its entirety, see MOFA’s web pages: http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/n_korea/pmv0209/pyongyang.html

this was the day that the controversial “abduction issue” ceased to be a suspicion, and was established as a fact.

The mystical disappearance of some Japanese citizens had been linked to North Korea ever since the middle of the 80s, but this was at large dismissed as false rumors or a smearing campaign against the communist North Korea. However with the appearance of witness reports and testimonies from North Korean defectors with espionage experience suggesting that North Korea had indeed forcefully abducted Japanese citizens for intelligence purposes, the Japanese public opinion became divided into two camps: The believers and the doubters. On September 17, 2002 the former camp delivered the finishing blow to the latter, as Kim Jong-il, to everyone’s surprise, admitted the abduction of 13 Japanese citizens between 1977 and 1982 of which 5 were still alive, and 8 were allegedly dead. The surviving 5 were returned to Japan on the 15th October on a temporary basis, however their children (who were born in North Korea) were not allowed to go with them. This was a kind of “hostage diplomacy” to ensure that the 5 would return to North Korea. This was nonetheless the greatest concession Kim Jong-il had ever yielded in the abduction issue. Not only did he admit the abductions, but he also apologized for them, and promised that such a thing would never occur in the future. Kim Jong-il’s motives for this confession are unclear and much debated, but as his country had just started to recover from a famine which some experts have labeled “*one of the greatest famines in human history*”²⁸, it seems likely that Kim Jong-il eyed Japanese, economic assistance upon normalization of diplomatic relations, and confessed to the abductions to show his goodwill in an attempt to speed up the normalization process.

However, unless Kim Jong-il’s motives were to deadlock Japan – North Korea relations, his approach cannot be deemed as anything but a complete failure. The Japanese people were outraged at the news. This anger was first directed toward North Korea in disbelief that a neighboring country could commit such an atrocious crime. Then the rage found a new target in the government and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (hereafter MOFA) for not having been able to protect its own citizens and for failing to take the abduction suspicions seriously in spite of the gradually growing amount of evidence. Finally the public rage turned back on

²⁸ Suk Lee, “The DPRK Economic Crisis and the ROK Security Dilemma”, in *Reconstituting Korean Security: A Policy Primer*, Ed. Hazel Smith, 131 (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2007).

itself, and a domestic witch-hunt ensued where the media, scholars, commentators, debaters, and politicians searched high and low for people who had been doubters pre-9/17. In fact, like 9/11 in the US one year prior, the term “9/17” came to be imprinted on the minds of Japanese people, at least in abduction issue affiliated circles, as a day that changed Japan drastically.

Abe Shinzō who succeeded Koizumi as Japan’s Prime Minister repeatedly referred to the Koizumi – Kim summit (in which he participated himself) as “9/17”, and stressed the importance of this day: *“For Japan, 9/17, that is the 17th of September when the abduction proof [was revealed] at Prime Minister Koizumi’s visit to Pyongyang, had an extreme impact. But the same goes for North Korea too. Before 9/17 there wasn’t a strong public opinion against North Korea. And neither did Japan and the US face sharply up to North Korea, nor was there an international coalition [as there is now].”*²⁹

So how did 9/17 concretely change Japan?

The LDP politician and Diet member Hirasawa Katsuei, one of the authorities in the abduction issue debate in Japan, and a character who will play a major role in this paper, points to 4 specific changes in Japan post-9/17.

1. The growing influence of the victims’ families and the public opinion on Japan’s North Korea Policy

*“After Koizumi’s 2002 North Korea visit a couple of things changed. One of these changes was that the families of the abduction victims and the national, public opinion began to maneuver Japan’s North Korea policy, especially on the abduction issue.”*³⁰

2. The disappearance of the taboo surrounding North Korea

“Another change sparked by the abduction issue was that the taboo surrounding North Korea began to be erased. Up until now it has been taboo to raise the North Korea problem from a perspective of authenticity. In Japan the Chrysanthemum

²⁹ Abe Shinzō, “Jikan ha wareware ni yūri ni hataraku”, *Chuōkōron* 8 (2003), 60.

³⁰ Katsuei Hirasawa, *Rachi Mondai: Kitachōsen Gaikō no Arikata wo tou* (Tokyo: PHP, 2004), 145

taboo³¹, the Crane taboo³², the social integration taboo and such have at one point existed, but since then the only taboo which lived on was the North Korea taboo, especially in the mass media. [...] This taboo has now finally been erased.³³

3. The exposure of pro-North Korea bias

“Thirdly, by the fact that North Korea admitted to and apologized for the abductions, the bias of people considered “North Korea sympathizers” or belonging to “North Korea support groups”, has been revealed. This, I think, is extremely important for the future solution to the abduction issue.³⁴”

4. The reexamination of Japan as a nation

“At number four, and this is the most important point, this problem has sparked a reexamination of the state of the Japanese nation. [...] Why hasn’t the Japanese government been able to protect the lives of its citizens? And what should it do to ensure safety and security for its citizens in the future? The abduction issue has forced the Japanese government, Japanese politicians and the Japanese public opinion to [reconsider] how Japan from now on must be as a nation.³⁵”

All of Hirasawa’s points can of course be argued against, but they are worth raising as all of them have been noticed and debated by numerous commentators in Japan. I will touch upon all of Hirasawa’s points in detail throughout this paper.

The North Korea Taboo

Many will probably argue that the so-called North Korea taboo was killed off when North Korea lost its socialist allies at the end of the Cold War, or at least in 1998 when North Korea tested its first Taepodong intercontinental ballistic missile which flew over Japan before it crashed into the Pacific Ocean. Despite having been within North Korea’s missile range since

³¹ The taboo of criticizing the emperor or the imperial family. Wikipedia: <http://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E8%8F%8A%E3%82%BF%E3%83%96%E3%83%BC>

³² The taboo of criticizing the religious sect Sōka Gakkai. Sōka Gakkai used to belong to the Nichiren Buddhist branch Nichiren Shōshū whose emblem was a crane, hence the name “crane taboo”. Wikipedia: <http://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E9%B6%B4%E3%82%BF%E3%83%96%E3%83%BC>

³³ Hirasawa, *Rachi Mondai*, 145-146.

³⁴ Hirasawa, *Rachi Mondai*, 146

³⁵ Hirasawa, *Rachi Mondai*, 146

1993³⁶, the 1998 launch certainly raised the Japanese people's threat perception toward North Korea to unprecedented heights, and in the ensuing North Korea debate there wasn't much which resembled anything like a North Korea taboo. The Japanese people were furious at North Korea and the Japanese government announced that North Korea was the greatest threat to its national security³⁷. I will look closer at the alleged North Korea taboo prior to 9/17 and at the much more obvious North Korea taboo after 9/17 in chapter 11.

Pro-North Korea bias

As for the exposure of pro-North Korea bias, one needs to have in mind that Hirasawa is an anti-North Korea hardliner who promotes economic sanctions and sees North Korea's collapse as the *"only way of completely solving the [abduction] problem."*³⁸ Therefore his perception of "bias" in a North Korea context may not be compatible with that of commentators on the other end of the scale, but it is certainly true that people who are considered North Korea sympathizers have suffered a massive attack on their credibility and often find themselves screened off from the public debate. Tokyo University emeritus professor Wada Haruki, who perhaps is the fiercest Japanese advocate of normalized relations with the North Korean regime even after 9/17, is one of the most frequent targets of hawkish attacks. Speaking from personal experience, he feels that after 9/17 *"the people who have been promoting and working toward the normalization of Japan – North Korea relations, have been slandered and attacked. These people have also been robbed of their authority, and as a result the very topic of normalization itself has come to be met with denial."*³⁹ Moreover, the rage spurred by the abduction issue propelled a hunt for scapegoats and the "North Korea sympathizers" were often framed as indirectly, sometimes directly, responsible for the abduction issue. In the words of another hardliner, the Waseda University professor Shigemura Toshimitsu, *"Kim Jong-il's abduction apology brought "death" upon some North Korea experts and debaters."*⁴⁰

³⁶ Glyn Ford, Soyoungh Kwon, *North Korea on the Brink: Struggle for Survival* (London: Pluto Press, 2008), 177

³⁷ Maaïke Okano-Heijmans, "Japan as Spoiler in the Six-Party Talks: Single-Issue Politics and Economic Diplomacy Towards North Korea" (introduction), Japanfocus, 2008, http://www.japanfocus.org/-Maaïke-Okano_Heijmans/2929

³⁸ Hirasawa, *Rachi Mondai*, 131

³⁹ Haruki Wada, "'Rachi sareta' Kokuron wo Dasshite", *Sekai* 1 (2004): 252-253.

⁴⁰ Toshimitsu Shigemura, *Saishin Kitachōsen Dētabukku* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 2002), 18.

In chapter 10 I will examine how North Korea sympathetic attitudes became intolerable and thus how the past came back to haunt the commentators who had previously failed to pay the proper homage to the abduction issue.

The growing influence of the families and the public opinion

When it comes to Hirasawa's first point, the growing influence of the abduction victims' families and the public opinion on Japan's North Korea policy, there seems to be a relative consensus across the camps. While foreign Japan-watchers tend to regard the abduction issue as a passing craze, Japanese commentators who feel the full force of the social restrictions laid down by the abduction issue in the post-9/17 mood, are much more pessimistic about the prospects of a quick settlement of the issue. They are, moreover, keenly aware of the steady foothold the abduction issue has gained as a powerful stimulant on the Japanese public opinion. Hence, there is certainly no lack of support in Japanese North Korea related literature for the claim that the public opinion has come to wield great influence on the issue since 9/17.

Hasuike Tooru (see chapter 7) who now is very skeptical to the one-sided public opinion which he himself took part in fanning up during his time in KKAI, described the relationship between 9/17 and the public opinion in the following manner: *"Before the abduction issue was officially recognized on "9/17" the Japanese society, the public opinion, the media, the people, almost everyone ignored or were indifferent toward North Korea [...]. However after "9/17" everyone began showing interest. [...] A public opinion which completely resembled something like a rowdy anti-North Korea movement came to life"*⁴¹.

The disgruntled ex-diplomat Amaki Naoto once looked back at his 34 year long career in MOFA and remarked on the abduction issue: *"In my life as a diplomat I have never experienced an issue where the diplomacy monopolization by the Government and MOFA has provoked forth the condemnation of the public opinion this strongly"*⁴².

⁴¹ Tooru Hasuike, Kayoko Ikeda, Kunio Suzuki, Tatsuya Mori, *Rachi 2: Sayū no Kakine wo koeru Taiwashū* (Tokyo: Kamogawa Shuppan, 2009), 140.

⁴² Naoto Amaki, *Saraba Gaimusho: Watashi ha Koizumi Shushō to Baikoku Kanryō wo yurusanai* (Tokyo: Kabushiki Kaisha Bijinesusha, 2005), 40.

Another MOFA bureaucrat exclaimed that *“I had never thought that the public opinion would exert this strong an influence on diplomacy. It’s been a lesson”*⁴³.

Sato Masaru noted in 2005 that *“a situation has arisen where the majority of the people are angry at something. The target of this anger is 100% wrong, while the public opinion which attacks it is 100% right [...] Under these conditions a xenophobic nationalism in the Japanese people has rapidly grown strong”*⁴⁴. Sato cited the North Korea problem as one of the main reasons for this situation.

Amaki Naoto’s MOFA nemesis, Tanaka Hitoshi, devoted an entire chapter to public opinion in his 2009 book *“Gaiko no Chikara”* (The power of diplomacy). He did not fail to see the changes in the public opinion following 9/17 as he observed, much like Sato Masaru, that *“the abduction issue aroused nationalism among the Japanese people and became a symbolic existence for people’s frustration”*⁴⁵.

There seems to exist near unanimous support for the claim that the public opinion came to wield greater influence on North Korea policy making after 9/17, but a consensus is far from reached on how to evaluate this trend. Some regard the strengthening of the public opinion as a welcome addition in the struggle to solve the abduction issue, whereas others see it as a dangerous trend leading to blind nationalism and hatred. One of the most ardent supporters of a strong public opinion has been “the families”.

In abduction issue literature, the term “the families” usually refers to the Association of Families of Victims Kidnapped by North Korea (hereafter KKAI (Kazokukai = the Family Association)) which was founded by the Yokota family in 1997. The support group the National Association for the Rescue of Japanese Citizens Kidnapped by North Korea (hereafter SKAI (Sukūkai = Rescue Association)) and the Parliamentary League for Early Repatriation of Japanese Citizens (hereafter RGIREN (Rachi Giren)) followed suit later the same year.

In chapter 7 I wrestle with the question of these interest organizations’ influence on Japan’s North Korea policy. First I introduce their structure and expressed aims. Secondly I look at

⁴³ Anonymous MOFA bureaucrat quoted in Tatsuya Shiroyama, *““Dokudan Gaikōkan” Tanaka Hitoshi to ha nanimono ka”*. *Bungei Shunjū* 11 (2002): 190.

⁴⁴ Masaru Satō, *Kokka no Wana: Gaimushō no Rasupūchin to yobarete* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 2005), 119.

⁴⁵ Hitoshi Tanaka, *Gaikō no Chikara* (Tokyo: Nihon Keizai Shinbun Shuppansha, 2009), 218.

the radicalization process both groups have gone through. Finally I look at these organizations' influence on governmental North Korea policy through an examination of the organizations' demands toward the government and the subsequent governmental responses to these demands.

The reexamination of Japan as a nation

In the wake of 9/17 there is no doubt about the fact that the Japanese people felt a heightened sense of vulnerability. A neighboring state had systematically abducted Japanese citizens for a period spanning at least 5 years, and the Japanese government hadn't been able to detect it, much less prevent it. That is not to say that this sense of vulnerability was the result of the abduction issue alone, the already mentioned 1998 Taepodong launch was also a major argument for the voices demanding a revision of the largely untested Self Defense Forces (hereafter SDF). But the overall image of North Korea as "strange, different and dangerous" grew deeper and deeper roots in the minds of the Japanese people. Horror stories about North Korean prison camps, secret footage of public executions and Kim Jong-il ridicule appeared frequently in Japanese media. In short, North Korea was demonized and presented as a wild animal. As if that wasn't enough, US President George Bush had listed North Korea on his "Axis of Evil" along with Iran and Iraq in January 2002. Just days before Koizumi met Kim Jong-il, the US which was deep into the war in Afghanistan, had cornered North Korea with evidence which allegedly proved that North Korea was secretly developing nuclear weapons. This put fuel on the fire for those who already designated North Korea as a military threat. Kim Jong-il was seen as an irrational dictator willing to do anything to achieve his goals, and the thought of him possessing one of the largest standing armies in the world, intercontinental ballistic missiles and possibly nuclear weapons spurred a massive outcry for a national security reevaluation and a revision of the "Peace Constitution" which prohibits Japan from keeping a conventional military.

In chapter 12 I argue that the abduction issue enhanced the Japanese threat perception toward North Korea. Furthermore, I examine how the abduction issue spurred an unprecedented assertiveness in the rhetoric of the more hawkish commentators and in some cases even a readiness to go to war.

From assailant to victim

The Tokyo University emeritus professor Sakamoto Yoshikazu noted in 2004 that: *“Since September 17, 2002, when North Korean leader Kim Jong Il admitted to the abduction, Japan has been engulfed with a feeling of having been unilaterally victimized, which matches the similar feeling among the U.S. citizens following 9/11. 9/17 is the Japanese counterpart to 9/11 in the U.S. in terms of unilateralist psychology⁴⁶.”* Yoshikazu raises an interesting point which Hirasawa and his fellow hard-liners don’t care to discuss, but which has been characterized as an important change post-9/17 by many of the commentators affiliated with the left. They argue that Japan’s past colonization crimes are forgotten and Japan now sees itself solely as the victim in the relationship to North Korea. This change in mentality will be discussed in chapter 9.

In the following chapter we will return to Hirasawa Katsuei for a detailed look at how the staunch anti-North Korea hardliner became a target for the public opinion he had played such a big role in agitating himself. Hirasawa’s case, as we shall see, shows that the days where Japanese politicians could bypass MOFA and arbitrarily approach North Korea without social and political consequences were long gone.

6. Hirasawa’s secret negotiations

After the return of the five (the Hasuikes, the Chimuras and Sōga Hitomi) to Japan on October 15th 2002, relations between Japan and North Korea soured. The reason for this setback was that 9 days after the abductees’ return, the Japanese government declared the return to be permanent. The returnees would not go back to North Korea. As the five all had family members remaining in North Korea, many speculated that the Japanese government had pressured them to stay. The North Korean side was furious and blasted Japan for breaking its promise to send them back. The Japanese side, on the other hand, claimed that there never had been such a promise of a temporary return. This is still a much debated

⁴⁶ Yoshikazu Sakamoto, “Violence, Legitimacy and the Future of Japanese and American Multilateralism”, Japanfocus, <http://www.japanfocus.org/-Yoshikazu-SAKAMOTO/2001>

topic today, but the majority seems to lean toward the notion that MOFA actually made such a promise.

Nonetheless, negotiations stalled and both parties distrust of each other grew. Japan was demanding that the North Korean government launch a proper investigation of the 8 who were claimed to be dead, and of the perpetrators behind the abductions. The death certificates which North Korea had submitted contained several dubious points, and in some cases information (such as date of birth) which was plainly incorrect. With both governments refusing to budge an inch, uncompromisingly sticking to their claims, the following Japan – North Korea talks in Kuala Lumpur on October 29th and 30th got stuck in the mire. A new opportunity arose in August 2003 as the 6PT saw the light of day, but these talks fared no better than the Kuala Lumpur talks, as both sides still stubbornly stuck to their claims and the 6PT's other parties were reluctant to bring up humanitarian issues in the talks that were primarily aimed at denuclearization.

The Beijing talks

All this time North Korea sent out feelers to influential people outside of MOFA to sound them out on the prospects of secret negotiations on bureaucracy level. One of these people was the earlier mentioned LDP strongman Hirasawa Katsuei. In the beginning Hirasawa, who also was the secretary-general of the RGIREN, declined the North Koreans' requests, but as there was no progress on the governmental level, his frustration grew and eventually he agreed to talk unofficially with the North Korean side in Beijing on December 20th and 21st 2003. Hirasawa later voiced his frustration with the Japanese government saying: *"Whether it was the 6PT or bilateral Japan – North Korea talks, no results were reached. Meetings aren't held just for the sake of holding them. Results are everything"⁴⁷*. The phrase "results are everything" would become Hirasawa's mantra in his engagement in the unofficial North Korea talks.

In Beijing Hirasawa's entourage (consisting of among others SKAI's vice president Nishioka Tsutomu) met with the experienced Song Il Ho who was the North Korean side's chief negotiator. According to Hirasawa, Song and the North Korean side expressed concerns over the power the Japanese public opinion wielded and how one-sidedly anti-North Korean it

⁴⁷ Hirasawa, *Rachi Mondai*, 29.

had become after Kim Jong-il's abduction confession. North Korea which is a strictly controlled one party state with a very restricted public opinion had failed completely to anticipate how Japan's public opinion would react and how big its influence was. The North Korean side reportedly put it this way: *"When it comes to the abduction issue, the ones wielding power in Japan are not the government or MOFA, but KKAI, SKAI, RGIREN, and most of all the public opinion. [...] No matter how much we try to conclude talks with the Japanese government or MOFA, they're always overturned if KKAI voices opposition. If the public opinion isn't satisfied the government cannot take action. Therefore it's no use continuing the talks with the government and MOFA. We believe that in order to solve the problem, we should talk to people who possess influence over KKAI and the public opinion"⁴⁸*.

The North Koreans claimed that precisely Hirasawa was a man of such influence and requested *"honest talks"* in which both parties could freely put forth their arguments without being bound to official policy. The three most important findings of Hirasawa's talks with the North Koreans were, 1. North Korea had made arrangements to return the 8 family members of the returnees if the returnees first came back to North Korea to make up their minds without pressure from the Japanese government (this was a condition which they probably knew that Japan would not accept). 2. The promise of a reinvestigation of the missing persons (the ones claimed to be dead or never having entered North Korea). 3. North Korea perceived MOFA as having broken its promise, and was therefore unwilling to engage diplomacy with the Japanese government at the time being.

Hirasawa was sure that the rather positive outcome of the talks would please the Japanese government. After all the North Koreans had displayed an unusually positive attitude and confirmed its intent to solve the abduction issue through bilateral talks as long as the Japanese government proved itself trustworthy. But the government was none too pleased. Hirasawa and company were criticized for acting too arbitrary without obtaining permission from the proper people and MOFA didn't even brief Hirasawa on the content of the talks. KKAI was also outraged and blasted Hirasawa for acting outside the scope of his authority.

Hirasawa notes that although the Japanese government didn't care to listen to him, he was approached immediately by American ambassadors who wanted to know what the North

⁴⁸ IBID, 44.

Koreans had to say. Eventually he was also briefed by ambassadors from South Korea, Germany and Singapore respectively⁴⁹. Hirasawa, frustrated by what he called MOFA's "pride" and "narrow-mindedness", later recalled his bitterness writing: "If I have to sum up MOFA's attitude toward me in one word, it would be "ignorance""⁵⁰.

So why was MOFA so ignorant to this new information which could potentially lead to progress in the Japan – North Korea diplomacy? One important reason is that the focus on normalization of diplomatic relations, which had been one of the major goals of Koizumi's visit, was perceived as less desirable than before. The US warned Japan just days prior to Koizumi's 2002 North Korea summitry that they possessed strong evidence that North Korea was developing nuclear arms. To the Americans' dismay, Koizumi did not bring up this issue at the summit, but for the Japanese who were all within North Korea's missile range, the idea of a nuclear North Korea heightened their sense of vulnerability. Furthermore the "abduction shock" forced the Japanese people to reconsider the necessity of normalized relations with the regime possessing such a bad track record that it had been labeled as one of the "axis of evil"⁵¹.

A materializing pattern

This change of focus is evident when one looks at the public opinion surveys on diplomacy conducted by the Japanese Cabinet Office. When asked about which North Korea related topics they found interesting, the respondents in 2003 (October) answered primarily "the abduction issue" (90.1%), "the nuclear development issue" (66.3%) and the "missile issue" (61.1%)⁵². The numbers for these three issues skyrocketed from the results of the previous year's survey. The abduction issue had gone up from 83.4%, the nuclear development issue was up from 49.2% and the missile issue rose up from 43.7%. Interestingly, this increase occurred despite the fact that there had been no significant developments neither in the abduction issue nor in the missile issue that year. There had been no new information of unaccounted abductees, no missile launches. The nuclear issue saw North Korea's sudden withdrawal from the NPT, but just months later North Korea willingly sat down in the China-

⁴⁹ Hirasawa, *Rachi Mondai*, 84.

⁵⁰ *IBID*, 83.

⁵¹ First used in Bush's State of the Union Address on the 29th of January 2002.

⁵² The Cabinet office of Japan, *Gaikō ni kan suru Yoron Chōsa*, Tokyo, 2003 <http://www8.cao.go.jp/survey/h15/h15-gaikou/2-1.html>

brokered 6PT. This framework provided a much more dynamic forum for dialogue than the NPT had ever been able to offer. In that respect it can be argued that the nuclear issue had as a matter of fact taken a positive turn. Nonetheless, the public interest in these issues grew stronger. On closer inspection one finds a small, but significant trend. The interest for the issues that put North Korea in a bad light, such as the ones mentioned, almost without exception rose⁵³. Reversely, the interest in the issues which likely conveyed positive connotations about North Korea generally decreased. E.g. “normalization negotiation” went down from 37% to 34.6%, the so-called “settlement of the past” went down from 21.8% to 20.7%, “cultural exchange” went down from 8% to 6.1% and “sports exchange” went down from 7.4% to 5.9%. The decreases are not as spectacular as the increases, but they consolidate the notion of a pattern materializing, a pattern following the principles of the spiral of silence. What makes this survey interesting is that it was conducted in 2003, a *quiet year* by North Korean standards. As already mentioned, 2003 was a year in which North Korea, if anything, showed positive intent by opting to join the 6PT on denuclearization. There wasn’t one single, determining factor that could explain why the perception of North Korea was worsening in Japan that year. If one starts looking for events that took place that year, one won’t find any relevant ones. The deteriorating picture of North Korea was a result of a growing sense of danger and threat that had been in the making for years.

Noelle-Neumann has hinted that danger is a strong stimulant on the public opinion. She explains: “*Perhaps the degree of danger to which a society is exposed, whether the danger comes from within or without, is the key: greater danger demands greater integration, and greater integration is enforced by heightened reactions of public opinion*⁵⁴”. Japan has of course to a certain degree been exposed to danger by North Korea throughout the Cold War, but as mentioned it was the 1998 Taepodong launch that instilled fear in Japan. Moreover the nuclear development allegations and the abduction confession delivered a quick one-two punch that had a unifying effect on the Japanese people. It was right after Koizumi’s 2002 Pyongyang visit that the witch hunt for North Korea sympathizers arguably entered its most intense phase. And the people who didn’t share the critical views of the majority were often branded as dissidents or traitors. Noelle-Neumann points to a mechanism which correlates to the conditions at the time in Japan: “*There is an indication [...] that [...] when*

⁵³ The lone exception was “*the mystery ship issue*” which went down from 59.5% to 58.7%.

⁵⁴ Noelle-Neumann: *The Spiral of Silence*, 138.

*society is in a crisis, pressures toward conformity increase*⁵⁵. It was precisely these pressures toward conformity that caused the ousting of elements unwilling to conform. By 2003 the spiral of silence had practically “*run its course*” and the anti-North Korea faction⁵⁶ had become so strong that the opposition dared not raise its voice publicly and the perception of Kim Jong-il’s regime could plummet despite the fact that North Korea took on a rather positive, or at least not menacing, attitude internationally that year.

This had also naturally an effect on the Japanese government. Normalization was no longer as desirable as it could backfire and arouse criticism against the government and MOFA for being too soft and compromising. Koizumi quickly made the complete solution to the abduction issue a premise for normalization, but the government never clearly specified what it meant by a “complete solution” and thus it effectively put the normalization process on hold.

The Dalian talks

As Koizumi’s premise and the North Korean claim that MOFA had broken its promise clashed, the returnees and their family members in North Korea remained separated. MOFA officials met with their North Korean counterparts in January and February 2004, but their standpoints remained incompatible. As a matter of fact, when diplomat Tanaka Hitoshi and LDP lawmaker Yabunaka Mitōji met the North Korean side on February 22nd and 23rd the North Koreans claimed that they had submitted all the necessary evidence in the abduction issue and that the matter was solved. This was actually a setback from Hirasawa’s Beijing talks where North Korea at least had promised to look into the dubious material. Later in the same month the second round of the 6PT was initiated. Yabunaka and the MOFA bureaucrat Saiki Akitaka tried to raise the abduction issue, but the North Koreans insisted that the 6PT was not the proper venue for such talks.

MOFA tried numerous times to convene a meeting, but the North Koreans declined. Foreign minister Kawaguchi Yoriko remarked that “*the ball is on their half now, but they won’t return it*”⁵⁷. Hirasawa commented wryly that “*this leisurely attitude doesn’t work against a gangster*”

⁵⁵ Noelle-Neumann: *The Spiral of Silence*, 137.

⁵⁶ What I call the anti-North Korea faction is by no means a uniform unit with a clearly defined common policy, it’s simply a loose term for people in opposition to North Korea.

⁵⁷ Hirasawa, *Rachi Mondai*, 87.

*state like North Korea. It just causes time to pass in vain. Either one has to go over there and pick up the ball, or one has to force them to return it*⁵⁸. Still frustrated with the lack of progress, Hirasawa again answered the North Koreans call. A secret meeting was arranged in Dalian, China on March 1st and 2nd. This time he went with LDP's former president Yamasaki Taku. At the time Yamasaki was out of office at the Diet, but he had been a powerful character in LDP for years and was known to be a close personal friend of PM Koizumi. As a matter of fact Yamasaki, Koizumi and LDP Diet member Katō Kōichi were known as the YKK clique⁵⁹, with ties dating back several years. At any rate Yamasaki was instrumental in Dalian as he made direct phone calls to Koizumi on both of the meeting days⁶⁰. The location was perhaps preferred by the Japanese side as Dalian actually was Yamasaki's birthplace.

In Dalian Yamasaki primarily raised the nuclear- and missile issues, while Hirasawa addressed the abduction issue. The North Korean side apparently showed willingness to cooperate, and according to Hirasawa they were willing to compromise on their previous claim that the case was closed. They repeated their demand that the 5 returnees go back to North Korea to decide the future residence of their families, but actually hinted that they would allow high officials from the Japanese government to go to North Korea in their place. Hirasawa later wrote that he thought that Yamasaki, who put forth the proposal of high officials instead of the returnees, had "*the person of the very highest rank in the government, namely PM Koizumi*⁶¹" in mind when he made the proposal. The meeting ended on a high note as the North Korean side reportedly also clarified that it would soon accept bilateral negotiations with the Japanese government.

In the line of fire again

Hirasawa once again had positive news to report, but just as before he ended up in the line of fire. Upon their return, a press corps awaited them at Narita Airport despite the top secret nature of the talks. Yamasaki and especially Hirasawa were swept away in a media storm that blasted them for bypassing the government and taking the Japan – North Korea diplomacy in their own hands. KKAI and SKAI criticized them for sabotaging the abduction

⁵⁸ IBID.

⁵⁹ Taku Yamasaki, "Kono mama Jieitai ni "Chōhōki teki kōdō" wo saseru no ka", in *Nihon yo! Nihonjin yo!*, ed. Sōichirō Tahara, 78 (Tokyo: Shōgakusan, 2002).

⁶⁰ Hirasawa, *Rachi Mondai*, 91.

⁶¹ Hirasawa, *Rachi Mondai*, 97.

issue. Yamasaki, whose long-time crusade had been strengthening the SDF, was criticized for trying to use the abduction issue for his own benefit as he *“never had shown any interest in the abduction issue [before]”*⁶². SKAI announced on March 4th that *“these two persons’ actions run counter to SKAI and RGREN’s principle that Japan – North Korea negotiations should be decided only on one front, that is, on a governmental level. Yamasaki has no interest in activities for the rescue of the victims. He has even been zealous toward rice aid to North Korea”*⁶³. Even Nishioka Tsutomu, the chairman of SKAI who had gone with Hirasawa to Beijing just two months prior, was upset at his former partner: *“Although Hirasawa said he wouldn’t approach North Korea again, he has now gone ahead and visited China without any prior consultation. These two are using the abduction issue for political [gains]”*⁶⁴.

Hirasawa insisted that he had in fact obtained permission from the *“relevant people”*, but couldn’t reveal any details as it could have a disruptive effect on the negotiations which looked likely to resume at governmental level: *“To criticize the contents or the results of the talks is one thing, but this was criticism based on the notion that to have talks with North Korean top officials is in itself unacceptable. This was all put forth without knowing the content [of the talks]. To put it short, criticism for the sake of criticism. After my return the media followed me everywhere like paparazzis. They [even] showed up at my doorstep. They also had a public opinion survey asking “what do you think of Hirasawa and Yamasaki’s arbitrary diplomacy?” There is no other way to put it than to say that the Japanese mass media miss the point. But at that time silence was golden. There was just no way I could explain [my actions] when [everything still] was at an unresolved stage. The only thing I could say at that time was “when the time comes, I’m sure you will all understand”*⁶⁵.

But most people didn’t understand. Especially RGIREN was fed up with Hirasawa’s solo diplomacy. In the end Hirasawa, who was the secretary-general, was ousted from RGIREN for having damaged the group’s relations with KKAI and SKAI. RGIREN declared the following comprehensive statement of condemnation of Hirasawa on a meeting on April 7th:

“Hirasawa has twice ventured [in talks with the North Korean side] without consulting with

⁶² Toshimitsu Shigemura, *Gaikō Haiboku: Nicchō Shunō Kaidan to Nichibei Dōmei no Shinjitsu* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2006), 164.

⁶³ Kiyoshi Wakamiya, *Shinsō: Kitachōsen Rachi Higaisha no Kodomo tachi ha ikanishite Nihon ni Kikan shita ka* (Tokyo: Asuka Shinsha, 2004), 242.

⁶⁴ Wakamiya, *Shinsō*, 242-243.

⁶⁵ Hirasawa, *Rachi Mondai*, 102.

RGIREN or other relevant people. When all is said and done, there is no other way to judge this than as a betrayal by a man who has used the abduction issue for his own ambitions' sake.

As already mentioned, in the service of the head of the secretariat of RGIREN, Hirasawa's actions have this time been careless, and it is terribly regrettable that they have damaged our trust-based relationship with KKAI and SKAI with whom we are looking to solve the abduction issue.

We have received the same Diet member's resignation as the secretary-general, and decided to relieve him of his duties with immediate effect.

RGIREN will continue to strive for a complete solution to the abduction issue under the trustful partnership of the victims' families⁶⁶."

The influence of KKAI and SKAI

RGIREN's response is interesting because it shows how concerned it is with not stepping on the toes of KKAI and SKAI. It seems clear that in order for an abduction issue-related interest group to obtain legitimacy, it is essential to earn the approval of not only the victims' families, but also SKAI which flexes strong financial muscles and have supported the families economically from the very initiation in 1997. Of course it lies in KKAI's very nature to be in opposition to the North Korean regime that kidnapped their beloved ones, but KKAI was initially nowhere near as far on the right as SKAI which not only takes a hard-line stance on North Korea matters, but also nurtures connections to various domestic issues usually associated with the right, e.g. constitutional revision, nuclear armament, worship at the Yasukuni shrine by the PM, history textbook revision etc. These extremist views are often not compatible with the views of the family members who probably never would have entered politics if it wasn't for the sad fact that their loved ones were taken away from them. Nonetheless, after being ignored by its own government, the media and the public for so long, many members apparently find it hard to decline SKAI which has supported them from the very beginning. Hasuike Tooru who was the secretary-general in KKAI withdrew from KKAI in 2009 citing the hawkish development of KKAI and the meddling of SKAI as his reasons. Hasuike later commented on SKAI's influence: "*Because funding organizations have a huge*

⁶⁶ Wakamiya, *Shinsō*, 244-245.

influential power, there were elements [in SKAI] which I somehow felt I couldn't turn down even when I was working as the secretary-general [in KKAI]. [SKAI] has always shown the "good intent" of actively "supporting" us. For that, many families feel indebted. However, behind that good intent there exists a radical ideology. There are probably many families that feel out of place [with SKAI], but because of the obligation of the past they find themselves in a situation where they cannot open their mouths.⁶⁷"

It's hard to measure just how influential KKAI and SKAI are in a broader public opinion context, but there seems to be a genuine sympathy for the plight of the families across the various camps in Japan's political landscape. It's this sympathy for the families which gives SKAI much of its credibility.

In the following chapter I will look closer at the influence KKAI and SKAI has exerted on governmental North Korea policy making.

No one is safe!

The media spectacle surrounding Hirasawa is also interesting in that it sent a powerful message to the Japanese people. "No one is safe" seemed to be what the hubbub conveyed. Even Hirasawa, the staunch North Korea opponent, was bashed and ostracized. As the North Koreans had pointed out in Beijing, Hirasawa was perhaps the most outspoken politician on the abduction issue at that time, he nurtured close ties with the families, he saw regime collapse as ideal for the solution of the abduction issue, he had personally lead raids on and investigations of CS during his time in the police, and he had himself blasted the media, politicians and academics whom he perceived to be North Korea friendly. He was as hawkish as they come. The attacks on Hirasawa proved that the conformity needs to be honored at all times, past allegiance alone, no matter how zealous, is not enough.

⁶⁷ Tooru Hasuike, Rachi: *Sayū no Kakine wo koeta Tatakai he* (Tokyo: Kamogawa Shuppan, 2009), 96-97.

7. Kazokukai & Sukūkai

KKAI was founded by Yokota Megumi's father Shigeru Yokota and the ex-Communist Party member Hyomoto Tatsukichi in 1997 in large as a consequence of the North Korean defector An Myung-Jin's testimony concerning Megumi.

In the beginning KKAI mainly concentrated its efforts on raising awareness of the abduction issue in the Japanese public through various enlightenment campaigns. Another primary goal of the organization was to place the abduction issue, which was at that time not yet established as a fact, on the agenda of Japanese politicians. Before the establishment of KKAI the scattered approaches of individual families had obtained little attention from politicians and MOFA officials. For example when the Arimotos went to MOFA in 1994 to convey their suspicions that their missing daughter, Arimoto Keiko, seemed to have been kidnapped by North Korea, they were met by one of the lowest ranking officials in MOFA and their concerns were hastily brushed aside⁶⁸. After the establishment of KKAI the families were at least granted audience with influential policy makers as the Yokotas' 1997 invitation to the Diet bears witness of. However, the skepticism harbored by most politicians remained strong. The Yokotas begged the Diet members for help in their struggle to retrieve their daughter, but received little more than a "good luck" and a pat on their shoulders.

It wasn't until 9/17 that KKAI were given complete recognition and attention, but in return KKAI became nearly untouchable post-9/17. The whole nation lamented the sad fates of the families and people started questioning themselves as to why they had overlooked the families' calls for support all this time, and more importantly, why had their government also done so? The ousted Hasuike Toru has compared KKAI to a "sanctuary"⁶⁹ where politicians and media people can take shelter. As long as one sticks to the opinions of KKAI one is safe, but just a slight deviation from the path of the families can have severe consequences as people like Hasuike and Hirasawa Katsuei have experienced.

It is off course difficult to prove just how big an influence KKAI has on the Japanese media and, more importantly perhaps, on Japanese foreign policy making. The debate on interest groups' influence on policy making in Japan is a lively one, but it has come to no definite

⁶⁸ Hirasawa, *Rachi Mondai*, 184.

⁶⁹ Hasuike, *Rachi: Sayū no Kakine wo koeta Tatakai he*, 89.

answers. At any rate, at least if one is to judge from the available literature pool touching upon KKAI and SKAI's role in today's Japan, there seems to be a solid consensus across the camps around the notion that the families and their friends in SKAI have had, and still have, a major impact on not only the media, but also directly on Japan's foreign policy post-9/17. The increase in media exposure the organization has enjoyed since Koizumi's first Pyongyang visit is evident for all to observe, and requires no further elaboration. However the questions surrounding how or if KKAI has affected governmental policy, and further, how the organization's own policy has changed with the growing publicity, deserve closer inspection.

A drift toward the right

To start with the latter question which is more tangible and readily observable, it seems pretty clear that KKAI has changed its agenda from enlightenment campaigns to an orchestrated effort with SKAI to work toward sanctions against North Korea with the collapse of the Kim Jong-il regime as the ultimate goal. KKAI has come to see regime collapse as the most effective way to solve the abduction issue. This is a view which very much reflects that of its support organization SKAI. This drift toward the right has perplexed some of its members, like Hasuike most noticeably, who have responded by distancing themselves from the organization. KKAI, which started out with the intention of simply placing the abduction issue on the map, has become a politically and ideologically loaded actor. The media showered the organization with attention in the wake of both of Koizumi's North Korea summits, and generally seeks KKAI's opinion whenever North Korea issues arise. Hasuike pointed out in 2009 that *"these past seven years [the media] has always sought Kazokukai's opinion no matter what problem it is as long as it's related to North Korea"*⁷⁰. Members of KKAI were asked to comment on such unrelated (to the abduction issue) matters as the missile launches and the nuclear tests, often side by side with East-Asia- or military experts. We should also remember that the growing influence of the families was one of the four post-9/17 changes that Hirasawa Katsuei highlighted earlier in this paper. If we recall his claim that after 9/17 *"the families of the abduction victims and the national, public opinion began to maneuver Japan's North Korea policy, especially on the abduction issue"*, we might begin to understand Hasuike's "sanctuary" metaphor. We might also recall

⁷⁰ Masakuni Oota, Tooru Hasuike, *Rachi Tairon* (Tokyo: Oota Shuppan, 2009), 103.

Hirasawa writing about various taboos in post-war Japan of which, in his mind, the North Korea taboo was the longest surviving. The historian Takashima Nobuyoshi points to a newer taboo which he calls the “*Kazokukai taboo in the media world*”⁷¹.

Judging purely from abduction issue related literature there seems to be little doubt that, at least in the perception of the commentators, KKAI has developed an immense influential power post-9/17. KKAI as an organization is also fully aware of how its status in the eyes of the government changed from nuisance to VIP with 9/17. KKAI Chairman at the time, Yokota Shigeru was once asked when the government started treating them positively, upon which he answered plainly: “*They started [treating us] seriously from the 17th of September 2002 when PM Koizumi visited North Korea*”⁷².

Another observable trait is that it has become more and more assertive in its stance. An identifiable ideology has sprung forth from its relatively non-political past. This ideology is undoubtedly closely intertwined with the political right in the Japanese, political landscape which on average is fairly conservative to begin with. KKAI members are heard calling for revisions of the constitution, strengthening of the SDF, sanctions on North Korea (multilateral and unilateral), and regime collapse of the Kim Jong-il dictatorship. There have also been instances where KKAI members have made controversial comments on Japan’s post-war responsibility and other topics completely separated from the abduction issue. For example, KKAI vice-president Masumoto Teruaki wrote a letter to Asahi Shinbun which was printed in the edition of November 10, 2002 where he commented on, among other things, the problem surrounding the settlement of Japan’s past: “*Now, on the basis of Kim Jong-il’s abduction confession and apology [...] Japan is finally able to shake loose from the curse of “the atonement for the past colonial rule”*”⁷³. These kinds of statements are precisely what Wada Haruki refers to when he is talking about Japan’s transformation from assailant to victim (See chapter 9).

The agenda of KKAI has become tightly interwoven with that of the SKAI, almost to the extent that one can’t spot any differences between the two organizations’ standpoints.

⁷¹ Nobuyoshi Takashima, *Rachi Mondai de hizomu Nihon no Minshushugi: Ishi wo nageru nara Watashi ni nageyō* (Tokyo: Supēsu Kaya, 2006), 88.

⁷² Yoshiko Sakurai, *Watashi ha Kim Jong Iru to no Tatakai wo tomenai: Beichū no Yūwa Seisaku ni mo makenai* (Tokyo: Bungei Shunjū, 2008), 205.

⁷³ Teruaki Masumoto, “Watashi no Shiten”, *Asahi Shinbun* (Tokyo). 11.10, 2002, morning edition. P.17.

Moreover SKAI's leadership is always participating in KKAI's meetings where it professes its ideology. One of the main reasons why SKAI has been able to exert its influence on KKAI so effectively is because SKAI has a member pool with pipelines to many other wealthy interest organizations (almost exclusively rightist), and more importantly because of its strong connections to the business world which enables it to support KKAI economically. SKAI has backed up KKAI economically almost since KKAI's initiation, and it seems that KKAI finds it hard to wrestle against SKAI's influence and economic muscles. Hasuike, for one, is of this belief. Speaking from his own experience as the KKAI's secretary-general he notes: *"Because funding organizations have a huge influential power, there were elements [in SKAI] which I somehow felt I couldn't turn down even when I was working as the secretary-general [in KKAI]. [SKAI] has always shown the "good intent" of actively "supporting" us. For that many families feel indebted. However, behind that good intent there exists a radical ideology. There are probably many families that feel out of place [with SKAI], but because of the obligations of the past they find themselves in a situation where they cannot open their mouths⁷⁴"*.

KKAI and SKAI have both undergone facelifts during the latter half of this decade. KKAI has from its initiation been led by the active Yokota Shigeru, but due to an increasingly frail health condition he stepped down from his post as chairman in 2007, after ten years of loyal service. In its first decade SKAI was led by the ultra-conservative Satō Katsumi, an outspoken advocate of the strengthening of the SDF and nuclear armament whom the Emeritus Professor of the Australian National University, Gavan McCormack, once described as *"one of the most influential people in the country⁷⁵"*. However, in 2008 he ceded the top spot to Fujino Yoshiaki who also is a dedicated supporter of nuclear armament. Fujino quit as chairman of SKAI in March 2010. Despite the reshuffling in the organizations' leadership there is nothing that suggests that we will see an easing of their hard-line stances anytime soon. KKAI is now under the chairmanship of Iizuka Shigeo who has said that he sees the cooperation of SKAI as *"indispensable"* and has called for an even more uniform line within KKAI, noting that *"there was one member of one family who made arbitrary remarks, and*

⁷⁴ Hasuike, *Rachi: Sayū no Kakine wo koeta Tatakai he*, 96-97.

⁷⁵ Gavan McCormack, "Japan and North Korea: The quest for normalcy", in *Reconstituting Korean Security: A Policy Primer*, Ed. Hazel Smith, 174 (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2007).

that did not help our cause. I wish to humbly appeal to the public opinion as one entity with a common determination"⁷⁶. This was clearly a stab at the "troublemaker" Hasuike Tooru.

SKAI is now led by Nishioka Tsutomu who is pro-nuclear armament (perhaps needless to say), and has been an active supporter of the families from the very beginning⁷⁷. Nishioka, who has written extensively on North Korea, sees the solution to abduction issue depending on three conditions⁷⁸. Firstly, he holds that the government and the Japanese people need to become aware that there are Japanese people in North Korea still alive and waiting for their rescue. Secondly, he argues that Japan must work toward creating a sense of crisis in North Korea in which North Korea is pushed into a corner and doesn't have any choice but to request normalization. This, he claims, was what happened in the early 90s when North Korea had lost a lot of prestige due to international events such as the 1988 Seoul Olympics, the collapse of the communist Eastern bloc, the Russian and Chinese normalization with South Korea and last, but not least the great famine. The idea is that in such a crisis North Korea will yield on the abduction issue. Nishioka sees additional sanctions as "*essential*" for the creation of such a sense of crisis, including the much debated sanction proposal involving restrictions on zainichi Koreans. This proposal seeks to deny re-entry permits to zainichi Koreans who travel to North Korea, but it has been fiercely criticized as racist and unconstitutional. Nishioka also asserts that any easing of already established sanctions is a "*betrayal by our government which will complicate the rescue of the abductees*"⁷⁹. His third necessary condition for a solution to the abduction issue is a governmental plan for a rescue of the abductees by the SDF in the case of an emergency situation on the Korean peninsula. "*In the case of Kim Jong-il's death or any other sudden change of the situation in North Korea how can we rescue the abductees? The SDF is a part of the US and South Korean forces' strategic plan so one can make an emergency plan for the three countries to join forces and rescue the abductees*"⁸⁰. Needless to say, this would require a comprehensive revision of the constitution and Nishioka's vision of a physical rescue of the abductees by coordinated

⁷⁶ Katsumi Satō and Shigeo Iizuka, "Rachi "Kazokukai" Iizuka Shigeo Daihyō ni kiku", Gendai Korea http://gendaikorea.com/20080115_taidan.aspx

⁷⁷ Nishioka Tsutomu was one of the very first people to link the disappearances to North Korea. Already in March 1991 he wrote the article *Kitachōsen ha naze Nihonjin wo Rachi suru no ka* (why does North Korea abduct Japanese people?) in the magazine Shokun!.

⁷⁸ Tsutomu Nishioka, "Nani wo tamerau! Nihon Dokuji no Tsuika Seisai wo dankō seyō", *Seiron* 2 (2009), 128-137.

⁷⁹ Nishioka, "Nani wo tamerau!", 132.

⁸⁰ Nishioka, "Nani wo tamerau!", 137.

military means on North Korean soil is one of the most radical policy proposals in the abduction issue debate, even by SKAI standards. Nonetheless, these claims have now been adopted as SKAI's official policy proposal and are posted on the organization's home pages.

Although the leadership in KKAI and SKAI has undergone some formal restructuring in the latter half of the decade, there is nothing that suggests a relaxation in their North Korea policy as the new leaders equal or perhaps even exceed the hawkishness of the former ones. It seems reasonable to assume that the near symbiotic relationship between the two will grow even closer as KKAI has gone through a radicalization process which has seen the purging of Hasuike and the emergence of a more uniform line supportive of SKAI.

International coordination

Another interesting turn in KKAI's policy is the increased focus on enlightenment campaigns outside of Japan. KKAI sees the rescue of the remaining abductees as dependent on international support and cooperation. KKAI has been particularly active agitators in other countries which have had citizens abducted by North Korea like for example South Korea and Thailand, but it has also repeatedly (and successfully) reached out to the US. KKAI sees the support of the US as indispensable in the quest for the retrieval of the Japanese citizens who they believe still to be alive in North Korea. In 2006 the Yokotas were even granted an audience with US President George Bush who remarked that it had been "*one of the most moving meetings since I've been the president*"⁸¹. Along with the US, South Korea is the most frequent object of KKAI lobbying. There are two important reasons for this. The first is that South Korea is the nation in the world which has had the most citizens abducted by North Korea. Although the exact numbers are unclear it is fairly certain that hundreds of South Koreans have been abducted since the Korean War, and it is often speculated that around 500 of these abductees are still living inside North Korea⁸². In October 2010 Kim Ho Yeon of the South Korean Grand National Party issued a press release stating that there are 517 South Korean abductees still living inside North Korea⁸³. Unlike in Japan, the South

⁸¹ "30 years after abductions, questions haunt Japanese", The Washington Post, 12.16, 2007, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/12/15/AR2007121501669_pf.html

⁸² Andrei Lankov, "Another Korea (217) : The ordinary abductions", The Korea Times, http://search.hankooki.com/times/times_view.php?term=+&path=hankooki3/times/lpage/opinion/200702/kt2007022214221854140.htm&media=kt

⁸³ So Yeol Kim, "517 abductees, 22 still in detention in North Korea", DailyNK,

Korean government is very reluctant to comment on this issue, but several interest organizations have sprung up and are now increasingly orchestrating their rescue efforts with KKAI.

But a common cause isn't the only reason why KKAI has its eyes fixed on South Korea. As already mentioned, KKAI sees sanctions as the most effective way of making North Korea yield further on the abduction issue. Against that backdrop it's easy to see why South Korea is an attractive cooperation partner for KKAI. Japan has since the inauguration of the Abe administration in 2006 increasingly imposed sanctions and the diplomatic leverage sanctions potentially can bring to the table is now all but gone. Japan has spent its sanctions card. While the Japanese government has imposed economic sanctions banning all trade with North Korea and thus effectively bringing the Japan – North Korean trade down to virtually zero, intra-Korean trade has grown steadily the past ten years, in a large part thanks to the "Sunshine Policy" of the late South Korean Presidents Kim Dae-Jung and Roh Moo-hyun who sought to thaw the strained relationship with their Northern neighbor. By 2007 the intra-Korean trade had reached 1797 million USD, which was almost as large as the China – North Korean trade⁸⁴. KKAI is aware of the fact that Japanese economic sanctions won't have much effect as long as North Korea's three major trading partners, China, South Korea and Russia, compensate for North Korea's lost revenue. However, it is also aware of the difficulty of influencing China and Russia which both off course have historically close (albeit at times strained) relations with North Korea. China and Russia have generally been protecting North Korea with their veto in the UN Security Council when sanction resolutions have been called for. South Korea too has a history of hesitating to provoke the North, but KKAI probably sees its chances of influencing South Korea as much greater than China and Russia. Through the coordination with the already existing interest groups in South Korea, KKAI seeks to engage the South Korean public opinion by raising the awareness of the fact that the abduction issue isn't a problem strictly limited to Japan. Through enlightenment campaigns it hopes to provide the stimuli needed to make the South Korean government impose sanctions on the North. If they succeed, this could potentially topple the North Korean regime.

<http://www.dailynk.com/english/read.php?catald=nk00100&num=6871>

⁸⁴ South Korean Ministry of Unification. "Exchanges and cooperation", http://eng.unikorea.go.kr/eng/default.jsp?pgname=AFFexchanges_overview

The Influence of Kazokukai and Sukukai

Moving on to the question of the degree of influence KKAI and SKAI possess on Japan's North Korea policy, it again needs to be emphasized that this is hard to measure concretely, but looking at the attention the government has paid to the organizations, and how much Japan's official North Korea policy has come to resemble the demands of KKAI and SKAI, gives us a hint of the influential power at play. As KKAI's policy has come to be largely dictated by SKAI it is henceforth beneficial to treat the two organizations as a single unit with the common goal of rescuing the abductees they believe still to be alive in North Korea through the implementation of tough measures. I will hereafter look at some specific cases in which the Japanese government has yielded to KKAI and SKAI's demands, or at the very least adopted policies which, to varying degrees, overlap these demands.

The Headquarters for the abduction issue

When Hasuike Tooru still was the secretary-general of KKAI he once resonated one of KKAI and SKAI's most frequent demands, insisting that *"there are no one in MOFA who one can call a North Korea expert [...], that's why we want some kind of project team lead by experts"*⁸⁵. In 2006 Hasuike and KKAI would eventually get this project team as the Abe government launched what is called the Headquarters for the Abduction Issue. This Headquarters was originally constituted by all the Cabinet ministers, but under the Hatoyama administration it went through a comprehensive power centralization as only four Cabinet ministers now attend its meetings⁸⁶. The Headquarters is under the direct administration of the Japanese Prime Minister who also chairs its meetings. The expressed goal of the Headquarters is to *"examine ways to resolve the abduction issue and to promote comprehensive measures for the prompt return of all living abductees, the investigation of the truth regarding the abductees whose fates are still unknown and the strategic steps to resolve the issue"*⁸⁷. The headquarters conveys the official, governmental premise that there

⁸⁵ Hirasawa, *Rachi Mondai*, 212.

⁸⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Rachi Mondai no Kaiketsu sono hoka Kitachōsen tōkyoku ni yoru Jinken Shingai Mondai he no Taisho ni kan suru Seifu no Torikumi ni tsuite no Hōkoku*, Tokyo, 2009, 2, http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/pr/pub/pamph/pdfs/rachi_torikumi.pdf

⁸⁷ The Headquarters for the abduction issue, <http://www.rachi.go.jp/en/shisei/taisaku/index.html>

can be no normalization of diplomatic relations as long as the abduction issue remains unresolved. This premise was originally formulated by PM Koizumi in March 2002⁸⁸, but has been acknowledged by all of his successors. To ensure maximum political flexibility Japan has never clearly stated precisely what it means by a “solution to the abduction issue”.

The Headquarters’ most notable undertakings have been in the field of public enlightenment. It has printed pamphlets about the abduction issue which it has dispatched to Japan’s embassies around the world, it has created a manga which is available in four languages and endorsed an animated movie which is available in ten, both depicting the tragic story of Megumi. Furthermore it posts posters in various public places reminding people about the issue, but perhaps most notably it has created the North Korean Human Rights Abuses Awareness Week from December 10th to the 16th every year.

In addition to these public awareness measures it also provides the shortwave radio broadcast “Furusato no Kaze” (Wind from back home) which is aimed at abductees believed to be still living in North Korea. It is updated once a week and contains messages from families and friends, Japanese songs, news about the latest developments in the abduction issue and supportive messages. It’s broadcasted in both Japanese and Korean.

Outside of public enlightenment the Headquarters hasn’t come up with any significant policies to propel advancement in the abduction issue. Hasuike Tooru who we recall called for the creation of a project team has expressed frustration with the Headquarters’ lack of a clear strategy. He sees enlightenment campaigns such as TV commercials, newspaper ads, DVD productions and manga as important, but “*not something a governmental task force should deal with*⁸⁹”. SKAI president Nishioka Tsutomu showed appreciation for the launch of the Headquarters, but felt it was too little, too late, and blasted Japan’s politicians in the past for being too slow to react. He argued further that “*the reason to why the abduction issue has gone this long without a solution, is that it took 28, 29 years from the abductions occurred to our government created a framework which took the abduction issue seriously*⁹⁰”.

⁸⁸ Hideo Ootake, “Koizumi Gaikō to Yoron: Kitachōsen Rachi Mondai no Shorui wo megutte”. *Senkyo* 57 (2004):1.

⁸⁹ Hasuike, Rachi: *Sayū no Kakine wo koeta Tatakai he*, 93.

⁹⁰ Nishioka, “Nani wo tamerau!”, 131.

Toward sanctions

KKAI and SKAI's evaluation of PM Koizumi was, as I will come back to later, rather negative, but his successor, Abe Shinzō, who had been a long time supporter of the families and the most outspoken anti-North Korea hawk in the LDP, quickly gained popularity, not only among the KKAI members, but also in the public opinion. Abe's popularity didn't go unnoticed within the LDP, and at the conclusion of a not-so-tight race with Fukuda Yasuo, Abe sailed up as the LDP president and eventually the next Prime Minister of Japan. The families and SKAI had high hopes for Abe in regard to progress in the abduction issue. When it comes to progress and results, the Abe government fared no better than the government under Koizumi, but the KKAI and SKAI members who felt that Koizumi's dialogue and pressure policy was too much dialogue and too little pressure, would finally under Abe see the implementation of sanctions against North Korea, a device never utilized by Koizumi. It would be a gross oversimplification to state that the sanctions simply were a result of KKAI and SKAI imposing their will on the Japanese government. Some of the sanctions have been multilateral and hammered out in the UN Security Council through the UN resolutions 1695, 1718 and 1874 as direct results of North Korea's 2006 missile launch, 2006 nuclear test and 2009 nuclear test respectively. There can be no doubt that Japan, desperately striving for a permanent seat in the Security Council, would have adopted these resolutions (which were adopted unanimously) regardless of KKAI and SKAI's opinion. However, Japan has gone one step further than the other UN members by implementing additional, unilateral sanctions against North Korea. KKAI and SKAI have at least since 9/17 called out in unison for Japanese, unilateral sanctions and with the advent of Abe their demands were finally met. Moreover, although the unilateral sanctions were spurred by events that in themselves were unrelated to the abduction issue, the Japanese government has stressed that the implementation of the sanctions is a result of a "larger picture" in which the abduction issue has been emphasized: *"This series of measures against North Korea was taken in consideration of the international political climate and the varying complex factors that made up the larger picture. One of the factors that influenced the decision to implement these measures was the fact that North Korea had not acted in good faith to resolve the abduction issue"*⁹¹.

⁹¹ HAI, <http://www.rachi.go.jp/en/ratimondai/syousai.html>

The premise that the abductees unaccounted for are still alive

In 2008 MOFA posted the pamphlet “Abductions of Japanese Citizens by North Korea” on its homepages (now removed). This pamphlet, which was translated into various languages and sent to Japanese embassies worldwide, was the same old story about the individual cases of the abductees, the abduction history and a confirmation of Koizumi’s normalization premise. However, it contained one small, but significant shift in policy toward the issue. It stated that the Japanese government made it its premise to assume that the abductees whose whereabouts were unaccounted for were still alive. We may recall that one of the three conditions that SKAI president Nishioka Tsutomu saw necessary for the solution to the abduction issue was the governmental and public awareness that there are Japanese citizens alive in North Korea waiting for their rescue. Against that backdrop it is perhaps no wonder that he rejoiced at this addition arguing that his first condition had now been met: *“Although belated, the government made this kind of pamphlet and clearly expressed its stance both in Japan and abroad. That means that my first condition for the rescue of the abductees has been reached⁹²”*. “Public movement”, he claimed, had had its way: *“The premise of the survival [of the remaining abductees] and the call for their instant return are, in fact, things that Kazokukai and Sukūkai have strongly been demanding. In that respect this pamphlet can be said to be the result of the public movement. If this governmental attitude had been shown during Kanemaru and Koizumi’s North Korea visits, the events would probably have developed in a totally different way⁹³”*.

It may be overly speculative (although not completely unreasonable) to suggest that the Japanese government launched unilateral sanctions as a result of the pressure from KKAI and SKAI, but it is not unlikely that a modest alteration like the survival premise – which most people probably wouldn’t even notice, but yet fits the interests of KKAI and SKAI perfectly – could be the result of these organizations growing influence and relentless lobbying.

⁹² Nishioka, “Nani wo tamerau!”, 133.

⁹³ Nishioka, “Nani wo tamerau!”, 133.

The investigation of other abduction cases

In the wake of 9.17 when it became clear beyond any doubt that North Korea was capable of going to such lengths as abducting nationals of other countries, a storm of requests from people who had experienced family members gone missing hit the offices of SKAI. People who had abandoned all hope of seeing their loved ones again started linking the details about the disappearances to North Korea. SKAI informed that, in the wake of 9.17, it received more than 100 reports involving over 130 people gone missing from families that suspected that the disappearances could maybe somehow be linked to North Korea. SKAI acknowledged that it was impossible that all of the cases were North Korea-related, but the sheer numbers were nonetheless too great to ignore. Thus it set up in January 2003 an independent investigation group called the Commission on Missing Japanese Probably Related to North Korea (hereafter COMJAN) led by Araki Kazuhiro who up until then had been the secretary-general in SKAI. COMJAN cooperates closely not only with SKAI, but also the Japanese government as it has been asked by the Headquarters for the Abduction Issue to gather information on additional abductees⁹⁴.

COMJAN's list of disappearances that may be North Korea-related has reached a whopping 470 persons, of which around 200 are being investigated confidentially. Up until recently there were "only" 36 people who were classified as "*very likely to have been abducted by North Korea*", but this number was nearly doubled in 2009 when 34 new people were added to this category⁹⁵. COMJAN has been criticized by North Korea for being a "*plot-breeding, ultra-right organization*" which only seeks to "*harm the dignity of the DPRK and tarnish its image and destabilize it under the pretext of the "abduction issue"*"⁹⁶, but it has also come under scrutiny inside Japan as well as many feel that COMJAN is too uncritical in its selection methods⁹⁷. Indeed its logic has been rather fuzzy at times, perhaps most notably in Araki's attempts to explain the reasoning behind the inclusions: "*Among the 470 names on the disappearance list, we make it our premise that there also are people who have not been*

⁹⁴ Schoff, "Political Fences and bad Neighbors", 14.

⁹⁵ Kazuhiro Araki, "Seifu ha "Kikoku" "Kaiketsu" de ha naku, "Kyūshutsu" wo kakageyō", *Seiron* 2 (2009): 140.

⁹⁶ "Japan's ultra-right organization's boondoggle under fire", Korean Central News Agency (Tokyo), 02.20, 2008, <http://www.kcna.co.jp/item/2008/200802/news02/21.htm#14>

⁹⁷ "*Rachi to kokubō*" de Shinpojumu Kazokukai Jimukyokuchō Masumoto shi, Tokutei Shissōsha Chōsakai Daihyō Araki shi ra, Tamogami shi mo Sanka shi, "Bunnaguru Shisei shimese"", Nikkan Berita, <http://www.nikkanberita.com/read.cgi?id=200903031356022>

*abducted, but reversely, the number of abductees who are not on the list is also considerable*⁹⁸. Araki sees the inclusion of “too many” as more beneficial than “too few”, however the Japanese government have been skeptical to COMJAN’s methods and although they do officially cooperate, the headquarters for the abduction issue has made it clear on its web pages that its definition of “*missing Japanese probably related to North Korea*” does not necessarily overlap with the one used by COMJAN. But it’s not only Araki’s “leave no one behind”-philosophy which scares people who already are skeptical to the government’s cooperation with COMJAN. As an offspring of SKAI, COMJAN also flags a radical banner which many feel the Japanese government is well-advised to stay away from. Araki, similarly to Nishioka in SKAI, has a broader agenda than just the abduction issue. Araki has stated that he sees the entire “*post-war structure*” as an obstruction to Japan becoming a nation able to deal adequately with problems like the abduction issue. Again, similarly to Nishioka, he sees the formation of the headquarters for the abduction issue as a positive, but insufficient step in the right direction. He complains that there are no assertive statements in official governmental literature that promises the “*rescue*” of the abductees”. And further, he argues that thus far the government has gotten some abductees returned “*by the good grace of North Korea*”, but not by “*assertively bringing them back*”⁹⁹.

So in order for the government to attain this necessary “assertiveness”, he claims that it’s essential that Japan revise the “Peace Constitution” which he sees as “*the cap on the bottle*”. Only when Japan has a capable, fully-fledged military will the Japanese government be able to break loose from the grip of the US and hammer out its own, independent security strategy in which it changes its focus from a passive “return” to an assertive “rescue”. To spur this change of mentality, Araki stresses the necessity of public action: “*In my mind there is no other way of solving the abduction issue than to let the issue progress in the hands of the Japanese people and, by doing so, rid ourselves of the post-war structure. We need to make the government change its policy from “return” to “rescue”. In order to do that public action is necessary*”¹⁰⁰. And further: “*If the government won’t act assertively, the public has to do it instead*”¹⁰¹.

⁹⁸ Araki, “Seifu ha “Kikoku” “Kaiketsu” de ha naku, “Kyūshutsu” wo kakageyō”, 140.

⁹⁹ IBID, 142.

¹⁰⁰ IBID, 143.

¹⁰¹ IBID, 143.

The coordination between COMJAN and the government in the investigation of new and old abduction cases should be viewed as a concrete example of KKAI and SKAI's influence on governmental North Korea policy.

Preventing the curtain to drop on the abduction issue

The SKAI Chairman, Nishioka Tsutomu, once confidently wrote that *"Japan and its people's rage against the abductions will not shrink no matter how much time passes"*¹⁰². Such a comment may appear more like wishful thinking than anything else, but if one judges from statistical data, there have yet been no indications that this statement is untrue. 9 years have passed since 9/17, but the Japanese people's interest in the abduction issue hasn't dwindled a bit, as was demonstrated in chapter 4. However, most members in KKAI do not share Nishioka's confidence. As a matter of fact, the most frequently heard concern from the families is that the Japanese people and the government eventually will grow tired of the issue and allow the *"curtain to close on the abduction issue"*. Yokota Shigeru recently expressed this concern, warning the Japanese people that *"if the public opinion loses interest [in the abduction issue], there will be no progress in the situation"*¹⁰³.

In order to keep the interest in the abduction issue alive, KKAI and SKAI consider it essential to keep the public agitated by the already mentioned enlightenment campaigns, and by making the most of one's appearances in the national media. The two organizations therefore naturally rejoiced at the Headquarters for the Abduction Issue's various enlightenment measures like the annual North Korean Human Rights Abuses Awareness Week. For KKAI and SKAI these individual enlightenment measures carry a strong sense of governmental sympathy and solidarity in themselves, but as a matter of fact they stem from an even more fundamental display of veneration; namely the Law concerning the Disposal of the Abduction Issue and other Human Rights Abuses by North Korean Authorities. This law which came into effect in June 2006 is perfectly tailored to KKAI and SKAI's demands as it obliges the Government to *"deepen our people's awareness of the abduction issue and other*

¹⁰² Nishioka, "Nani wo tamerau!", 132.

¹⁰³ "Megumi-san Rachi kara 33 nen: Kyūshutsu Katsudō wo "Han-Chōsenjin Sōdō" to oshieru Chōsen Gakkō ni Kikikan", Sankei Shinbun (Tokyo), 11.16, 2010, Online edition, <http://sankei.jp.msn.com/affairs/news/110111/crm11011119260179-n1.htm>

North Korean human rights abuses, and to cooperate with the international community informing about the current situation of matters like the abduction issue”¹⁰⁴.

In other words, joining hands with KKAI and SKAI in enlightening the Japanese people about the abduction issue isn't simply a nice gesture the government can perform out of sympathy at any time it sees fit, it is, rather, a duty which the government is decreed by law to carry out at all times.

It would hardly make sense to think that the government would implement this kind of law triggered by anything else than resolute pressure and lobbying from KKAI and SKAI who are the only actors to benefit directly from such a measure.

Spreading the word to the world

As is evident from the above description, this law demands that the government also engages the international community in order to put pressure on North Korea to yield on the abduction issue. I have already pointed out how one of the main activities of KKAI and SKAI is to reach out to other countries for assistance, with the ultimate goal being an international sanctions regimen leading to the collapse of the North Korean dictatorship. Against this backdrop, the Japanese government has launched its full support of KKAI and SKAI by making it its premise to pursue the abduction issue in every possible international forum of significance. In 2009 MOFA posted a rapport on its homepages outlining its stance on the abduction issue. It particularly stressed the importance of raising awareness about the abduction issue internationally: *“In order to solve the abduction issue it is not enough to simply approach North Korea strongly. It is essential to gain the support and cooperation of all countries. The government has taken every diplomatic opportunity to raise the abduction issue, and has received support and cooperation from a wide range of countries”¹⁰⁵.* And Japan has indeed been aggressive in raising this issue internationally. It has thus far brought up the abduction issue in the 6PT, EU, FN, G8, The Japan – South Korea – China trilateral Summit, ASEAN, ASEAN+3 and the East Asia Summit.

¹⁰⁴ HAI, *Rachi Mondai sono hoka Kitachōsen Tōkyoku ni yoru Jinken Shingai Mondai he no Taisho ni kan suru Hōritsu*, 2006, <http://www.rachi.go.jp/jp/ratimondai/syousai.html>

¹⁰⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Rachi mondai no Kaiketsu sono hoka Kitachōsen Tōkyoku ni yoru Jinken Shingai Mondai he no Taisho ni kan suru seifu no Torikumi ni tsuite no hōkoku*, Tokyo, 2009, 5, http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofa/press/pr/pub/pamph/pdfs/rachi_torikumi.pdf

Although MOFA states that it has “received support and cooperation from a wide range of countries”, far from everyone is pleased with Japan’s stubborn insistence on the abduction issue which is widely perceived as a bilateral issue¹⁰⁶. Japan was criticized for “hijacking”¹⁰⁷ the 6PT by insisting on the abduction issue and refusing to join energy-for-denuclearization deals hammered out by the other participants. When North Korea withdrew from the 6PT in April 2009 it stated that “Japan [is] entirely to blame for bringing six-party talks to collapse”¹⁰⁸. In the words of one American international relations critic: “Japan can’t allow the great pursuit for peace and stabilization in East Asia to become abducted by the abduction issue”¹⁰⁹. Several Japanese analysts have also shown concern over the government’s stubborn insistence on the abduction issue in international forums, particularly the 6PT. Military analyst Ogawa Kazuhisa stressed pragmatically that the 6PT were the proper venue for the abduction issue, but for the more directly pressing nuclear issue as originally intended: “In the very beginning of the 6PT the other countries were even more negative than now toward Japan bringing up the abduction issue. It’s a terrible tragedy for the abduction victims and their families, but even if not a single abductee had been able to come back, that would still not constitute a threat toward Japan. However to neglect the nuclear issue is a matter of life and death, not just for Japan, but for every country”¹¹⁰.

The influence of KKAI and SKAI shows no signs of fading

The basic question still remains: Have KKAI and SKAI exerted influence on governmental North Korea policy post 9/17? The governmental measures stated above do not constitute proof in the strictest academic sense of the word, as influence hardly is an empirically testable quantity. However, I would like to argue that the above-mentioned measures are as strong indicators of a powerful, one-sided influence as can possibly be derived from a case-by-case approach. To this day, almost all¹¹¹ of KKAI and SKAI’s significant demands, that is, demands that have received media coverage, have been met by the government sooner or later. Some of the governmental responses like the establishment of the Headquarters for

¹⁰⁶ Mitoji Yabunaka, *Kokka to Meibun* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 2010), 139.

¹⁰⁷ Okano-Heijmans, “Japan as Spoiler in the Six-Party Talks”, (Prime Ministers in Control).

¹⁰⁸ “Japan entirely to blame for bringing Six-Party Talks to collapse”, KCNA (Tokyo), 04.28, 2009, <http://www.kcna.co.jp/index-e.htm>

¹⁰⁹ Steven Vogel, “Rachi mondai ni Gaikō wo “Rachi” saseru na”, *Newsweek*, Japanese edition (07.23, 2004), 11.

¹¹⁰ Kazuhisa Ogawa, Mamoru Sakamoto, *Nihon no Sensōryoku VS Kitachōsen, Chūgoku* (Tokyo: Asukomu, 2007): 75.

¹¹¹ The one exception being the tuition-waver issue. See chapter 13.

the Abduction Issue and the imposing of sanctions were long in the making, but eventually saw the light of day with the inauguration of the Abe administration in 2006. Furthermore, other measures like the survival premise and the Law concerning the Disposal of the Abduction Issue and other Human Rights Abuses by North Korean Authorities – are so closely tied up to the interests of these two organizations that it would hardly make sense to think of the motives for their implementation as something else than an attempt to please the long-neglected victims whose tragic plight has won the Japanese public opinion over.

Entering the homepages of SKAI, the first thing that strikes one is the three slogans which read: *“Megumi and the others are still alive! Now is the time for total sanctions against the terror nation North Korea! Stop the flow of goods, money and people [to North Korea]!”*

Looking back at the Japanese Government’s response to the abduction issue over the years, it is safe to say that KKAI and SKAI have accomplished the vital task of gaining the complete support of the government.

Since 9/17 every Prime Minister has made it one of his top priorities upon assuming the top spot to pay homage to the families by visiting KKAI representatives face-to-face. KKAI and SKAI’s relations to the Prime Ministers did undoubtedly take on its most personal character under Abe’s reign, but in terms of priority there is nothing that points toward a weakening of relative importance under Abe’s successors. A clear indication of this is found in the budget allocated to the Headquarters of the Abduction Issue. In the year of its initiation, 2006, the Headquarters’ budget was 226 million yen¹¹². Abe’s successor was PM Fukuda who was the most North Korea-conciliatory of the post-Koizumi Prime Ministers, and one who has taken a lot of criticism from KKAI and SKAI for neglecting the Abduction Issue. Even so, the budget for the Headquarters was more than doubled (480 million yen) under the Fukuda Government. In 2008 the budget was increased again, this time to 677 million yen (900 million if personnel expenditure is included). In 2009 the budget slightly decreased before being doubled in 2010 (1.2 billion yen¹¹³). Even with the demise of the LDP dynasty and the advent of the more liberal DPJ rule there doesn’t seem to be a down-prioritizing of the families and the abduction issue. Both of the DJP Prime Ministers so far, Hatoyama Yukio

¹¹² Haruki Wada, “Japan – North Korea relations: A dangerous stalemate”. Japanfocus, <http://www.japanfocus.org/-Wada-Haruki/3176>

¹¹³ Tooru Hasuike, Haruki Wada, Mitsuhiro Tsuganuma, Osamu Aoki, Tsutomu Shōji, *Rachi Mondai wo kangaenaosu* (Tokyo: Seitōsha, 2010), Introduction, 1.

and Kan Naoto, have sat down with KKAI and SKAI to ensure the organizations of the importance the Government assigns to the abduction issue. In fact, in the already mentioned 2009 MOFA rapport on the governmental stance on the abduction issue (published under the Hatoyama administration) it is stipulated that *“the solution [to the abduction issue] is ranked as a top priority issue of the government”*¹¹⁴. The same pamphlet also stresses that the *“government has become united [on the abduction issue]”* with Hatoyama’s power centralization of the Headquarters as now only four Cabinet Ministers (the PM, the Vice-PM, Cabinet Secretary and the Foreign Minister) attend its meetings as opposed to before when all Cabinet Ministers attended.

The wording describing the government’s stance as *“united”* bears a peculiar resemblance to numerous outcries from KKAI and SKAI calling for a uniform front against North Korea among the public and the government (see chapter 13). The most recent call for unity by KKAI and SKAI came in 2010 when the Ministry of Education, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) were at odds with other ministries over the so-called Chosen School debate (see the final chapter). KKAI leader Iizuka Shigeo despaired: *“I can’t see a unified judgment in the government, and that angers me”*¹¹⁵. The government seems to embrace this as well as all other KKAI and SKAI concerns and demands as have been thoroughly pointed out throughout this chapter.

In short, there is very little that points toward a gradual weakening of KKAI and SKAI’s influential power over the government.

8. Megumi

The North Korean claim that Yokota Megumi hanged herself in 1993 after being hospitalized due to severe depression, has been dismissed by both the Japanese public and the Japanese government which has made it its premise to insist on the survival of all the unaccounted abductees until proper proof of their deaths is submitted by the North Korean side.

¹¹⁴ MOFA, *Rachi mondai no Kaiketsu*, 2.

¹¹⁵ *“Sukūkai” ga Chōsen Gakkō Mushōka Miokuri Yōsei: “Kitachōsen wo Ri suru dake”*, Sankei Shinbun (Tokyo) 08.25, 2010, online edition, <http://www.sankei.jp.msn.com/world/korea/100825/kor1008252225007-n1.htm>

An Myung-Jin, a former North Korean spy who sought refuge in South Korea in 1993, sensationally reported in 1997 that he had received Japanese language training in North Korea by Yokota Megumi. The news about Megumi's existence sparked the establishing of Kazokukai and Sukūkai and also a nationwide blossoming of interest in the abduction issue. However a considerable number of academics and politicians remained skeptical toward the existence of the abductions because they didn't perceive An's testimony credible. Some people suspected An of being opportunistic and looking for a way to earn money on his alleged inside information. *"An was granted asylum in 1993, but why did he hold back information of this magnitude till 1997?"* was a common criticism among the doubters. Even after the abductions became an established fact in 2002, Wada Haruki wrote that *"the abduction of 13 persons is a fact, but my distrust toward An's testimony doesn't change"*¹¹⁶.

And An's testimony did indeed contain several dubious points, but it raised the Japanese public's awareness of the abductions. When North Korea launched its Taepodong missile over Japan the following year, tensions rose high and the ensuing anti-North Korea sentiments created an atmosphere in which An's statements could easily find believers.

After the 5 abductees' return to Japan in 2002, An again became the centre of attention as he unveiled some rather spectacular theories about Megumi's existence in an emotional meeting with Megumi's parents. An looked at a picture of Megumi which North Korea had sent her parents and immediately judged that she looked 7 or 8 years older than the last time he had seen her in 1990 or 1991 and concluded *"therefore we can say that she was in the very least alive in 1997 or 1998"*¹¹⁷. But the most spectacular theory An launched at this meeting was that Megumi had been Kim Jong-il's Japanese language teacher. An claimed to possess information from the North Korean Secret Intelligence Service. According to this information Kim Jong-il had requested a Japanese teacher in the 80s. He had then been presented with the photographs of the abductees whereupon he allegedly had selected Megumi because *"she looked the most like his mother, Kim Jong-suk, who died when Kim Jong-il was 7 years old"*¹¹⁸. Furthermore he also claimed that she had been designated to teach Japanese to Kim Jong-il's sons because he wanted *"a female who could control them*

¹¹⁶ Wada, *"Rachi sareta" Kokuron wo dasshite*, 254.

¹¹⁷ Tetsu Suzuki (ed.), *Yokota Megumi ha ikiteiru: An Myon Jin ga abaita "Nihonjin Rachi" no Inbō* (Tokyo: Kōdansha Mook, 2003), 28.

¹¹⁸ Suzuki (ed.), *Yokota Megumi ha ikiteiru*, 35.

*like a mother*¹¹⁹. From these rather speculative assumptions An judged that Megumi was being hidden away under the pretence of being dead. “North Korea won’t let out anyone who has inside knowledge of the royal family. However they couldn’t kill her either, because she is so close to [Kim Jong-il’s] sons¹²⁰.”

Although many people still harbor strong doubts against An’s testimonies, it’s an inescapable fact that he was right about the existence of the abductees. And this has led to KKAI and SKAI adopting his theory that Megumi, and the others, are still alive. Through these organizations’ intense lobbying this has, since 2008, also become the Japanese Government’s official stance.

Hasuike Tooru has called Megumi the “*symbol of the abduction issue campaign*”¹²¹ which indeed seems to be no exaggeration. She is the poster child of most of the Government’s publications concerning the abduction issue, the Government’s manga and anime enlightenment projects are both simply called “Megumi”, in 2007 Paul Stookey of the famous American folk band Peter, Paul and Mary toured Japan playing his “Song for Megumi”, and unlike the other abductees who are properly addressed with their family names first, Megumi is often simply referred to as Megumi, or even the highly informal Megumi-chan by the Japanese media.

What has caused this enormous fascination for Megumi’s fate?

If one looks to the field of victimology there are some good clues to be found. Megumi seems to be the perfect fit for what the Swedish victimologist Nils Christie has dubbed “the ideal victim”¹²². Christie argues that in most criminal cases the offender is not 100% evil and the victim is not 100% innocent or blameless, however the closer one gets to these extremes the more likely will one be given “*the complete and legitimate status of being a victim*”¹²³. Several victimologists have pointed out there is a correlation between the ideal victim and

¹¹⁹ IBID, 35.

¹²⁰ IBID, 36.

¹²¹ Hasuike, *Rachi: Sayu no Kakine wo koeta Tatakai he*, 42.

¹²² Nils Christie, “The Ideal Victim” (1986), in *The Jury Trial in Criminal Justice*, ed. Douglas D. Koski, 154 (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2003).

¹²³ Christie, “The Ideal Victim”, 155.

what the media considers “newsworthy”¹²⁴. It is almost as if Christie had Megumi’s case in mind when summarizing the 5 characteristics of the ideal victim.

1. “*The victim is weak. Sick, old or very young people are particularly well suited as ideal victims*”. – Megumi was 13 years old at the time of her abduction. By far the youngest of all the abductees.
2. “*The victim was carrying out a respectable project*”. – Megumi was on her way back home from badminton practice.
3. “*She was where she could not possibly be blamed for being*”. – Megumi was walking the same path as she always used to.
4. “*The offender was big and bad*”. – He was an adult North Korean spy who had illegally entered Japan by boat.
5. “*The offender was unknown and in no personal relationship to her*”¹²⁵. – See above.

Megumi is the living (hopefully) incarnation of the ideal victim, but also the members of KKAI more or less fit the above description. In fact, one of the aspects of the abduction issue which alarms scholars and historians like Wada Haruki and Oota Masakuni is the adoption of the victim role by the entire nation and the historical amnesia this role spurs. In the next chapter we will take a closer look at another significant change 9/17 brought, namely the perceptual change from assailant to victim in the relationship with North Korea.

9. The quest for victimhood

Wada and Oota’s criticism triggers a fundamental, but pressing question. Why is it so important for certain forces to portray Japan as a victim? Again I suggest we look to victimology.

¹²⁴ James Dignan, *Understanding victims and restorative justice* (Berkshire: Open University Press, 2005), 17.

¹²⁵ Christie, “The Ideal Victim”.

The victim – offender dichotomy

In Marilyn D. McShane and Frank P. Williams III's *Critique of the Concept of Victim in Traditional Victimology* they argued that the traditional concept of victim leans too heavily against definitions created in the field of law and the legal process¹²⁶. This black and white picture of offender and victim, they claim, fails to capture the multifacetedness of the dynamism of crime. The current legal concept of victim stems from a middle-class symbolism, they hold. The middle-class citizens are on a daily basis far removed from crime and therefore they can "*only understand crime, and their own victimization, as irrational, senseless phenomena*"¹²⁷. They are, generally speaking, only able to comprehend victims as "*innocent bystanders who are swept into this maelstrom of irrationality*"¹²⁸. If the black and white picture of offender and victim is blurred, the victim – offender dichotomy does not only take on a confusing role, but on a psychological level it can also be downright intimidating as one may find that the offender belongs to the same social strata as oneself and he might go about his daily routines just like everyone else.

The argument that the middle-class citizen needs to dissociate himself from the offender which in turn causes further vilification of the latter has many advocates within victimology. The victimologist Frank J. Weed has noted that "*the middle-class listener to the crime story can easily dissociate himself and his way of life from that of the criminal, so that the criminal becomes a moral outsider*"¹²⁹.

McShane and Williams III take it one step further, however, and argue that "*for the middle class, the victim and offender are part of a strict dichotomy, a mutually exclusive set of categories. The offender cannot be viewed as victim, nor can the victim be viewed as offender*"¹³⁰.

One of their main arguments of contention against this concept of victim which is based on middle-class imagery is that within such a framework there is no flexibility. No matter what

¹²⁶ Marilyn D. McShane and Frank P. Williams III, "Radical Victimology: A Critique of the Concept of Victim in Traditional Victimology", *Crime and Delinquency* 2, Vol. 38 (1992): 258-271.

¹²⁷ McShane and Williams III, "Radical Victimology", 261.

¹²⁸ IBID, 261.

¹²⁹ Frank J. Weed, "The Vilification of the Crime Problem", in *The Jury Trial in criminal Justice*, ed. Douglas D. Koski, 193 (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2003).

¹³⁰ McShane and Williams III, "Radical Victimology", 261.

preceding events may have unfolded in past, it is the party that has won the victim status at the latest point in time that will be perceived as innocent or morally right. However, this is an inaccurate perception, they claim, as the victim roles and the offender roles are far from static, they can change at any point. The current concept of victim fails to acknowledge the fluctuating and abstract nature of these terms. *“From this perspective”, they continue, “our popular conception of victims is derived from a simplistic middle-class framework where all victims are innocent characters in a morality play. This framework requires that victims do not participate in offences and that the victim-offender relationship remains static”*¹³¹

If we accept the assumption that the victim and the offender form a mutually exclusive set of categories in the mind of the middle-class, it is no wonder that victimhood is such an attractive privilege. Winning this privilege could potentially mean absolution from past sins, and in Japan’s case, the stigma of being an in-denial nation with a history of aggressive warfare.

Japan turned victim

Wada once commented that the abduction issue has abducted the North Korea debate and that since 9/17 the Japanese have come to think of themselves as victims rather than assailants in the relationship with North Korea¹³². If that is the case then there should be no lack of people who have noticed and commented on this trend. And, in fact, several commentators with no relation to Wada have made surprisingly similar remarks. The ex-MOFA diplomat Tanaka Hitoshi who played a crucial role in arranging the 2002 Koizumi – Kim summit, reflected on the twists and turns of the abduction issue and remarked unmistakably in 2009 that *“the abduction issue changed the obligatory post-war perception of Japan as an “assailant” into one where Japan is a “victim”*”¹³³. He further complained about the Japanese people’s *“vague”*¹³⁴ understanding of its own past. The historian Oota

¹³¹ IBID, 262

¹³² Haruki Wada, “Rachi Mondai to Niccho Kokko Seijoka”, In *Rachi Mondai wo kangaenaosu*, Hasuie et al., 193 (Tokyo: Seitosha, 2010). Wada noted that the North Korea debate had been abducted by the abduction issue, but the phrase was originally coined by Steven Vogel (see chapter12, Abduction hysteria).

¹³³ Tanaka, *Gaikō no Chikara*, 217.

¹³⁴ IBID, 141.

Masakuni commented in a similar vein that *“Japan, which continuously has been criticized as an assailant, has with this [the abduction issue] been cleared and become a victim”*¹³⁵.

As mentioned earlier, the Tokyo University emeritus professor Sakamoto Yoshikazu observed in 2004 that: *“Since September 17, 2002, when North Korean leader Kim Jong Il admitted to the abduction, Japan has been engulfed with a feeling of having been unilaterally victimized, which matches the similar feeling among the U.S. citizens following 9/11. 9/17 is the Japanese counterpart to 9/11 in the U.S. in terms of unilateralist psychology”*¹³⁶.

The outspoken, ex-MOFA bureaucrat Satō Masaru observed in an essay right after 9/17 that *“it seems like a “Pandora’s Box” of nationalism has been opened because of the abduction issue”*¹³⁷. Satō would later clarify his view of nationalism as follows: *“From how I see it, nationalism has two traits. The first one is that the more radical an opinion is, the more correct it is. The second one stems from an asymmetrical mindset in which the suffering inflicted upon one’s own nation and people by another nation or people is forever remembered, but the suffering oneself has inflicted on other nations and peoples is forgotten. I feel that Japan now has been sucked into a dangerous spiral of nationalism”*¹³⁸.

Wada Haruki pessimistically concluded that *“In Japan – North Korea relations the abduction issue is everything, settling the past history of colonial rule is no longer an issue. Japan’s past as an assailant is now forgotten or justified and Japan is now only the victim in the relationship with North Korea”*¹³⁹.

There should neither be a lack of commentators in this period who openly advocate the view of Japan as a victim. If one starts to probe the literature written by rightwing North Korea analysts one finds an overwhelming amount of sources corresponding to this notion. Some commentators present their views in a roundabout way showing awareness of the sensitivity of the issue, and others, like the opinion leaders in KKAI and SKAI, take a much blunter and more direct approach.

¹³⁵ Oota and Hasuike, *Rachi Tairon*, 100.

¹³⁶ Sakamoto, Japanfocus, <http://www.japanfocus.org/-Yoshikazu-SAKAMOTO/2001>

¹³⁷ Satō, *Kokka no Wana*, 12.

¹³⁸ Satō, *Kokka no Wana*, 119.

¹³⁹ Haruki Wada: *“Rachi sareta” Kokuron wo dasshite*, 251.

One of the most unmistakable comments to this effect was made in 2002 by KKAI member Masumoto Teruaki whose open letter in *Asahi* conveyed the following sentiment: “*Now, on the basis of Kim Jong-il’s abduction confession and apology [...], Japan is finally able to shake loose from the curse of “the atonement for the past colonial rule”, and Japan can now earnestly look to solve the abduction issue*”¹⁴⁰.

In the following month the Kyoto University professor Nakanishi Terumasa wrote an article in *Seiron* where he similarly called on the Japanese people to “*come to terms with the incorrect view of history*” and abandon its “*atonement mentality*”¹⁴¹.

This suggests that abduction issue debaters like Masumoto and Nakanishi see the settlement of the past as a “curse” which now justly has disappeared as Japan has the latest claim to victimhood. 9/17 gave rise to a loud outcry for a reexamination of Japan’s role as a past aggressor. Particularly Japan’s 35 year long rule over the Korean Peninsula came under scrutiny among people on the right who now were displaying an unprecedented confidence in their rhetoric. By comparing the colonial rule with the abduction issue – incidents which took place under two substantially different world orders (the era of colonialism and the Cold War) with incompatible values and norms – many voices from the political right had no reservations about justifying Japan’s colonial rule.

In the 2002 December edition of *Shokun!* the outspoken journalist Inagaki Takeshi praised “*the positive sides of colonial rule*” of which he claimed “*there is a sense of acknowledgement even among the South Koreans*”¹⁴². This is a notion shared by several of the radical right-wingers in Japan, albeit often in a little more camouflaged manner. To prove the “*sense of acknowledgement among the South Koreans*” of Japan’s colonial rule, some commentators, like Inagaki, refer to the South Korean author Kim Wanseop’s book “*Shinnichiha no tame no Benmei*” (A Defense of the pro-japanists). Kim Wanseop is a character worth bringing up in this context. Kim was initially staunchly anti-Japanese, but he apparently had a revelation-like experience when he met some Japanese tourists on a travel abroad. He then changed his views on the Japanese people and began praising the Japanese

¹⁴⁰ Teruaki Masumoto, “*Watashi no shiten*”, *Asahi Shinbun* (Tokyo), 11.10, 2002, Morning edition.

¹⁴¹ Terumasa Nakanishi, “*Kitachōsen no Kaku kara Kokka to Kokumin wo mamoreru no ka*”, *Seiron* 12 (2002.): 53.

¹⁴² Inagaki, “*Kitachōsenzoku*” no Danmatsuma”, 75.

colonial rule, even calling it a “*blessing for us*”¹⁴³. Kim’s attitude reversal is a peculiar one, but needless to say, it was not embraced by the average South Korean. Kim came under heavy criticism and lost his authority as a scholar in South Korea. As a matter of fact his book was even banned by the South Korean Government, but the right-wing in Japan was quick to realize what a tremendous asset he could be to their cause and welcomed him with open arms. It is worth noting that one of the persons in charge of the Japanese translation of the book is none other than Araki Kazuhiro. Kim is often referred to by right-wingers seeking to justify Japan’s past, but he is hardly a representative sample to prove that there is a “*sense of acknowledgement of the positive sides of Japan’s colonial rule*” among the South Koreans. At any rate, Inagaki is clear in his view that the abductions constitute a crime which is far more heinous than Japanese colonial rule. “*This [the colonial rule] cannot be compared to [North Korea’s] state crimes which can’t be justified by any words*”¹⁴⁴, he asserts.

Although Inagaki claims that the two historical facts cannot be compared he doesn’t base this claim on grounds that these historical occurrences happened under different world orders which both to a certain degree justified colonialism and abductions for intelligence purposes respectively, rather he makes his claim based on a selective rationale that applies modern day values and judgments on one of the crimes, but not the other. In that way he ends up comparing two state crimes which he claims can’t be compared.

Right before the 1999 Murayama normalization delegation to North Korea, Nonaka Hiromu (who participated) was well aware of the dangers of comparing the abduction issue and colonial rule. He hinted that Japan shouldn’t put the abductions on the agenda when dealing with North Korea because that would only lead to a fruitless battle of words where the North Korean side would insist on compensation for the Koreans deported by Japan during colonial rule and stall the normalization talks¹⁴⁵. Following 9/17 the conservative military analyst, Kakiya Isao, used the following argument to criticize what he felt was Nonaka’s cowardly approach: “*The annexation treaty between Japan and Korea was legitimate. Because the Koreans therefore became Japanese, they were conscripted in exactly the same way as the Japanese under the Great East Asian War. Nonaka is placing the abductions,*

¹⁴³ Wanseop Kim, *Shinnichiha no tame no Benmei* (Tokyo: Sōshisha, 2002), 95.

¹⁴⁴ Inagaki, ““Kitachōsenzoku” no Danmatsuma”, 75.

¹⁴⁵ “Rachi Mondai no Shinten, Nichō Kōshō no Zentei ni sezu: Nonaka Jimin Kanjichō Dairi ga Shisa”, *Yomiuri Shinbun* (Tokyo), 11.24, 1999, morning edition.

which are a state crime, side by side with the Japanese colonial period which was a legitimate action. If he holds that the arguments of the “pro-japanists” are unreasonable, I would like him to read the recent book of the South Korean author, Kim Wanseop; “Shinnichiha no tame no Benmei”¹⁴⁶.

Much in the same way as Inagaki, Kakiya claims that the abductions are a much graver crime than colonial rule. Although refusing to acknowledge Japan’s colonial rule as a state crime is nothing new in itself, 9/17 has given the “pro-japanists” an undisputed state crime to compare the more shadowy legal status of colonial rule to.

For people like Araki, Inagaki, Kakiya, Masumoto and many others with far greater political authority – whose view of Japanese colonial rule as a legally and morally justified incident sharply contrasts the abductions which are seen as nothing but an irrational state crime, or even as acts of terror – the image of the families as victims is a powerful symbol of Japan’s immaculateness. Keeping the image of the families spotless is directly connected to legitimizing Japan’s past. This is because the pure and innocent victimhood of the families has even managed to extract an official confession and apology from North Korea, whereas the victimhood of the abducted Koreans during colonial rule is blurred and complicated due to the quasi-legal annexation treaty of 1910. Furthermore, the plight of the families serves as a much fresher and better documented victimhood than the obscure and controversial tales and figures stemming from some 60 to 100 years ago.

Japan’s historical amnesia not a new phenomenon

That Japan perceives itself as a victim, rather than an assailant is not a phenomenon that was born out of 9/17, the legacy of Hiroshima and Nagasaki has left a deep imprint on the Japanese self-perception. This has not by any means gone unnoticed in academia as many scholars, especially non-Japanese, have pointed to what has popularly been dubbed “Japan’s historical amnesia”. Lisa Yoneyama noted in 1999 that *“the memories of Hiroshima’s destruction, secured within the global narrative of the universal history of humanity, has sustained, at least in the dominant historical discourse, a national victimology and phantasm*

¹⁴⁶ Isao Kakiya, ““Eikyū Hozonban” “Kochō”ka-tachi no Kitachōsen Raisan, Geigō Hatsugenshū”, *Seiron* 12 (2002): 102.

*of innocence throughout most of the postwar years*¹⁴⁷. In 1996 Australian japanologist Gavan McCormack pointed to differences between how the legacy of the war was interpreted in Germany and Japan. While the Germans generally views the end of the war as a liberation, he notes that in Japan “[...] *it was the circumstances of the war’s end, especially the firebombing of Tokyo and other major cities, followed by the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, that remained fresh in people’s minds; as a result, the sense of being a victim was stronger than that of having been aggressor*”¹⁴⁸.

However, while the perception of victimhood took on a rather general notion during the postwar years where Japan viewed itself as an unlucky pawn in an increasingly hostile international environment which left it few other options than going to war, the victimhood of the post-9/17 era revolves around a very particular assailant – North Korea. Although the postwar victimization narrative for the most part is centered around the trauma of being the world’s only victim of nuclear warfare, the US – which in this case could fairly easily be identified as the clear “assailant” – does not sail up as the national enemy. Quite the contrary, the US eventually emerges as Japan’s closest ally. With the escalation of the abduction issue, however, Japan very specifically targets North Korea as the reason for its newfound victimhood. Unlike the US, North Korea does not have the economy, the political ideology or the military power to sufficiently attract Japan as a trading partner or a military ally. In short, North Korea has nothing to offer. This lack of attractiveness allows Japan to pinpoint North Korea as an assailant, a threat, a terrorist nation and an enemy without risking consequences economically and militarily. North Korea’s international pariah status facilitates and seemingly legitimizes not only the comparison between the abduction issue and colonial rule, but also the oblivion of the latter as long as it is restricted to the case of North Korea.

How could the abduction issue come to wield such an influence on Japan that it can legitimize historical amnesia? The answer obviously lies in silencing those who criticize such a development. In the next chapter we will examine how the abduction issue is used as a standard of morality which can strip people of legitimacy, not only in the abduction issue debate, but in the North Korea debate in general.

¹⁴⁷ Lisa Yoneyama, *Hiroshima Traces: Time, Space, and the Dialectics of Memory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 13.

¹⁴⁸ Gavan McCormack, *The Emptiness of Japanese Affluence* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, Inc. 1996), 231.

10. The abduction issue as the ultimate standard of morality

The abduction issue has gradually turned into an ideological battle far surpassing the mere objective of bringing back abducted Japanese. The abduction issue is frequently used as an argument in wide-spanning debates on topics like constitutional reform, strengthening of the SDF, nuclear armament, settlement of the past, education, textbook revision and so forth. The abduction issue appears on so many arenas and has become such an integral part of the Japanese psyche that it seems to have taken on a meaning of its own, separated from the factual notion of the abductions. The abduction issue seems to have taken on the form of a symbol and a weapon. As a symbol it represents evil and cruelty, but perhaps most of all irrationality. This negatively loaded symbol is effectively used as a powerful weapon. Anyone at the receiving end of an attack by this weapon is branded as irrational and thus disqualified to participate in the debate. In the North Korea debate the abduction issue has become the ultimate standard of morality. All actions or opinions which are regarded as damaging or disruptive to the near mythical concept of a “solution” to the abduction issue are promptly denounced and stripped of legitimacy. No scholar with aspirations of academic recognition can afford to bring up the issue without the utmost carefulness. Likewise would no politician dare to campaign for issues that could be regarded as not paying proper homage to the abduction issue. In fact, when PM Hatoyama took office in 2009 he was very aware of his rather passive stance on the abduction issue in the past for which he had been criticized¹⁴⁹. Hatoyama would soon encounter other difficulties, but he escaped potential criticism for his past stance on the abduction issue by quickly meeting with the families and in turn officially designating the solution to the abduction issue as “*a top priority issue of the Government*”¹⁵⁰. This demonstrates the importance this issue has carried, and is still carrying today almost a decade after 9/17.

The witch hunt for non-believers

The gravest crime against the progress to a “solution” seems to be to have doubted the existence of the abductions in the past. Immediately after Kim Jong-il’s abduction confession the media, particularly the monthly and weekly magazines, began an investigation campaign

¹⁴⁹ Hideo Ishii, “Shinchōha Chishikijin, Muhansei Mōgenroku”, *Bungei Shunjū* 11 (2002): 161.

¹⁵⁰ MOFA, *Rachi mondai no Kaiketsu*, 2.

which more resembled a witch hunt than anything else to track down and expose those who had obstructed progress in the abduction issue. Just two days after 9/17 the respected and merited author Sono Ayako wrote an essay in *Sankei Shinbun* where she called for full exposure of the North Korea sympathizers. She wrote, *"I call for a reexamination of what remarks have been made by whom, when, and in what newspapers, magazines and other media. To glorify North Korea has been the trendy demeanor of the progressive cultural elite and the progressive media, but this attitude has also disrupted the fates of the 13 people who were announced by North Korea"*¹⁵¹.

Her call was heard and in November 2002 a commentator in *Bungei Shunjū* enthusiastically joined her cause, exclaiming that *"now is the perfect time to publicize the names [of these people]. It is time to publicize the names of these politicians, scholars and members of the cultural elite and to examine what they have said about North Korea and what actions they have taken"*¹⁵². Before long, meticulous examinations of "improper" comments and actions of alleged North Korea sympathizers were spreading like a wildfire among the monthlies and the weeklies. They went by such feisty titles as *"The death throes of the North Korea clique – Rip out the double talking tongues of these guys!"*¹⁵³ and *"The politicians, bureaucrats and debaters who have stood by and watched 8 [abductees] die – Apologize for your great sins through death"*¹⁵⁴. What these articles had in common was their hunt for scapegoats and their angry rhetoric. One *Seiron* commentator's criticism in 2002 adequately encapsulates the general brunt of the argumentation and rhetoric of these articles: *"Judging from testimonies of people who have defected to South Korea and letters that have slipped out of North Korea, it was pretty obvious that North Korea had been abducting [Japanese citizens]. Therefore it has been only natural to expect that the truth about the abductions would be revealed someday in the not-too-distant future. Nonetheless, there haven't been few people in our country who have praised North Korea, insisted on rice aid and made comments to the effect that in the lack of evidence the abductees should be treated as missing persons. How did this group feel when they saw the [returned] abduction victims hugging their parents and*

¹⁵¹ Ayako Sono, "Tomeina Saigetsu no Hikari", *Sankei Shinbun* (Tokyo), 09.20, 2002, quoted from Ishii, "Shinchōha Chishikijin, Muhansei Mōgenroku", 160-161.

¹⁵² Ishii, "Shinchōha Chishikijin, Muhansei Mōgenroku", 160

¹⁵³ Takeshi, ""Kitachōsenzoku" no Danmatsuma", 74-88.

¹⁵⁴ "Hachinin wo Mikoroshi ni shita Seijika, Kanryō, Genronnin: Isshi motte Daizai wo shase", *Shūkan Bunshun* 08.03, 2002.

friends while apologizing [for their long absence]? They should line up in front of the victims and their families and throw themselves to the ground in apology. The prize winners should all return their prizes and diplomas and disappear from the view of the Japanese people”¹⁵⁵.

The demand for the disappearance of the doubters is noteworthy since this is another trait of the “witch hunt” following 9/17. The agitated writers sought to delegitimize their targets by maintaining that these people’s earlier, insensitive comments and actions disqualified them from taking part in the debate.

The most frequent target of criticism is the Tokyo University emeritus Wada Haruki. The historian Wada has been a long-time proponent of normalization and has close ties with various socialist movements and is no stranger to public criticism. But the reason for the latest attacks against Wada is his position as the most outspoken of the debaters who allegedly denied the existence of the abductions pre-9.17. Waseda University professor Shigemura Toshimitsu accused the magazine *Sekai* for printing “*an article by professor Wada which claims that there are no abductions*”¹⁵⁶. This article which appeared in the February edition of *Sekai* in 2001 has been referred to by many commentators as proof that Wada denied the existence of the abductions. This has led to several attacks on Wada’s credibility as a historian. Inagaki Takeshi, for example, referred to the same article and claimed that Wada, because of his past abduction denial, “*does not have the qualification to talk about contemporary history or present developments*”¹⁵⁷. Shigemura criticized Wada and his fellow doubters very much in the same way as Inagaki, claiming that: “*the people who insisted that there were no abductions were completely unaware of the fact that North Korea has been an “agent state” since the 60s. They, therefore, don’t have the qualification to comment on the Korea problem*”¹⁵⁸. In this way has one’s stance on the abductions come to determine one’s legitimacy even on matters far removed from the abduction issue.

But what was it Wada really did write in his article? As a matter of fact Wada never flatly denied the existence of the abductions, but much like the other criticized doubters he simply stated that at the time there didn’t exist conclusive evidence, and thus the “abductees” should have been treated as “persons whose whereabouts are unknown”. It is the following

¹⁵⁵ Kakiya, “Eikyū Hozonban”, 100.

¹⁵⁶ Shigemura, *Saishin Kitachōsen Dētabukku*, 19.

¹⁵⁷ Inagaki, “Koitsura no “Nimaijita” wo hikkonuke!” *Shokun!* 12 (2002): 82.

¹⁵⁸ Shigemura, *Saishin Kitachōsen Dētabukku*, 21.

passage which spurred the controversy: *“It’s clear that there does not exist enough evidence to conclude that Yokota Megumi has been abducted. If this information had come from the South Korean Intelligence Agency, then maybe there would have been grounds for doubt, but that is the only claim one can derive. It’s a pity for Yokota’s parents, but no definite material has yet been presented”*¹⁵⁹.

Wada who felt he had been unjustly slandered, sent a letter of complaint to Shigemura’s publishing house, Kōdansha, and demanded to know exactly where he had denied the abductions¹⁶⁰. At first Kōdansha promised to remove Wada’s name in the following edition, but by direct intervention by Shigemura himself, the accusation remained unchanged. Wada felt that he had been reduced to a sitting duck in the North Korea debate. *“I don’t see this as a personal problem, but it shows the sad state of today’s debate where groundless rumors are prevailing”*¹⁶¹, he despaired.

Despite the claims of the slanderous articles, there were in fact very few people who publicly had denied the existence of the abductions. Nakayama Masaaki infamously remarked in an interview in CS’s magazine, *Chosen Shinpō*, in 2000 that *“it’s just my gut-feeling as a politician, but I think all this talk [about the abductions] is like a ghost without substance”*¹⁶². The Osaka University professor Yoshida Yasuhiko stated in 1997 that he believed there were *“falsifications”*¹⁶³ in the abduction issue. The same year the editor of the weekly *Shūkan Nikkan Shiryo* (Weekly Japan – South Korea Material) and the monthly *Nikkan Bunseki* (Japan – South Korea Analysis), Kitagawa Hirokazu, dismissed the Megumi case as a *“fabricated case created by South Korea’s National Intelligence Service”*¹⁶⁴, but he never denied the abductions as a whole. Several SDP politicians also made similar remarks.

Neutral or naïve?

The skepticism toward the abduction issue is the main cause of the criticism Kitagawa and his fellow doubters have faced post 9/17. They are often labeled as “traitors” because they

¹⁵⁹ Haruki Wada, *“Nihonjin Rachi Giwaku” wo Kentō suru*, *Sekai* 2 (2001).

¹⁶⁰ Wada, *“Rachi sareta” Kokuron wo dasshite*, 255.

¹⁶¹ *IBID*, 255.

¹⁶² Masaaki Nakayama, interview, *Chōsen Shinpō* (Tokyo), 09.04, 2000, <http://www1.korea-np.co.jp/sinboj/sinboj2000/sinboj2000-9/sinboj000904/81.htm>

¹⁶³ Yasuhiko Yoshida, interview, *Sapio*, 06.25, 1997, quoted in Ishii, “Shinchōha Chishikijin, Muhansei Mōgenroku”, 164

¹⁶⁴ Hirokazu Kitagawa, *Kitachōsen wo dō yomu ka* (Tokyo: Ryokufū Shuppan, 1997), 84.

are perceived to have impeded progress in the abduction issue. There might have been people close to the North Korean government in CS and other parts of the Japanese Korean community who were in the know, yet deliberately held back sensitive information about the abduction issue, but most of the skeptical North Korea commentators probably hesitated to make any definite conclusions simply because there weren't any hard evidence. There were questionable testimonies from a couple of alleged North Korean ex-spies, but nothing that could be considered as solid evidence. Furthermore the motives behind the abductions remain unclear even today. It is known that the abductees were made to teach Japanese language and Japanese culture, etiquette and manners to North Korean spies so that the spies could operate unnoticed in Japan posing as Japanese. However if that was North Korea's purpose of the abductions, there was during the Cold War no lack of North Korea-sympathetic, capable people both in Japan and North Korea who could have performed these tasks voluntarily. There was no need to resort to something as drastic as abductions. Kitagawa asked in 1997: "[...] *Can you really abduct someone who you don't know and have never seen before and educate him to be a proper Japanese teacher? Several inconveniences have been pointed out. For example the hassle of teaching them Korean before you can make them Japanese teachers. Furthermore, there are many returnees in North Korea who originally were zainichi Koreans, there are many zainichi Koreans in Japan and there are many returning vacationers. It has therefore been noted that this argument makes no sense. It has become clear for all to see that the Japanese teacher argument is nonsense*"¹⁶⁵.

This is not to say that Kitagawa and his fellow doubters were completely unbiased and just followed their deductive reasoning. Many of the doubters were leftists or leaning toward the left and many certainly had ideological agendas, but all in all the doubts were not completely unjustifiable. Rather, it can be argued that, in the lack of clear evidence, remaining skeptical was the neutrally appropriate approach to take. Unlike the abductees from other countries¹⁶⁶, the Japanese abductees could easily have been replaced with some of the

¹⁶⁵ Kitagawa, "*Kitachōsen wo dō yomu ka*", 85.

¹⁶⁶ The abductions of non-Japanese citizens remain fairly undocumented and are shrouded in mystery. SKAI states on its homepage that there are at least 11 other countries than Japan which have had citizens abducted by North Korea (based on witness reports). Soga Hitomi's husband, the American defector Charles Robert Jenkins, claims to have seen abductees from four different countries (not including Japan) during his 40 years in North Korea.

nearly 100,000 returned zainichi Koreans from the repatriation project between 1959 and 1984. Although we now know that the abductees actually *were* used in education projects for North Korean spies, there was no need for North Korea to conduct the abductions on Japanese citizens solely for that purpose. It has also been argued that North Korea abducted the Japanese in order to steal their identities and operate unnoticed in Japan, but if a North Korean agent is caught using a stolen, Japanese identity, that would make it fairly easy for the Japanese investigators to trace the whereabouts of the missing person back to North Korea. Assuming a stolen identity therefore seems more like a liability than an asset for North Korea. Kim Jong-il claimed during his first meeting with Koizumi that he didn't have any personal knowledge about the abductions at the time they were carried out. He insisted that "*some elements of a special agency of the state had been carried away by fanaticism and desire for glory*"¹⁶⁷, but the perpetrators, he said, had all received proper punishment. Kim Jong-il might perhaps not have been in the know (although that is unlikely as he was consolidating his position at that time), but it's almost inconceivable that a group of fanatics would be able to conduct the abductions independently, without Kim Il Sung's permission. The North Korean authorities are certainly responsible for the crimes, but looking at North Korea's possible motives, it's perhaps understandable that Kim Jong-il sought to plead his innocence by hiding behind the "fanatics" excuse. If it wasn't for North Korea's terrible track record, it would almost seem passable, because as of today it's impossible to state any clear-cut, convincing reason for the abductions. Staying skeptical to the abductions may therefore not have been such an unreasonable approach to take after all. But post-9/17 when the abductions are facts rather than suspicions, the uncertainty of the pre-9/17 era is easily forgotten and the commentators who in the past committed the cardinal sin of doubting are effectively disqualified from the North Korea debate and forced into silence.

The abduction issue and the media

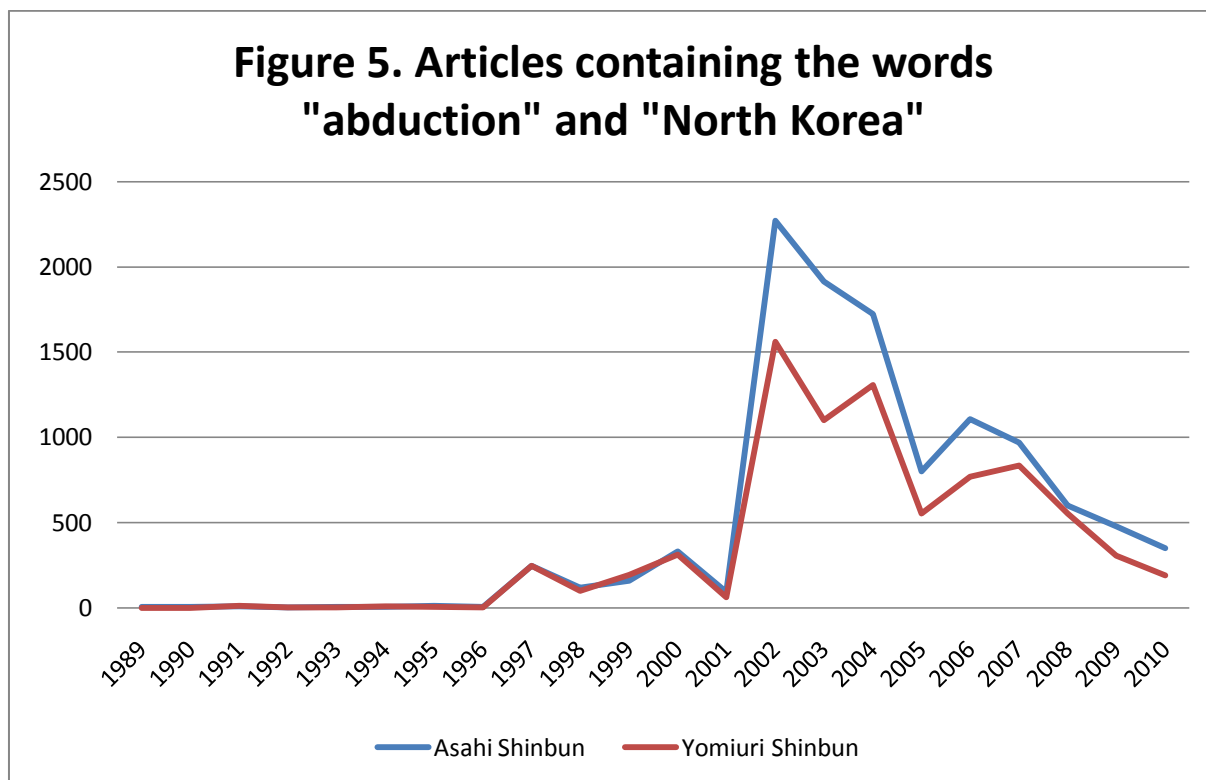
Using the databases of Asahi Shinbun¹⁶⁸ and Yomiuri Shinbun¹⁶⁹ it is possible to conduct content analysis over longer periods of time. I have looked at these two newspapers' coverage of the abduction issue from 1989 to 2010 by structuring the number of articles

¹⁶⁷ McCormack, "Japan and North Korea: The Quest for Normalcy", 168.

¹⁶⁸ Kikuzō II Bijuaru.

¹⁶⁹ Yomidasu Rekishikan.

which contain the words “abduction” (rachi) and “North Korea” (Kitachōsen) into a graph. Only the morning editions were analyzed.



What first strikes the eye is the explosion of media coverage the abduction issue received from 9/17, but in fact, there are several interesting observations one can make based on this data. Firstly, it shows that the criticism against the media for neglecting the abduction issue prior to 9/17 is accurate, especially before An’s testimony about Megumi in 1997. In fact, most of the very few articles containing the relevant keywords in the first half of the 90s were not about North Korean abductions on Japanese citizens, but about the much graver – in terms of sheer numbers – North Korean abductions on South Korean citizens. Articles about the Japanese abduction issue were as good as nonexistent until 1997, and even then they were not zealously pursued.

Secondly, it gives a glimpse of the similarities in the various Japanese media’s reporting patterns. With the exception of a discrepancy in the sheer number of articles between 2002 and 2004, the reporting patterns of Asahi and Yomiuri are strikingly identical. This characteristic of the Japanese printed media has been pointed out by many foreign scholars, and one of the reasons for this lack of diversity is often said to be the press clubs stationed

at all governmental institutions and providing all media organizations (as long as they have access to the press clubs) with exactly the same information at exactly the same time¹⁷⁰.

Thirdly, the data refutes the numerous claims from people on the right¹⁷¹, and especially the families, that Asahi has been particularly neglectful toward the abduction issue. Whenever the topic of Asahi comes up, the Yokotas never fail to mention their subscription switch from Asahi to Yomiuri due to the former's passive stance¹⁷². However, looking at the numbers alone, it is clear that Asahi has devoted more attention to the abduction issue than at least Yomiuri. But in all fairness it also needs to be pointed out that much of the criticism against Asahi stems from the newspaper's tendency to prioritize normalization over solving the abduction issue, and not necessarily the lack of coverage in itself. But claims that Asahi "*made light of reporting the abduction suspicion*" before 9/17, as for example Inagaki Takeshi holds¹⁷³, are off target because the same criticism holds true for all of Japan's mass media.

Fourthly, although the content analysis only covers Asahi and Yomiuri, it is not unreasonable to assume that their coverage of the abduction issue gives a somewhat representative picture of the distribution of abduction issue related articles and coverage in the general, Japanese media world, as these are the two biggest newspapers in Japan in terms of circulation. Assuming this to be the case, it is noteworthy how weak an effect the dwindling media interest in the abduction issue has had on the public's abduction issue interest. If we look at the "topics of interest" in figure 2 we can see a slight decrease in abduction issue interest in 2009 and 2010, but this is nowhere near as drastic as the dramatic plummeting of the media coverage. This ineffectual relationship between the media and the public could stem from the relentless campaigning by actors such as KKAI, SKAI and the Headquarters for the Abduction Issue whose main goal is to remind and agitate the public, but I believe that the main reason lies in the changes in attitudes that 9/17 brought. The spiral of silence has "run its course", and anti-North Korea sentiments are not longer just attitudes one **can**

¹⁷⁰ See for example Ellis S. Krauss, "Portraying the state: NHK Television News and Politics", and Maggie Farley, "Japan's Press and the Politics of Scandal", in *Media and Politics in Japan*, ed. Susan J. Pharr, ed. Ellis S. Krauss, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1996).

¹⁷¹ See for example Katsuei Hirasawa, *Nihon yo Kokka tare* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2002), 73, and Inagaki, ""*Kita Chōsenzoku*" no Danmatsuma", 74-76.

¹⁷² Sakurai, *Watashi ha Kimu Jon Iru to no Tatakai wo yamenai*, Interview with the Yokotas from 2003, P. 72, and interview with the Yokotas from 2007, 203.

¹⁷³ Inagaki, ""*Kitachōsenzoku*" no Danmatsuma", 75.

express, but attitudes one **must** express in order to avoid social isolation. It is also important to stress the fact that although the abduction issue salience has decreased in the media, media attitudes on the issue remain the same as in the heydays of the 2002-2004 period. These days, voices calling for conciliatory steps are sometimes able to penetrate the thick wall of animosity, but the general tone of the mainstream media is still hostile and vengeful toward North Korea. And this is important because Noelle-Neumann notes that “*not in a single instance has the process of the spiral of silence run counter to the line taken by the media*”¹⁷⁴. Unless this media tenor for one reason or another should change, there is nothing that indicates a relaxation of the hostile attitudes of the public. Wada Haruki observed that “*a trait of the mass media since the summit (9/17) is the removal of historical explanation of the Japan – North Korea relationship*”¹⁷⁵. As the abduction issue has come to symbolize the wickedness of the North Korean regime, it is perhaps not so strange that people’s interest in the issue stays strong as long as the status quo of the general anti-North Korea fervor remains intact. The media has done its job, so to speak, by setting the abduction issue on the agenda. Now as the spiral of silence has “run its course” and anti-North Korea attitudes have become the only tolerated attitudes, the public doesn’t need Asahi and Yomiuri to spew out thousands of articles on the abduction issue annually in order to upkeep the dislike rate toward North Korea or to grasp the significance of the abduction issue. It is not longer a question of how the right-wing can maintain support for its hard-line stance – this attitude has now become the established norm – now it is up to the ostracized outcasts on the other end of the political scale to bring about change in attitudes.

11. From one North Korea taboo to another

Although no one is in doubt about the tenor of the public opinion against North Korea today, there are conflicting views concerning how the public opinion and media portrayed North Korea in the period between the end of the Cold War and 9/17. As pointed out in chapter 5,

¹⁷⁴ Noelle-Neumann, Elisabeth: *The spiral of silence: Public opinion – our social skin*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 201.

¹⁷⁵ Wada, “”Rachi sareta” Kokuron wo dasshite”, 252.

Hirasawa Katsuei claimed that one of the changes 9/17 brought was the disappearance of *“the taboo surrounding North Korea”*. Hirasawa held that in this period criticism against North Korea was tabooed through ardent lobbying by CS and the political left, particularly SDP which went to great lengths to protect North Korea. Hasuike Tooru shares Hirasawa’s point of view and acknowledges that there was a *“taboo surrounding North Korea at the time”*¹⁷⁶. Hasuike, speaking from his own experience as an ignored victim of the abduction issue, describes North Korea at the time as *“untouchable”*¹⁷⁷.

The commentators who raise the taboo argument blame the left-side for failing to grasp the realities of the times and for clinging to outdated values of a world order that no longer existed. Shigemura Toshimitsu placed the blame on SDP and CS: *“Up until the 1987 Korean Air flight 858 bombing incident just before the ‘88 Seoul Olympics, North Korea was held in higher esteem than South Korea. The background for this is the “illusion of socialism” which remained strongly rooted in Japan’s media and intellectual circles. SDP and CS played a big role”*¹⁷⁸. Inagaki Takeshi wrote an article about those in the Japanese society who were *“obsessed with North Korea”* which mercilessly lashed out against SDP. *“There is a practical reason to why everyone in SDP, from the seniors to the juniors, is “obsessed with North Korea”. That is the controversial “pachinko suspicion””*¹⁷⁹. The pachinko suspicion which Inagaki refers to is the controversy surrounding alleged bribes from the CS affiliated pachinko underworld to members of SDP (or the Japanese Socialist Party as it was called then) in the 80s and 90s. The investigation of the pachinko bribes was led by Hirasawa who at the time was the head of the police department. Hirasawa reflected in 2002 on how prominent members from SDP always tried to butt in and stop the investigation of CS: *“It would have been better if they did it out of true conviction, but the politicians of the opposition parties opposed [the investigation of CS] because they for a long time have been protected by CS. Therefore they are traitors. Without ever mentioning a word about how they are being looked after by CS, they work for the interests of North Korea. The fact that there are so many of this kind of politicians is Japan’s biggest problem security-wise”*¹⁸⁰.

¹⁷⁶ Hasuike and Oota, *Rachi Tairon*, 81.

¹⁷⁷ IBID, 82.

¹⁷⁸ Shigemura, *“Saishin Kitachōsen Dētabukku”*, 27.

¹⁷⁹ Inagaki, *“Koitsura no “Nimaijita” wo hikkonuke!”*, 79.

¹⁸⁰ Hirasawa, *“Nihon yo Kokka tare”*, 76.

It's still unclear to what extent the bribery was carried out, but a couple of SDP Diet members did publicly admit to having received money from CS. This dealt a considerable blow to SDP's credibility as a political party and would be a foreboding to SDP's definite fall from grace with 9/17 a couple of years later.

The commentators who argue in retrospect that there existed a taboo surrounding North Korea during the 90s blame SDP, CS, liberals in LDP, certain scholars and intellectuals and the left wing mainstream media, particularly Asahi Shinbun and the monthly magazine *Sekai* for creating this atmosphere. But in the literature by writers affiliated with the political left a completely different picture is painted. The scholar Kitagawa Hirokazu who would later become one of the main targets of criticism post-9/17 for his denial of the abduction issue, devoted the first three chapters of his 1996 book on the situation on the Korean Peninsula¹⁸¹ to what he felt was media's smear campaign against North Korea. Kitagawa, who believed that the nuclear development suspicions against North Korea were "*made up*"¹⁸² by the US in order to deter Japan and South Korea from getting too friendly with the North, argued that the Japanese government was "*using the "North Korea threat" to increase the mobility of the SDF to make preparations for a smooth coordination with the US army and to create a condition where the SDF can easily be dispatched abroad*"¹⁸³.

In Kitagawa's works from the 90s there is nothing resembling a North Korea taboo in the Japanese media. On the contrary, he wrote extensively about how North Korea had been framed as a threat by the rightist media and people who wanted to discontinue Japan's food aid. Judging from the available literature and the dislike rate data in which North Korea found itself on top throughout the decade, there may not have been a taboo surrounding North Korea during the 90s as many of the more conservative commentators in retrospect are claiming, but there was certainly room for debate about, and even support for, the North Korean regime. This sharply contrasts the mood after 9/17 which unquestionably can be characterized as a "North Korea taboo", however the post-9/17 taboo does not sanction criticism against North Korea, quite the contrary, it sanctions non-criticism. In the words of one commentator, "*the abduction issue is together with the Emperor system the two*

¹⁸¹ Hirokazu Kitagawa, *Chōsen Yūji ha aru no ka* (Tokyo: Ryokufū Shuppan, 1996).

¹⁸² Kitagawa, "*Kitachōsen wo dō yomu ka*", 94.

¹⁸³ Kitagawa, *Chōsen Yūji ha aru no ka*, 34-35.

greatest taboos [in Japan]”¹⁸⁴. Another commentator has noted that “if one expresses skepticism through writing or talking, [one will face] a storm of criticism. One cannot call for dialogue and negotiations. In these conditions it’s safe to say that the North Korean problem is a taboo. Therefore many people keep their mouths shut”¹⁸⁵. Yet another commentator similarly wrote in 2004 that: “Comments that benefit “the criminal” North Korea have become taboo. An atmosphere which does not allow alternative arguments has been created”¹⁸⁶.

At this point it is purposeful to recall Noelle-Neumann’s definition of public opinion: “*public opinions are attitudes or behaviors one **must** express in public if one is not to isolate oneself; in areas of controversy or change, public opinions are those attitudes one **can** express without running the danger of isolating oneself*”.

Change in public opinion certainly did occur with 9/17, and anti-North Korea attitudes – notwithstanding whether or not such attitudes previously had been tabooed – changed from attitudes one **could** express to attitudes one **had to** express. Accordingly it follows that, in the transitional period of the mood change, attitudes sympathetic toward North Korea changed from attitudes one could express without running the danger of isolating oneself, to attitudes one could not express once the mood shift had established itself. According to Noelle-Neumann, it’s this very nature of public opinion that enables the spiral of silence to begin spiraling. These changes in opinion, values, morals, and norms, or shifts in the climate of opinion as Noelle-Neumann called it, create a friction between the established and the new. This forces people to choose sides, painfully aware of the fact that one side might lose. The picking of sides between dueling and incompatible alternatives creates a fear of isolation, a fear of being socially isolated and ridiculed for having chosen wrongly. Not in order to end up on the winning side, but, rather, in order to prevent ending up on the losing side, people consciously and subconsciously begin gauging which way the climate of opinion is heading. At this stage outspokenness is essential for victory. Especially the tone of the media becomes a vital factor for people’s judgment of which side is winning and which is losing. We may recall Noelle-Neumann’s observation that “*not in a single instance has the*

¹⁸⁴ The comment was made by Ikeda Kayoku in Hasuie et al. *Rachi* 2, 58.

¹⁸⁵ The comment was made by Suzuki Kunio in Hasuie et al. *Rachi* 2, 78.

¹⁸⁶ Kōichi Ishizaka, “Kokkō seijoka wo hakaritsutsu Kitachōsen shakai to kakawaru Michi wo”, *Ronza* 8 (2004.), 72.

*process of the spiral of silence run counter to the line taken by the media*¹⁸⁷. It is not the opinion of the sheer, mathematical majority which determines which side people choose, but the perceived majority opinion. That means that it is the side which is loudest and most confident in the debate which will gain momentum. As this side grows stronger, people of conflicting opinions are increasingly exposed to the fear of isolation and either switch sides or fall silent. This silence further increases the feeling of power discrepancy between the two sides and thus the spiral of silence begins spiraling until one side gains total dominance and the other retreats to the shadows. Once a spiral of silence has run its course, the winning opinion is established as the norm from which no deviance is tolerated.

Judging from the confidence of the anti-North Korea movement and the resigned silence of the opposition, it seems that it is precisely this process which has taken place in Japan post-9/17. This process spelled doom for conciliatory actors like CS and SDP whose ideals no longer were compatible with the new climate of opinion.

Let us, then, look back at how SDP coped with this new climate which eventually led to its downfall.

The downfall of the SDP

On request from the SDP, Kitagawa would write an article denying the abductions which was posted on SDP's homepages. In the beginning no one took notice of it, but after 9/17 more and more people expressed disgust with the article, however it remained on the party's web pages until Sankei Shinbun ran a story on the article, criticizing it harshly. The article became highly controversial as it symbolized the passivity and ignorance of the SDP in dealing with the abduction issue. Indeed, a number of prominent SDP members had publicly shown a neglectful stance and made some rather insensitive remarks on the issue. As a matter of fact, the abduction issue would become the bane of the SDP. 9/17 delivered a hefty blow to the party's integrity from which it has still not recovered. When the abductions turned from suspicion to fact, the party's handling of the issue came under intense scrutiny. The party's reluctance in apologizing for its past neglect did nothing to ease the criticism either. The iconic party leader Doi Takako halfheartedly mustered an apology the following month: *"It's not the case that we never brought up the abduction issue [in our talks with the Korean*

¹⁸⁷Noelle-Neumann, *The Spiral of Silence*, 2nd ed., 201.

Worker's Party], but we can't say we pursued [the issue] sufficiently. I would like to express my apologies to the families of the victims"¹⁸⁸. But when senior Diet member Den Hideo complained a couple of days later that he had been "deceived" by North Korea into believing that the abduction suspicions were fabrications, people had had enough of SDP's naivety. Inagaki Takeshi blasted the former journalist Den, saying: "In his naivety, his crude brain blindly believed North Korea's propaganda. Just the fact that this gentleman who has been promoting [North Korea] this way, has been able to pass as a journalist, shows the falseness of post-war Japan"¹⁸⁹. Yomiuri Shinbun ran a thunderous editorial stating that "no matter what [the SDP] is saying now, they cannot be trusted", reminding its readers that the SDP "cannot erase their past [stance] on the abduction issue just by one apology"¹⁹⁰.

SDP came under a barrage of verbal abuse and this had a devastating effect on the camaraderie inside the party. In the immediate aftermath of 9/17 three of its Diet members¹⁹¹ resigned from the party on grounds that SDP's handling of the abduction issue had been unsatisfactory and inadequate. In the 2003 general election SDP won only 6 seats in the House of Representatives, compared to 18 in the previous election¹⁹². Doi Takako who had, until then, enjoyed great popularity during her tenure as the party leader, took responsibility for the poor results and stepped down from the top spot. SDP – whose predecessor, the Japanese Socialist Party, had been the only political party to snub LDP for majority rule in the post-war era – was now broken. In terms of pure political damage, no institution in Japan felt the wrath of the public opinion due to the abduction issue stronger than SDP.

Calling on the allergic left

Since its downfall, SDP has along with the majority of the political and academic left shunned the abduction issue debate making this the unrestricted playground of the right-wingers. In the words of Hasuike Tooru, the left-wing seemed to "face a shock and fell silent. When they found out that North Korea, which they had trusted, had committed such outrageous acts,

¹⁸⁸ "Rachi Mondai: Doi Shamintō Shu ga Chinsha "Tsuikyū Fujūbun"", *Yomiuri Shinbun* (Tokyo), 10.08, 2002, morning edition.

¹⁸⁹ Inagaki, "Koitsura no "Nimajita" wo hikkonuke", 78

¹⁹⁰ "Doi Tōshu Shazai: "Rachi" meguru Kako ha kienai", *Yomiuri Shinbun* (Tokyo), 10.11, 2002, morning edition

¹⁹¹ Tajima Yoko, Oobuchi Kinuko and Oowaki Masako.

¹⁹² "Japanese General Election, 2003", Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japan_general_election,_2003

they were devastated. While [the left-wing] failed to speak up, the right-wing gradually began to raise its voice. Now [the left-wingers] are allergic to the word “abduction”[...]”¹⁹³. Hasuike’s view spans a notion that seems taken straight out of the spiral of silence theory. The shift in accepted/tolerated attitudes and the subsequent failure of one side to speak up and thus allowing the momentum to swing in favor of the opposing side are precisely the core components constituting the mechanics of the spiral of silence. The self-declared rightist Suzuki Kunio from the nationalist movement Issuikai has also commented on this trend: “There are people who in reality were close to the former Socialist Party and North Korea who possessed connections [to North Korea]. These people should have cooperated with KKAI, but because of their [past] glorification of North Korea, they could do nothing but fall into silence when things got moving in the abduction issue. Therefore, the people who shout that they “will never forgive North Korea” have come to be the only ones who are connected with this movement”¹⁹⁴.

Regarding the people with connections to North Korea whom Suzuki refers to, many commentators of various political orientations have pointed out that these people’s silence is cowardly and regrettable. They hold that, in the lack of official, diplomatic relations, it is precisely these people with connections to North Korea who should have brought progress to the abduction issue. As the Japanese Communist Party severed all its ties with the Korean Workers’ Party in the mid-80s, the Socialist Party/SDP became the only political party in Japan with stable connections to North Korea. Hasuike feels that SDP should have acknowledged its past mistakes and used its connections to contribute to the process toward a solution to the abduction issue¹⁹⁵. Oota Masakuni as well directed a wake-up call to the left, stating that “upon undergoing a clear self-criticism for their past errors and inadequacy, they should confront the twisted, nationalistic agitation which it is clear where will lead us. Then they should strive to solve the problem by engaging the North Korean leadership with which they once had good, solid relations. Even if it didn’t produce instant results the building process would be important”¹⁹⁶.

¹⁹³ Hasuike et al. *Rachi* 2, 86.

¹⁹⁴ IBID, 85.

¹⁹⁵ IBID, 85.

¹⁹⁶ Hasuike and Oota, *Rachi Tairon*, 111.

But in an era where all contact with the North Korean side, regardless of the motives, is frowned upon, SDP, or other left wing actors for that matter, has no intentions of placing itself in a position which could reopen old wounds. SDP quickly froze relations with the Korean Worker's Party after 9/17 and is in no rush to cure itself from its "abduction issue allergy" just yet. The days where SDP could send delegations to North Korea praising the Great Leader in pompous, communist rhetoric without facing political consequences back in Japan – are now over. When Koizumi went to Pyongyang on 9/17, all the major newspapers made a big deal of the fact that Koizumi brought his own lunch box and didn't accept any comforts from North Korea. Likewise, in his book about his secret negotiations with North Korea, Hirasawa Katsuei emphasized several places that he had been ardently determined "*not to accept even a glass of water*" from the North Korean side¹⁹⁷. All indulgence in unnecessary coquetry with North Korea is frowned upon, which is something all politicians dealing with North Korea in the post-9/17 era are cautiously aware of. SDP has seen how Hirasawa was hounded by the Japanese public opinion upon his return from North Korea despite his staunchly conservative anti-North Korea stance. SDP knows that dealing with North Korea has become a risky business, especially for a party that still hasn't managed to shake loose from its image as a willing cat's-paw for the most hated country in Japan. Even if SDP wanted to dust off its old connections to Pyongyang, it would most likely be met with a cold shoulder as its relations with the Korean Workers' Party remain frozen.

The desire to solve the abduction issue through dialogue and negotiation is a positive aspect to an otherwise broken record looping sanctions and hard-line measures, but abduction issue hopefuls should probably look elsewhere than to the SDP for capable initiative-takers.

The next chapter will analyze the increase in Japanese threat perception following 9/17. Furthermore it will look at the increasingly assertive rhetoric of the right-wing commentators, some of which eventually even called for military action against North Korea.

¹⁹⁷ Hirasawa, *Rachi Mondai: Kitachōsen Gaikō no arikata wo tou*, 195.

12. Threat perception

The international relations expert Hazel Smith wrote in 2007 that *“no serious military analyst anywhere in the world views the DPRK as an offensive military threat to its neighbors or to any other state”*¹⁹⁸. This point seems to have escaped Japanese military analysts in MOFA and the Ministry of Defense who in 2009 described North Korea’s missile launches and nuclear tests as *“serious threats to the safety of Japan”*¹⁹⁹. Actually, ever since the 1998 Taepodong launch North Korea with its armament programs has frequently been denounced in such terms as *“direct threat to the security of Japan”*²⁰⁰ and *“not only a direct threat to peace and stability in the East Asia region including Japan, but also a grave challenge to the international non-proliferation regime”*²⁰¹ in Japanese official sources. Even the abduction issue has been termed as *“a major threat to the lives and security of the Japanese public”*²⁰².

The changes in the threat pattern have not gone unnoticed, and Asahi Shinbun and Yomiuri Shinbun have since the late 90s sporadically conducted public opinion surveys asking people to state the countries they feel being the most militarily threatening ones. One of Asahi Shinbun’s first surveys inquiring about military threats came in 1997 (see figure 6). Thus we are able compare threat perceptions pre-Taepodong and post-Taepodong. Unfortunately Asahi did not conduct a similar survey again before 2000 so data from the critical junctures right after the launch is lost. In any case we can observe a steep increase in threat perception toward North Korea from 1997 to 2000. This is undoubtedly a result of the Taepodong launch. The threat rate increases post-9/17, but yet again there is data missing at critical junctures as Asahi did not run surveys in 2003 and 2004, so it is hard to say from these data precisely how 9/17 affected the threat pattern. But one thing is certain; it did heighten threat perceptions among the Japanese people.

The string of Asahi surveys unfortunately ends abruptly in 2006 (there were a couple of similar surveys conducted after 2006 too, but the phrasing of the question was so altered that they couldn’t be used for reliable results). Coincidentally, in 2006 Yomiuri picks up where Asahi left off and launches its own series of threat perception surveys (see figure 7).

¹⁹⁸ Smith, *Reconstituting Korean Security*, 7.

¹⁹⁹ MOFA, *Diplomatic Bluebook 2010*, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/index.html> P.5.

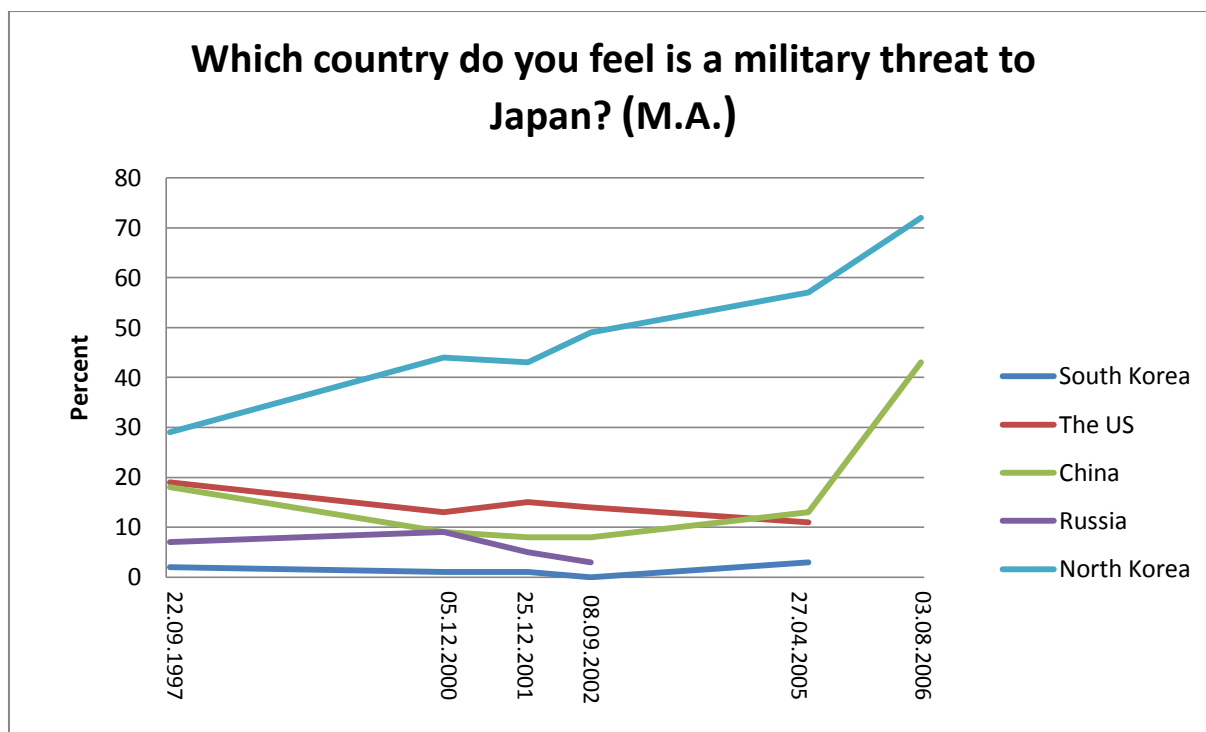
²⁰⁰ MOFA, *Diplomatic Bluebook 1999*, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/index.html>

²⁰¹ MOFA, *Diplomatic Bluebook 2003*, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/index.html> P.7.

²⁰² MOD, *Defense of Japan 2010* (Annual whitepaper). http://www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w_paper/2010.html P.5.

These surveys can't be used as a direct continuation of the Asahi surveys as the phrasing of the question is different. Nonetheless, the surveys, spanning every year from 2006 to 2010²⁰³, show us that, much like the dislike rate, the threat perception rate eventually stabilized and is now hovering steadily at around the 80% mark.

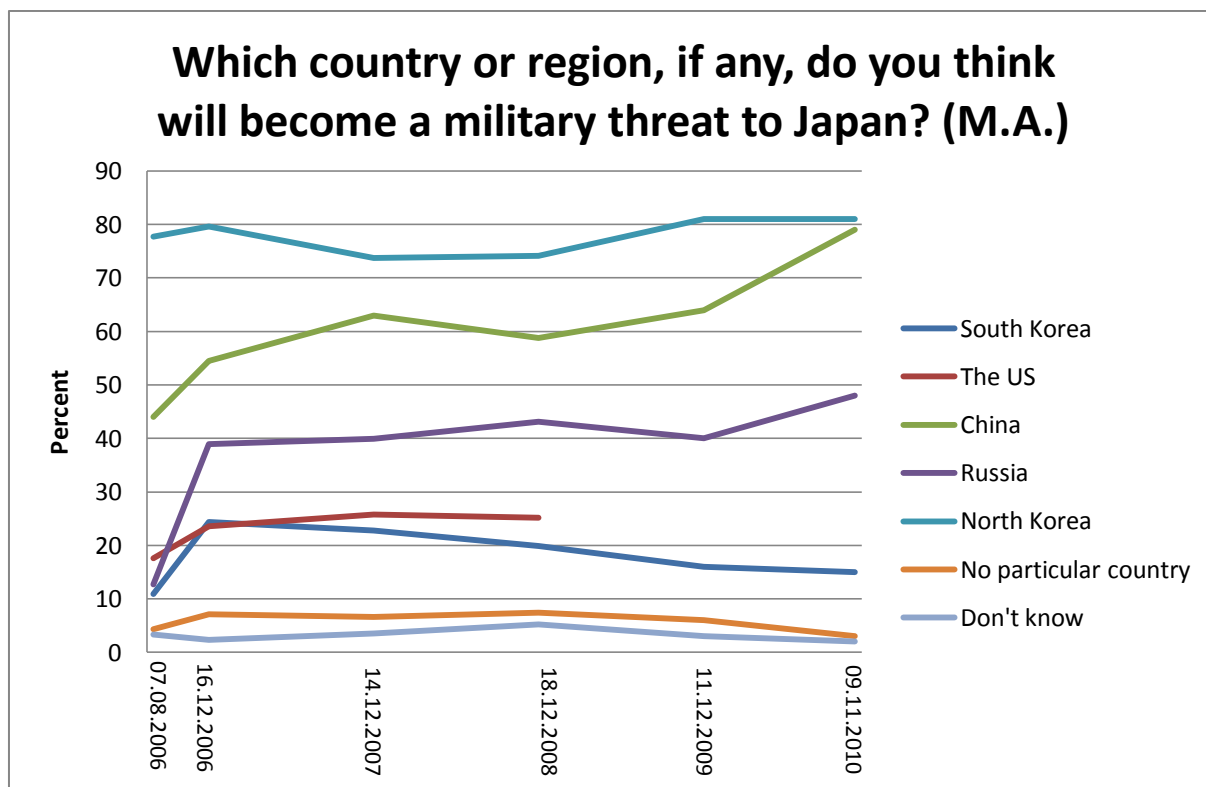
Figure 6: Asahi Shinbun's polls (1997 – 2006)



The gaps in the Asahi survey set are problematic. Moreover, the qualitative differences between the two sets of surveys contain too many operational problems to be used as a coherent unit, but they provide for a more than sufficient observation of the dramatic increase in the threat perception toward North Korea from the 1998 Taepodong launch onward. We can also observe steady increases following 9/17 and the first nuclear test upon which the peak seems to have been reached, but rather than to decline significantly the threat perception rate flattened out without being particularly affected by the 2009 nuclear test.

²⁰³ Note of caution: The wording of the question in the 2010 survey was slightly different from the other surveys as it read: "Which country, if any, of the following 6 do you feel is a military threat?"

Figure 7: Yomiuri Shinbun's polls (2006 – 2010)



As we have seen, the 1998 missile launch increased the Japanese threat perception toward North Korea dramatically, not only among military analysts, but among the Japanese people in general. North Korea had tested missiles in 1993 as well and Japan had, in fact, since then been well within North Korea's missile range, but this was a fact that seemed to have evaded the Japanese public. No one failed to take notice of the 1998 launch however, and if North Korea hadn't been seen as a threat before it was certainly now. The 2002 abduction confession, the 2003 withdrawal from the NPT, the 2005 announcement of possession of nuclear weapons, the 2006 and 2009 Taepodong missile launches and subsequent nuclear tests, and the 2009 withdrawal from the 6PT certainly constitute a string of destabilizing events that have hardened this image.

A perfect excuse?

The East Asia researchers Linus Hagström and Christian Turesson at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs have analyzed Japanese threat perception of North Korea over a period of time which correlates to the timeframe within which my own thesis spans. They looked at three time junctures: 1991, 1999 and 2007, and compared the Japanese threat perception of

North Korea vis-à-vis that of China. They use Stephen M. Walt's model to measure threat. In short, this model is based on the four following points: 1. Aggregate power. 2. Geographical proximity. 3. Offensive power. 4. Aggressive intentions²⁰⁴.

Hagström and Turesson assess Japan's seemingly increasing assertiveness in international affairs since approximately the turn of the millennium. This change, they claim, can be evidenced by the following 6 points: 1. *"A growing public and political acceptance of revision of Article 9"*. 2. *"A nascent debate on Japanese nuclear weapons after the first North Korean nuclear test"*. 3. *"The introduction of the BMD and the fact that the Air Self-Defense Force is close to possessing the capability to execute pre-emptive strikes"*. 4. *"The introduction of new or updated defensive capabilities, currently under way in all branches of the SDF"*. 5. *"The Dispatch of troops to the Indian Ocean (2001) and Iraq (2003) outside the scope of United Nations peacekeeping operations for the first time after World War II"*. 6. *"The transformation of Japan's Defense Agency to a full Ministry in 2007"*²⁰⁵.

They question what could have sparked this newfound, military assertiveness and look to China and North Korea for answers. They highlight the fact that China's military growth has been *"highly significant"* and its *"defense budget has grown in tandem with the GDP"*²⁰⁶. North Korea, however, has stagnated. Although it has developed intercontinental missiles and nuclear weapons, its conventional military means has seen no modernization. They argue that *"North Korea has barely developed its military at all over the last 16 years. The North Korean attitude toward Japan has also remained similar: Hostile, haughty, derogatory, but hardly aggressive in the expansionist sense"*²⁰⁷. Yet, paradoxically, it is North Korea which is presented as a threat in official Japanese documents. The word threat is not attached to China in any official literature, but it is seemingly an obligatory suffix when it comes to North Korea references. They assume that, as Walt's proclaimed, *"aggressive intentions" equal or override capabilities when estimating threats*²⁰⁸, because *"if a neighboring country's mere*

²⁰⁴ Stephen M. Walt, "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power". *International Security* vol. 9, no. 4 (1985), 3-43.

²⁰⁵ Linus Hagström and Christian Turesson, "Among threats and a "perfect excuse": Understanding change in Japanese foreign policy", *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* vol. 21, No. 3 (2009), 297-298.

²⁰⁶ Hagström and Turesson, "Among threats and a "perfect excuse"", 301..

²⁰⁷ IBID, 307.

²⁰⁸ Hagström and Turesson, "Among threats and a "perfect excuse"", 307..

*possession of ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons would automatically trigger Japan to frame it as a threat, then China should have had the same treatment long ago*²⁰⁹.

They conclude that the main reason behind Japan's hesitation to label China as a threat is because it would have a disruptive effect on the intricate trade relations between the two countries. However the framing of North Korea as a threat *"might serve as a "perfect excuse" for changing Japanese security policy in the face of what could on neorealist terms obviously be construed as a more pressing China threat*²¹⁰.

This conclusion implies that the notion of North Korea as a threat is something that is construed or at least framed in order to facilitate the realization of some ulterior motive. Hagström and Turesson are far from the only ones who have implied this. We may recall the historian Oota Masakuni who criticized those who use the North Korea issue *"for their own war-mongering"*. He further exclaimed a sentiment that closely mirrors that of Hagström and Turesson, explaining that *"in a sense, nothing could suit the wishes of the right-wing powers in Japan better than a regime like Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il's North Korea"*²¹¹.

When one deals with these kinds of explanations to the threat perception it is advisable to be conscious of the fact that North Korea is not construed as a threat by an all-encompassing right-wing with a uniform motive. If one overlooks the rather obvious fact that the right-wing is a fragmented mosaic of scattered opinions one is left with nothing but a populist conspiracy theory. As has already been pointed out, the rightwing is a diverse term in which many personal agendas lay hidden.

That being said, it certainly seems plausible that many of these diverse rightwing forces consider it beneficial to their interests to fan up the threat perception of North Korea. For example KKAI and SKAI whose most frequently expressed fear is that the public and the politicians lose interest and allow *"the curtain to go down on the abduction issue"*. To prevent this from happening it is favorable if they are able to evoke not only sympathy, but also anger and fear in the Japanese public.

²⁰⁹ IBID, 307.

²¹⁰ IBID, 299.

²¹¹ Hasuike and Oota, *Rachi Tairon*, 99.

In the case of the abduction issue, a threatening image of North Korea fits perfectly with the role of “ideal offender” it is expected to assume in the dichotomy with the abductees and their families who take on the role of “ideal victim”.

Terrorist nation

In Japan North Korea is often framed as a “terrorist nation” and North Korea is certainly responsible for some blatant episodes of international terror, most notably the bombing of Korean Air flight 858 in 1987 killing all 115 passengers and crew. This led the US Department of State to add North Korea to its list of State Sponsors of Terrorism the following year. However on June 26th 2008 US President Bush announced that he would take steps to delist North Korea as it hadn’t engaged in terrorist acts since the Korean Air bombing. This sudden change of heart from a man who had publicly declared that he “*loathe[s] Kim Jong-il*”, and described North Korea’s nr.1 in terms like “*pygmy*” and “*tyrant*”²¹² – caught Japan totally off guard. Nakayama Kyōko, who was in charge of the Headquarters for the Abduction Issue at the time, had announced less than a year earlier that “*the US has stated that it will not sacrifice Japan – US relations on this point. Moreover, since the US understands Japan’s earnest desire to see the return of the abduction victims, we can expect that the US will not remove North Korea from the list of countries that sponsor terrorism. Indeed, I think we can be certain of this*”²¹³.

Japan was shaken, and the strength of the Japan – US alliance was questioned. Prime Minister Asō Tarō was alerted by Washington only 30 minutes before the removal²¹⁴. Finance Minister Nakagawa Shōichi described the decision as “*extremely regrettable*”²¹⁵. There were even speculations that Japan would withdraw from the 6PT²¹⁶. It was indeed a significant event because it meant that the US did not consider the abductions to be acts of terrorism. Judging from Japanese abduction issue related literature it seems taken for granted that the abductions constitute an act of terrorism. In 2003 KKAI and SKAI prepared a

²¹² “Factbox: Previous US comments about Kim Jong-il”, Reuters, 2007, <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSN06198902>

²¹³ “Rachi Mondai no Genjō to Tenbō: Nakayama Kyōko Sōri Hosakan”, Foreign Press Center Japan, 2007, <http://fpci.jp/modules/news3/index.php?page=article&storyid=185&storytopic=3>

²¹⁴ Ian Rowley, “Japanese anger as U.S. takes North Korea of terrorism list”, Bloomberg Businessweek, 2008, http://www.businessweek.com/globalbiz/blog/eyeonasia/archives/2008/10/japanese_anger.html

²¹⁵ Okano-Heijmans, “Japan as Spoiler in the Six-Party Talks”, 8

²¹⁶ IBID

survey which was given to all the 1159 candidates for the Lower House election of that year. The response rate was at 84%. Of all the candidates who responded, 93% affirmed that they considered the abductions acts of terror²¹⁷.

The “terrorist nation” tag has been highly effective in the post-9/17 era where former President Bush’s “War on Terror” has become a catchphrase internationally. The international focus on terrorism has reached unprecedented heights and the “terrorist nation” label fits well with the ideal offender role, and at the same time it serves to justify Japan’s insistence on raising the abduction issue in various international forums which are originally designed for other purposes.

That North Korea possesses nuclear weapons and intercontinental ballistic missiles is an undeniable fact. However the nuclear tests and missile launches which all, to varying degrees, have been failures, have demonstrated that the quality of these weapons is far from convincing. Even if one, based on worst case scenario estimates, assumes, like many of the hawks in Pentagon and Tokyo, that North Korea’s weaponry is of a state-of-the-art calibre, this in itself does not automatically justify labelling North Korea a threat, as Hagström and Turesson have pointed out. One is perhaps best advised to think of North Korea’s nukes and missiles simply as deterrence. Kim Jong-il himself seemed to be painfully aware of this. In a rare interview with South Korean journalists in 2000 following the summit with Kim Dae-jung, Kim Jong-il expressed the following, surprisingly humble statement: *“The missiles cannot reach the US and if I launch them, the US would fire back thousands of missiles and we would not survive. I know that very well. But I have to let them know I have missiles. I am making them because only then will the US talk to me”*²¹⁸.

Not much has changed in that respect ten years later. In November 2010, US Senator John McCain noted that *“the North Koreans’ only claim to their position on the world stage is their nuclear capacity”*²¹⁹.

²¹⁷ “”Rachi ha Tero” 93% Dōi: Shūinsen Kōhōsha ni Kazokukai nado Ankēto”, *Asahi Shinbun* (Tokyo), 02.04, 2003, Morning edition.

²¹⁸ Paul French, *North Korea: The Paranoid Peninsula: A Modern History* (London: Zed Books Ltd, 2005), 207.

²¹⁹ “After issuing warning, Seoul cancels artillery drill on disputed island”, CNN, 11.29, 2010, <http://edition.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/asiapcf/11/29/koreas.crisis/index.html?iref=obinsite>

Also Satō Katsumi is of this opinion. *“Why does the international community negotiate with North Korea?”* he asked before clarifying: *“It is because they possess weapons of mass destruction and long range ballistic missiles. If they didn’t have that no one would negotiate with them”*²²⁰. He further went on to state that the chances of a North Korean attack were equal to zero.

The Kim Jong-il comment admittedly came many years before North Korea “went nuclear”, but the emergence of nuclear weapons changes nothing. Kim Jong-il knows that a nuclear missile launch into foreign territory would equal suicide. Despite all its intimidating rhetoric and threats to turn Seoul into “a sea of fire”, first strike attacks are not an option for North Korea. However it could go down fighting if cornered.

Abduction hysteria

The up-cranked threat perception since 9/17 twisted Japanese people’s image of North Korea beyond recognition. North Korea, the stagnated half of the Korean Peninsula which historically has been characterized as “a shrimp among whales”, is now branded as a “threat to the security of Japan”, both popularly and officially. As I will come back to at the end of this chapter, 9/17 spurred an unprecedented outcry for military action. Behind this newfound assertiveness lays the perception of a hostile, unstable and dangerous North Korea willing to go to any lengths to secure its shady interests. For many of the more hawkish commentators there was no room for interpreting North Korea’s missile and nuclear development as a deterrent force, these measures were strictly regarded as means of warfare. Bush had already labelled North Korea as one of the countries constituting the “axis of evil”, and several Japanese commentators warned that heightened US – North Korea tensions could have dangerous consequences for Japan, but often their worst case scenarios seemed like little more than fear-mongering. Nishioka Tsutomu wrote in the end of 2002, *“Keep in mind that North Korea’s nuclear missiles are also aimed at Japan. Now as the tensions between the US and North Korea are escalating Japan faces a great risk of being attacked by North Korea. Scenarios of guerrilla fighters landing on shore, and even attacks by missiles with nuclear warheads are possible. We could also see the unfolding of terror attacks*

²²⁰ Katsumi Satō, “Shushō ga kaeta Yoron no Kazamuki: ”Higaisha Kazoku ha amakatta””, *Ronza* 8 (2004): 46.

like 9/11 in the US. [North Korea] is a terrorist nation that wouldn't hesitate attacking us no matter how much we pray for peace"²²¹.

Several foreign commentators who saw the events unfold from the outside couldn't help but feel that the rhetoric of commentators like Nishioka bordered on hysteria. It would almost be unthinkable for any Japanese debater at the time to criticize anything that was connected to the abduction issue as "*hysteria*", but the environment of Tokyo-based foreign correspondents had the luxury of not having to fully commit itself to the Japanese society which was rapidly getting dragged down into the spiral of silence. The Australian National University professor Tessa Morris-Suzuki noted in 2003 that a "*spiral towards hysteria seems to be evident in the current Japan's response to the North Korean "abduction incidents"*"²²². In the Japanese version of Newsweek a couple of months later UCLA professor Steven Vogel urged the Japanese Government to "*not allow the pursuit for the great goal of peace and stability in East Asia to become "abducted" by the abduction issue*"²²³. 3 months later Dana Lewis, reporter in the same magazine, warned Japan about the "*pitfalls of abduction hysteria*" which it was falling into²²⁴.

Needless to say, people like the opinion leaders in KKAI and SKAI were none too pleased with the "reckless" reporting by the foreign commentators who refused to conform to the uniform line of the Japanese reporting. Hasuike Tooru who was still a very frustrated and angry man at that time, did not see the anti-North Korea atmosphere as "hysteria", quite the contrary, he was disappointed with the lack of enthusiasm of the Japanese people. At the height of what the foreign reporters called "abduction hysteria", Hasuike complained that "*there is no anger. I want to tell people to be angrier. We [KKAI/SKAI] are the only ones who are angry. When we're told that this is "hysteria", it's just unbearable. I want people to be angrier*". Hasuike was probably trying to refute the hysteria claim, but his frenzied outburst most likely had the opposite effect.

Why was it only the foreign commentators who felt that the Japanese threat perception and general attitudes toward North Korea bordered on hysteria? Did not the Japanese reporters

²²¹ Tsutomu Nishioka, "Rachi Kazoku to no 6 nen Sensō: Teki ha Nihon ni mo ita!" (Tokyo: Fusōsha, 2002): 51.

²²² Tessa Morris-Suzuki, "The Politics of Hysteria: America's Iraq, Japan's North Korea", Iwanami, 2003, <http://www.iwanami.co.jp/jpworld/text/politicsofhysteria01.html>

²²³ Vogel, "Rachi Mondai ni Gaikō wo "Rachi" saseru na", 11.

²²⁴ Dana Lewis, "Rachi Histerī no Otoshiana", *Newsweek*, Japanese ed. (10.22, 2003): 16-20.

witness the exact same unfolding of events? Of course they did, but by 2003 the spiral of silence had already “run its course” and anti-North Korea attitudes were the only attitudes tolerated. Those who did not conform fell into silence.

Toward conformity and social control

The threat perception of North Korea in Japan seems more construed than based on reality. It serves to solidify the otherness which North Korea is shrouded in, and it facilitates the maturing of the conformity of the Japanese people by playing on us-versus-them sentiments. Absolute, monolithic conformity in Japan’s stance toward North Korea is essential for organizations like KKAI and SKAI whose biggest fear is that the abduction issue will be forgotten and left to die as time passes. KKAI’s Masumoto Teruaki warned in 2002 that *“we must not be tricked by North Korea’s schemes and allow the domestic public opinion to become divided”*²²⁵. The KKAI chairman Iizuka Shigeo called out to the Japanese people in a similar manner: *“I wish to humbly appeal to the public opinion as one entity with a common determination”*²²⁶.

It is not a coincidence that these organizations and other people on the political right side stress the importance of unity against North Korea. Actually, conformity is the natural end result of a spiral of silence having run its course. Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann wrote that *“there is an indication [...] that [...] when society is in a crisis, pressures toward conformity increase”*²²⁷. And further: *“Perhaps the degree of danger to which society is exposed, whether that danger comes from within or without, is the key: greater danger demands greater integration, and greater integration is enforced by heightened reactions of public opinion”*²²⁸.

The heightened sense of danger through the presence of “the threat”, North Korea, creates a demand for social integration. It is up to the public opinion to enforce this integration. In other words, there is a close connection between the threat perception of North Korea and the conformity of the Japanese society on the North Korea problem. In this way the spiral of silence functions as a social control penalizing deviance and exerting pressure toward

²²⁵ Teruaki Masumoto, “Watashi no Shiten”, Asahi Shinbun (Tokyo), 11.10, 2002, morning edition.

²²⁶ Tooru Hasuike and Tsutomu Nishioka, “Tanaka Makiko Bōgen ga “Kita” wo ri suru”, *Shokun!* 1 (2004), 92.

²²⁷ Noelle-Neumann, *The Spiral of Silence: Public*, second edition, 137.

²²⁸ *IBID*, 138.

conformity. No matter what motives one has for framing North Korea as a threat, be it military armament or keeping the interest for the abduction issue alive, it goes without saying that realizing these motives, as long as they can beneficially serve the anti-North Korea movement in one way or another, would be easier in a conformist society which is united in its stance against North Korea.

Against this backdrop Oota Masakuni's claim that nothing could suit the wishes of the right wing powers in Japan better than a regime like North Korea seems very sensible.

To war

The increased threat perception of North Korea seems to have initiated an aspect of the Japan – North Korea relationship which is often overlooked in Western publications on the subject: The unprecedented readiness to advocate military means to check the North Korean threat. And in the opinion of several of the more hawkish commentators: A readiness to go to war.

As has been pointed out several times, the 1998 Taepodong launch was a wake-up call for the Japanese people who had thus far been fairly content with entrusting security matters to the US. It is in the wake of the 1998 launch that one finds the first serious calls for military action against North Korea. Satō Katsumi who was arguably the most outspoken commentator in the North Korea debate at the time, urged people to be ready for war in 2000: “[...] *In the last instance I think that, naturally, we have to be prepared to go to war. The abduction issue is that serious an issue. I mean, almost 50 persons have had their human rights infringed upon for 22, 23 years now. That our nation, our government has neglected this is unforgivable. What kind of foolish nation allows [such things] to happen without saying a word?*”²²⁹

In the same year Tokyo Governor Ishihara Shintarō shared Sato's sentiment that the abduction issue was worth going to war for: “*A nation that can't help its own people, can't be called a nation in the first place. Japan has to take a stance which makes North Korea understand that it doesn't have any other choice than to return the Japanese citizens. If Japan negotiates from a hard-line stance where we even show readiness to go to war, there*

²²⁹ Katsumi Satō, *Chōsen Jōsei wo yomu* (Tokyo: Banseisha, 2000), 78.

is a good chance that the abductees will peacefully return. But North Korea might still not comply. However the capabilities of our SDF are far superior to North Korea's military power. If we don't intimidate them [into believing that] we can win, then diplomacy is already lost. Instead of showing this stance we are now gladly sending them many hundred thousand tons of rice. As far as international negotiations are concerned, this can only be described as an unheard-of pattern"²³⁰.

Officials at governmental level were alarmed at how far groups like Satō's MKRI went in their aggressive rhetoric against North Korea. If MOFA were to allow the situation to get out of hand, this could have a disastrous effect on the restoration of the normalization talks which had been MOFA's main objective throughout the 90s. Sensing the danger, several politicians who had been active in pursuing normalization set out to weather the storm by stressing that military action was not an option for Japan. The LDP Diet member Nakayama Masaaki who had taken part in the 1997 Mori Delegation to North Korea emphasized that *"Japan has no military power. The only thing we have is peaceful negotiation. We cannot resort to violent opposition in anger over the "reckless abductions of Japanese nationals"'"²³¹. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Kōno Yōhei, who had earlier publicly announced that he took full responsibility for the rice aid to North Korea made comments to the same effect not long after: *"Even if we tried to solve [the abduction issue] with brute force, our country doesn't possess military power, so whether we trust them or not, whether we like them or not, we have no other option than to sit around the same table and talk"²³².**

Interestingly, it is not the 1998 launch Satō and Ishihara give as the reason for their call for arms, but rather the abduction issue. The readiness to go to war over the abduction issue 2 years before 9/17 shows just how emotionally loaded the issue is. The abduction issue is a powder keg, and has been so for more than a decade.

It is therefore perhaps no wonder that Satō and Ishihara's war cries would reverberate in many quarters after Kim Jong-il's abduction confession on 9/17. The majority of the rhetoric advocating military action through a revised SDF seems to have sprung up in the 3, 4 years

²³⁰ Shintarō Ishihara and Sōichirō Tahara, *Katsu Nihon* (Tokyo: Bungei Shunjū, 2000), 200.

²³¹ Nishioka, *Rachi Kazoku to no 6 Nen Senso*, 236. The article appeared first in *Bungei Shunjū* 12 (2002) under the title "Rachi ka Kome ka: Baikoku no Seijika Retsuden". The quote is cited from Sankei Shinbun of 11.17, 1999.

²³² Nishioka, *Rachi Kazoku to no 6 Nen Senso*, 236. The article appeared first in *Bungei Shunjū* 12 (2002) under the title "Rachi ka Kome ka: Baikoku no Seijika Retsuden".

following 9/17, that is, up until North Korea declared itself to be in possession of nuclear weapons in 2005 and its nuclear test the following year. But the hardcore pro-military action advocates mentioned below continued to urge the Government to revise the constitution and open up for military intervention even after North Korea's nuclearization.

By the end of 2003 the Koizumi administration had already stretched the interpretation of Article 9 sufficiently to dispatch troops to the Indian Ocean and Iraq without a UN mandate as well as given the green light for the implementation of the ambitious Ballistic Missile Defense. Japan was flexing its muscles militarily for the first time in almost 60 years. Although the war-mongers were kept safely within the realms of the public debate and outside of defense strategy planning, the government's unprecedented military assertiveness fanned up premonitions that something big was about to happen. One military analyst was almost religiously convinced that the US would nuke North Korea. He wrote extensively about this scenario in his 2003 book which was unmistakably titled *"The US will nuke North Korea – The shocking Scenario"*²³³.

But more concerning than dubious predictions about the US military strategies for North Korea was the more tangible increase in support for Satō and Ishihara's calls for war preparations. It is around this time that current SKAI chairman Nishioka Tsutomu and former SKAI secretary-general Araki Kazuhiro begin to openly advocate a rescue operation of the abductees by the SDF on North Korean soil. Araki expressed in 2005 that *"without brute force the abduction issue will never be solved"*²³⁴, and further elaborated that *"the constitutional restriction" is only an idea. Japanese citizens have been abducted in a one-sided state crime, and their basic human rights which are guaranteed by the constitution have been violated over a long time, so of course we can use the army to rescue them. Or rather one should say that not using the army is unconstitutional*²³⁵.

Even certain members of the families began insinuating the claim they are whole-heartedly embracing today, namely that the SDF will most likely have to play a part in the return of the remaining abductees.

²³³ Yoshiki Hidaka, *Amerika ha Kitachōsen wo Kakubakugeki suru: Sono Shōgeki no Shinario* (Tokyo: Tokuma Shoten, 2003).

²³⁴ Kazuhiro Araki, *Rachi: Ijōna Kokka no Honshitsu* (Tokyo: Bensei Shuppan, 2005), 157.

²³⁵ IBID, 160.

It has to be pointed out that up until the Kan Government, no one in MOFA or other top governmental institutions openly shared or supported the opinions of the vague pro-military action movement. Some influential politicians like Abe Shinzō, who was (and is) one of the peskiest firebrands for revision of Article 9, expressed sentiments that were rather close to these radical ideas, but not at any point was Japan realistically close to war with North Korea. But on the other hand, it also needs to be emphasized that the pro-military action movement was not restricted to the fringes of the North Korea debate. This movement contained almost all the heavyweights on the right side of the political spectre: Satō Katsumi, Nishioka Tsutomu, Araki Kazuhiro, Ishihara Shintarō and to a certain degree Abe Shinzō. In addition come the pressure groups MKRI, COMJAN, KKAI and SKAI. This constitutes the core of the right-wing in the Japanese North Korea debate. It is precisely the influential power of this group that makes historians affiliated with the left, like Wada Haruki and Oota Masakuni, shudder. In the words of the latter: *“There is a symbiotic relationship between the dictator Kim Jong-il who can go to these lengths just to extend his own survival, and the ultra-right which yearns for the militarization of Japan”*²³⁶.

While the left-wing feared that the “ultra-right” was pushing Japan dangerously close to the brink of war, the pro-military action movement found itself frustrated with the lack of passion and the general nervousness of the Japanese mainstream which failed to share their rage and enthusiasm for action. Nishioka warned already in 2000 that *“a country which has forgotten how to be angry at “evil” has nothing left to do but collapse”*²³⁷, and further: *“The sovereignty of our nation and the safety of our people can only be protected after a determination to sacrifice everything has sprung forth”*²³⁸, an eerie claim which seems like a ghost from the early Shōwa days. Satō Katsumi blamed it on some obscure, national defect: *“To be frank, many Japanese stop thinking when problems get a little “stormy”. This, I think, is a weak national trait and an extremely dangerous tendency”*²³⁹. Addressing this fear, Abe Shinzō called for courage in 2003: *“We cannot let them believe that their brinkmanship diplomacy produces results. We cannot show any weakness. To show a weak stance by being*

²³⁶ Hasuike and Oota, *Rachi Tairon*, 100-101.

²³⁷ Nishioka, “Rachi Kazoku to no 6 Nen Sensō”, 237. The article appeared first in *Bungei Shunjū* 12 (2002) under the title “Rachi ka Kome ka: Baikoku no Seijika Retsuden”.

²³⁸ *IBID*, 236.

²³⁹ Satō, *Chōsen Jōsei wo yomu*, 107.

*afraid of their launches is the most foolish thing we can do*²⁴⁰. Araki, as well, saw overcoming one's fear as essential in facing up to the North Korean regime: *"I feel fear myself. I think that all Japanese, big or small, can feel that in their hearts. However if we can completely overcome this fear, I think we can bring all the abductees back home"*²⁴¹.

Reason and emotion

The unprecedented assertiveness some of the debaters were showing spurred a sense of urgency in the people who saw this as a dangerous trend. Several commentators felt that those who fronted sanctions and even SDF intervention over the abduction issue were letting themselves be carried away by unhampered emotions of revenge. The real concern, they argued, was North Korea's nuclear development. To counter the frenzied demands for tough measures, they suggested that the North Korea problem should be dealt with according to a rational logic based on realpolitik. In other words, firstly, they held that the problem should be dealt with through diplomatic talks, and secondly, the problem was the "direct" nuclear issue rather than the "emotional" abduction issue.

These conflicting views gave birth to the debate which became known as "reason (*chi/ri*) versus emotion" (*jō*). Perhaps needless to say, the firebrands on the abduction issue were not pleased with being labelled as some kind of irrational savages prone to give in to emotional impulses. Many of them countered that the abduction issue wasn't merely an emotional problem, but matter-of-factly it was closely connected to the security of the nation and thus also to the national interest.

Abe Shinzō felt that the reason and emotion debate was based on an erroneous foundation as the abduction issue was closely tied up to North Korea's international terror and therefore a national security concern: *"To pursue responsibility for the abductions isn't simply to let oneself be carried away by "emotions". We know that the perpetrator of the Korean Airlines Bombing Incident, Kim Hyong-hee, received education by Taguchi Yaeko*²⁴² *which made her able to pass as Japanese. In this way the abductions were carried out as a part of North Korea's international terror. That is certainly a security related problem. And to*

²⁴⁰ Abe, "Jikan ha wareware ni yūri ni hataraku", 62.

²⁴¹ Kazuhiro Araki and Mizuho Ishikawa, "Anatara no Hijō ha wasurenai!", *Seiron* 12 (2002): 93.

²⁴² An abduction victim abducted in 1978. She allegedly died in North Korea in 1986.

*wave this off with big headlines as an “emotional” problem, can’t be thought of as anything but a conscious effort to distort information.*²⁴³

The Kyoto University professor Nakanishi Terumasa also criticized the proponents of the “emotion vs. reason” argument as he saw, much like Abe, the abduction issue to be inseparably connected to the security of Japan. *“These commentators should reflect deeply on the thoughtlessness of such an argument. For Japan, true “reason” is precisely a complete, comprehensive solution to the abduction issue which is the starting point in [preserving] the security of our nation”,* he held²⁴⁴.

Araki Kazuhiro pointed out that the apprehensiveness toward tough measures stemmed from an oversimplification of the abduction issue as merely an emotional issue and a fear of North Korean reprisals. He held that it was rather the ones who were reluctant toward tough measures who were carried away by fearful emotions. In the wake of 9/17 he argued that *“there is a wrong interpretation of “emotion and reason”. “Emotions” aren’t the emotions of the families, but the cowardly emotions of those who claim that it is. When it comes to the matter of seriously confronting North Korea there is, in some scenarios, a risk of war. That is frightening and we don’t want to suffer damage. Therefore there exists an “emotion” that wants the families to shut up. That’s why [some people] try to hold [us] back with their [talk of] “emotions”, even though there exists reason in this country that tells us to save the people who have been abducted”*²⁴⁵.

As the public opinion’s sympathies for the families and inclination toward stronger measures against North Korea grew stronger in the years following 9/17, it was no longer viable to denounce the hardliners simply as “emotional” (implying irrational) without running a serious risk of political downfall, and the debate of reason versus emotion eventually died out. Abe declared triumphantly in 2004 that *“[...] I retorted against those media and critics who were trying to trivialize the issue [...] [and] as a result, there are none of those people who are claiming chi and jō now”*²⁴⁶.

²⁴³ Shinzō Abe, *Utsukushii Kuni he* (Tokyo: Bungeishunjū, 2006), 52.

²⁴⁴ Nakanishi, “Kitachōsen no Kaku kara Kokka to Kokumin wo mamoreru no ka”, 52.

²⁴⁵ Araki and Ishikawa, “Anatara no Hijō ha wasurenai!”, 93.

²⁴⁶ Shinzō Abe and Hisahiko Okazaki, *Kono Kuni wo mamoru Ketsui* (Tokyo: Fusōsha, 2004), 111-113, quoted in Schoff, “Political Fences & Bad Neighbors”, 10.

Abe and Araki, as we have seen, were eager to point out that the Japanese people could not allow themselves to succumb to fear in the face of the North Korean threat. However the Japanese people had good reasons to feel fear. At approximately the same time as 9/17 the so-called second nuclear crisis on the Korean Peninsula arose. The US claimed to have evidence that North Korea was developing nuclear weapons and North Korea responded by throwing out the IAEA inspectors and withdrawing from the NPT in 2003. The international community got its suspicions confirmed once and for all when North Korea conducted its first nuclear test in October 2006. A daring SDF-orchestrated rescue operation did not longer only risk a confrontation with North Korea's numerous, but old-fashioned, conventional military, now such an operation had the potential to provoke forth nuclear retaliation. As mentioned earlier, it probably makes most sense to regard North Korea's nuclear weapons as a deterrent (to North Korea's dismay, the US has never granted North Korea guarantees that it will not be attacked). However, a rescue operation on North Korean soil is just as much an infringement on national sovereignty as when North Korea snatched people off Japanese beaches in the 70s and 80s. This is a grave international crime which no state in the world would take lightly, much less a North Korea which is known to be obsessed with prestige²⁴⁷. The chances of an unprovoked North Korean attack are minimal, but by sending the SDF to North Korea, Japan would be pushing its luck dangerously far against a nuclear power with a rich history of brinkmanship.

PM Kan's slip of tongue

Even with the odds stacked up, the above-mentioned group still profess military action as the only method of bringing the abductees back. KKAI which initially was reluctant to support this radical proposal has now joined forces with this movement. After the recent North Korean shelling of the South Korean Yeonpyeong island, KKAI and SKAI convened an extraordinary meeting where an outraged KKAI Secretary-General Masumoto Teruaki addressed the lawmakers of Japan: *"Now KKAI and SKAI would like to make a request directed to the Diet members. We request constitutional reform, including reform of the SDF law in order to rescue the Japanese who are in North Korea"*, and further he echoed Araki's

²⁴⁷ For more on North Korea's obsession with prestige, see Young-su Kim, "Gaiko: Ishin Jushi no Sutairu" in *Kitachōsen ha, ima*, ed. Kōichi Sakamoto (Tokyo: Iwanami Shinsho, 2007), 58-62.

claim from a couple of years earlier: *“The only ones who can rescue the Japanese abductees are the Japanese SDF”*²⁴⁸.

And as so many times before, the Government obediently took KKAI’s claims to heart. Just three days after KKAI and SKAI’s emergency meeting, PM Kan Naoto met with the families and made some shocking remarks. He became the first top-level politician to openly support the two organizations’ call for a SDF dispatch to North Korea as the PM hinted that he would take steps to allow the SDF to *“rescue the abductees in the North in case of a contingency”*²⁴⁹.

Kan’s remarks stirred up controversy as they indicated a massive overhaul of Japan’s “Peace Constitution”, but more importantly since his proposal had the potential to seriously hurl Japan into military confrontation. The leader of the SDP, Fukushima Mizuho characterized Kan’s remarks as *“appalling”*, and warned that *“if the SDF are dispatched, they might plunge into war”*²⁵⁰. North Korea did of course not let the occasion slip to take a stab at Japan, and denounced the contingency plan in its notoriously flamboyant manner as *“a dangerous war plan of the Japanese militarist forces to invade not only the DPRK and China, but the rest of Asia”*²⁵¹.

But Kan’s remarks came under heavy criticism domestically as well. So much, in fact, that just days later Chief Cabinet Secretary Sengoku Yoshito had to retract Kan’s remarks. During a press conference Sengoku clarified that *“there is absolutely no such plan”*, interpreting that Kan might have suggested that Japan needs to undertake *“mental exercises”* about how to cope with an eventual contingency in North Korea²⁵².

Even though the Government was quick to retract the remarks, Kan’s *“mental exercises”* might have been an indication that, amidst rising tensions in North-East Asia, the day the

²⁴⁸ “Kitachōsen no Kankoku Hōgeki ni Kōgi shi Rachi Higaisha Kyūshutsu ni Manzen no sonae wo motomeru Kinkyū Shukaku Hōkoku”, SKAI’s homepages (12.07, 2010), <http://www.sukuukai.jp/mailnews.php?itemid=2416>

²⁴⁹ “Yūji no Sai, Rachi Higaisha Kyūshutsu ni Jieitai: Kan shushō ga Shutsudō ni Genkyū”, *Asahi Shinbun* (Tokyo), 12.11, 2010, morning edition.

²⁵⁰ “Japan not considering SDF dispatch to Korea in case of contingencies”, Japan Today (Tokyo), 12.13, 2010, <http://www.japantoday.com/category/politics/view/sdp-head-raps-kans-idea-to-dispatch-sdf-in-korean-peninsula-crisis>

²⁵¹ “Japan’s dangerous moves to stage comeback to Korea flailed”, KCNA (Tokyo), 12.21, 2010, <http://www.kcna.co.jp/index-e.htm>

²⁵² “Japan not considering SDF dispatch to Korea in case of contingencies”, Japan Today (Tokyo), 12.13, 2010, <http://www.japantoday.com/category/politics/view/sdp-head-raps-kans-idea-to-dispatch-sdf-in-korean-peninsula-crisis>

Japanese Government decides to comply with this most daring of KKAI and SKAI's North Korea policy proposals might not be too far away.

13. The Chōsen school debate

An indication of change?

There are not many indications pointing toward change in the deadlock between Japan and North Korea. In order for changes to occur it will be necessary for both sides to alter their stances which, as of today, are incompatible. Japan keeps insisting on a vague "solution" to the abduction issue before negotiations on normalization can be realized, and North Korea has not changed its position since the 2007 claim that the abduction issue is solved. North Korea has frequently stated that "*the "abduction issue" is an issue of bringing the dead to life*"²⁵³.

In August 2010, on the 100th anniversary of the Japanese occupation of Korea, the newly inaugurated Japanese Prime Minister Kan Naoto expressed to the South Korean President Lee Myung Bak his "*heartfelt sentiments of regret and apology for the great damage and suffering*"²⁵⁴ colonial rule had inflicted upon the South Koreans. This did not mark the first time a Japanese Prime Minister apologized for Japan's past colonial rule, Prime Minister Murayama expressed his "*deepest regrets and heartfelt apologies*"²⁵⁵ on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the end of WW2 in 1995 in a statement that was, down to the wording, almost exactly similar to Kan's 15 years later. The Murayama statement was more or less aimed at North Korea with whom normalization was at the top of the foreign affairs agenda. This, however, contrasts significantly to Kan's statement which came at a time when the term "normalization" is nothing but a ghost from the past; Kan does not mention North Korea in his statement. His apology was the first Prime Ministerial apology which was solely aimed at South Korea. Foreign Minister Okada was at pains to explain a couple of days later

²⁵³ "DPRK Foreign Ministry blasts Abe Group's Racket over "Abduction Issue"", 07.20, 2007, KCNA (Tokyo), <http://www.kcna.co.jp/index-e.htm>

²⁵⁴ <http://sankei.jp.msn.com/politics/policy/100810/plc1008102312029-n1.htm>

²⁵⁵ Haruki Wada, "Jiyūminshutō to Kitachōsen", *Ronza* 8 (2004): 80.

that “*I think [Kan] had the whole Korean peninsula in mind*”²⁵⁶, but it seemed rather unconvincing. North Korea dismissed Kan’s apology as a “*step backwards from the Murayama statement*”²⁵⁷. The statement was instantly passed as a cabinet resolution by the Kan government.

Former PM Abe Shinzō, upon inspecting the newly elected Kan cabinet, wryly remarked: “*such a sinister leftist government has rarely been seen in history*”²⁵⁸ Another former PM, Asō Tarō, joined in on the condemnation, exclaiming that “[...] *it is the first time [we’ve had] a government this leftist.*”²⁵⁹ Despite such harsh criticism, there seems to be little “leftist” about the current government if one contemplates the ideological significance the term used to carry just a few decades back. The LDP hegemony may be over, but the Democratic Party of Japan’s policy toward North Korea, one of the only remaining communist states in the world, shows how ideologically concentrated Japanese politics have become across the camps. Even if one should agree with Abe and Asō and feel that Kan’s government is the most leftist in Japan’s history, one would still be hard pressed for answers when asked about what really has changed, especially in the government’s North Korea policy which still appears to be tightly restricted by the public opinion and the interest organizations KKAI and SKAI.

But there has been one small, but potentially significant indication of change during the still fresh Kan administration. I think it worthwhile to look into the issue of whether to include the North Korea-affiliated Chōsen schools in the tuition-waver program directed at Japan’s high schools. The short-lived Hatoyama administration launched an ambitious program to make all senior high schools in Japan free of charge. However critical voices calling for the exclusion of the Chōsen schools soon came to the fore. The Chōsen schools have close ties with North Korea and the schools’ education system is strictly dictated by North Korea. This means that the textbooks, exclusively in Korean, have to adhere to the official North Korean, ideological standpoints, resulting in some rather biased takes on controversial, historical issues such as Japanese colonial rule, North Korea’s involvement (or lack thereof) in international terrorist activities, and last, but not least, the abduction issue. Furthermore, all

²⁵⁶ <http://sankei.jp.msn.com/politics/policy/100813/plc1008131816004-n1.htm>

²⁵⁷ <http://sankei.jp.msn.com/world/korea/100814/kor1008140951001-n1.htm>

²⁵⁸ “”Sayoku Seiken” to Hihan: Jimin, Abe, Asō shi ra”, *Asahi Shinbun* (Tokyo), 06.08, 2010.

²⁵⁹ IBID.

classrooms are required to display the pictures of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong-il, a symbol of allegiance so powerful that many Japanese probably see it as a treacherous provocation.

So sensitive did this issue become that it was decided to establish an expert panel anonymous from the public that would examine whether the Chōsen schools were to be included in the tuition-waver program or not. While the tuition-waver law was enforced at all of Japan's other high schools, the expert panel at the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) just couldn't decide on the fate of the Chōsen schools. MEXT came under intense pressure from both supporters and protestors. North Korea also took part in the debate through its news outlets, vociferously attacking "*the reptile media*" Sankei Shinbun, Yomiuri Shinbun and the political right in general for plotting a "*smear campaign against the measure*", and further stating that "*the Koreans in Japan have the same obligations to pay taxes as the Japanese people do. Therefore, it is quite clear that the Japanese authorities should naturally give a share of them to the national education of the Koreans in Japan*"²⁶⁰.

Despite the lofty rhetoric which so often seems to do North Korea more harm than good, it was pretty obvious that North Korea had a point. The Japanese media, Sankei Shinbun in particular, were resolutely against the inclusion of the Chōsen schools in the tuition-waver program. At least in the case of Sankei Shinbun, it is hardly an exaggeration to label the newspaper's reporting a "*smear campaign*". It ran stories on the latest events in the tuition-waver debate almost daily, all profoundly negative. It kept feeding its readers stories about how the Chōsen schools had worked as training institutions for North Korean agents who reportedly even had been involved in the abductions, the ideological education which is so strict that "*even suicides occur*"²⁶¹, the special benefits given to the children of CS high officials²⁶², and so on.

But Sankei was far from alone in this matter. As a matter of fact, the Japanese people were near unanimously opposed to a potential Chōsen school inclusion. In September 2010 Sankei

²⁶⁰ "KCNA Refutes Misinformation of Japanese Newspapers", KCNA (Tokyo), 09.20, 2010, <http://www.kcna.co.jp/index-e.htm>

²⁶¹ "Kimu Shuseki Shōzōga Migaki, Jisatsusha ga deru hodo Shiso Kyōiku: "Jitai Ninshiki wo": Chōsen Gakkō moto Kyōyū ga Kokuhatsu Shuki", *Sankei Shinbun* (Tokyo), 08.07, 2010, morning edition.

²⁶² "Chōsen Gakkō: Sōren Kanbu, Shokuin no Kodomo ha motokara Gakuhi Menjo...Mushōka nara mizumashi Jukyū", *Sankei Shinbun* (Tokyo), 09.26, 2010, morning edition.

ran a survey asking people if they thought it appropriate for the Chōsen schools to be included in the tuition-waver program. A dominant 96% of the respondents answered no²⁶³. The same survey also revealed that the majority saw the Chōsen school issue as connected with the abduction issue as 58% of the respondents conveyed that they thought the tuition-waver (of the Chōsen schools) was impeding a solution to the abduction issue.

Even officials on governmental level did not hesitate to link the Chōsen school issue with the abduction issue. The leader of the Headquarters for the Abduction Issue, Nakai Hiroshi, expressed that he wanted North Korea to return the abductees before Japan granted the Chōsen schools access to the tuition-waver program²⁶⁴.

In the following month Abe Shinzō made the following bombastic argument: *“If, for example, Aum Shinrikyō were to build a school that was positive toward killing people based on religious doctrine, would it be ok for Japan to support it with money? Of course it wouldn’t”*²⁶⁵. Thus Abe, without any reservation, drew parallels between the Chōsen schools and a fanatic, religious sect responsible for killing 12 people and injuring hundreds in Japan’s most famous terror incident, the 1995 sarin gas attack on the subways of Tokyo.

By this time it was clear that the Chōsen schools were sitting ducks open to attacks from anyone, no attack too unreasonable.

Perhaps needless to say, KKAI and SKAI also became engaged in this issue. In a bid to apply further pressure, representatives from KKAI and SKAI went to MEXT’s offices and delivered a written request which read: *“We are sending North Korea a wrong message which tells them that Japan has softened on the abduction issue”*²⁶⁶. KKAI Chairman Iizuka Shigeo took the opportunity to air his concerns about the lack of unity in the government: *“On the one hand our government applies sanctions on North Korea, but on the other MEXT is continuing this debate on whether to subsidize education for the Chōsen schools or not. I can’t see a unified*

²⁶³ “Watashi mo itai: “Chōsen Gakkō he no Jugyōryō Mushōka”/“Datō de ha nai” 96%”, *Sankei Shinbun* (Tokyo), 09.09, 2010, morning edition.

²⁶⁴ Kyōko Hasegawa, “Fee row shines spotlight on Japan’s pro-North Korean schools”, Google News, 04.08, 2010, <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5g5bv7c0ND-KO5uCYDuXR4crgoFgA>

²⁶⁵ ““Oumu no Gakkō dattara Tekiyō wo sarenai”: Chōsen Gakkō he no Kōkō Jugyōryō Mushōka Mondai de Abe shi”, *Sankei Shinbun* (Tokyo), 09.16, 2010, morning edition.

²⁶⁶ ““Sukūkai” ga Chōsen Gakkō Mushōka Miokuri Yosei: “Kitachōsen wo Ri suru dake””, *Sankei Shinbun* (Tokyo), 08.25, 2010, morning edition.

judgment in the government, and that angers me"²⁶⁷. Masumoto Teruaki expressed fear that the subsidized tuition money could end up in the hands of the North Korean government since there was no monitoring system that could ensure that the financial aid would be used only on the school children.

In this way the debate continued for months. Only a very few people in academic circles pointed out that it was unreasonable toward the Korean students to link their educational opportunities to the abductions which are a state crime conducted by the North Korean government some 30 years ago. But despite the dirty accusations against the Chōsen schools, despite the rather one-sided media campaign, despite the danger of being regarded as pro-North Korea, despite the 96% in disfavor of the inclusion of the Chōsen schools, and most importantly of all, despite the intense lobbying of KKAI and SKAI, the Kan Government and the MEXT expert panel has still not ruled out subsidizing the Chōsen schools. The final verdict has been postponed time and time again, provoking both proponents and opponents. If the government decides to grant the Chōsen schools access to the tuition-waver program on the same basis as the other Japanese senior high schools, this would be a truly significant decision because it would mark the first time in the post-9/17 era that the government has ratified a policy that is in direct contrast to KKAI and SKAI's desire.

An eventual decision to include the Chōsen schools would of course not be anywhere near the magnitude a decision to abandon the normalization premise (*"no normalization without a solution to the abduction issue"*) would account to, but it would perhaps mark the first small steps toward a government that dares to make unpopular decisions in order to thaw relations with North Korea. The stubborn stances of both governments are, as of today, incompatible so in order for normalization to again realistically appear on the agenda, both sides must be ready to make compromises. In case of the Japanese Government, this will necessarily mean to clash with public opinion.

²⁶⁷ IBID.

Conclusion

I set out to find changes in Japanese attitudes toward North Korea spurred by 9/17, and by going through a relatively large quantity of Japanese literature on the so-called North Korea problem, I believe I have found some rather clear changes in the attitude patterns among the Japanese. Some of these changes are true changes in the sense that they represent a clear break with the reality that existed before the change occurred. Other changes are semi-changes in the sense that they are continuations of already existing attitudes, but nonetheless indicate change in that they now adhere to a more North Korea-oriented focus than has been the case earlier.

When it comes to these semi-changes, I have pointed to the transformation from an assailant mentality to a victim mentality and the threat perception. These are not new phenomena activated by 9/17. The legacy of Hiroshima and Nagasaki has throughout the Cold War era and the 90s been a powerful symbol of victimhood, but since 9/17 the victimhood narrative has come to very specifically single out North Korea as the offender in the Japan – North Korea relationship. The dependence on the US in the postwar era never allowed Japan to openly frame the US as the offender responsible for Japan's misery, and Hiroshima and Nagasaki were in a way lamented as tragedies without a tangible culprit. They were abstractly regarded as a terrible byproduct of war and nuclear weapons rather than victims at the hands of the power wielding these weapons. This abstraction, however, changed with 9/17. Through 9/17 the Japanese were able to put a face to its victimization. North Korea, friendless and isolated, holds no leverage over Japan (except perhaps the pretence of a military threat) which means that as long as the discourse restricts itself to the framework of Japan – North Korea relations, Japan can use the abduction issue to legitimize, or at least, overshadow its own brutal past as a colonizer without suffering noteworthy consequences from the international community. At least among Japanese right-wing debaters it has become legit and expected to compare the abduction issue with colonial rule despite the fact that the two occurrences are completely different in sheer numbers of victims and in historical context. The specific mention of North Korea as a part of the right-wing discourse trying to overshadow Japan's own past as an offender by finding new offenders to focus on – is a new pattern since 9/17.

Another semi-change in Japanese attitudes toward North Korea is the increased threat perception. As we have seen from the Asahi Shinbun polls, threat perception rose dramatically with the 1998 missile launch so an increased threat perception is not a new trend in itself. But the threat pattern eventually looked like stabilizing before it rose drastically again with 9/17. This is significant because, unlike the Taepodong launch, the abduction issue is not a clear-cut security issue (Abe Shinzō would beg to differ however) in the sense that it does not pose a direct threat to Japan (unless one suspects that the abductions might still be going on, like Araki Kazuhiro suggests). That the threat perception nonetheless could rise must stem from the overall worsening image of North Korea (see the dislike rate graph) due to which radical anti-North Korea hardliners obtained near unlimited coverage in Japan's media. These commentators fronted sanctions, hard-line measures and increasingly even military action. The latter is the most radical of the policy proposals the heightened threat perception spurred, and the fact that the commentators advocating military action used the abduction issue, not the nuclear issue, as their main argument suggests that the abduction issue was just as influential as the so-called second nuclear crisis, if not more, in fanning up Japanese threat perceptions at around the time of 9/17.

I will now move over to the more readily observable attitude changes spurred by 9/17.

As several people throughout this thesis have pointed out, 9/17 made MOFA's North Korea policy vulnerable to the influence of the public opinion and especially to the intense lobbying of KKAI and SKAI. I have in detail described how governmental North Korea policy, almost without exception, has complied with the demands of these organizations. The two most important results of this public influence are the adoption of sanctions and the reduction of normalization from a thriving diplomatic goal in the 90s to an impossible prospect post-9/17.

Another tangible change is the obvious transformation from suspicion to fact the abduction issue underwent with Kim Jong-il's abduction confession. More importantly for my thesis is the subsequent change in the legitimacy balance among the commentators on the North Korea problem. Some commentators like Hasuike Tooru and Hirasawa Katsuei maintain that there existed a taboo sanctioning criticism against North Korea before 9/17. I do not take a standpoint on whether such a taboo really existed or not, I find it sufficient to point out that there are many commentators who honestly feel that such a taboo did indeed exist. Taboo

or no taboo notwithstanding, the mood before 9/17 clearly allowed pro-North Korea sentiments, or at least North Korea sympathetic sentiments in the public debate. 9/17 marks a radical break with this climate of opinion as anti-North Korea sentiments became the only tolerated attitudes. In the new climate of opinion the abduction issue became the ultimate standard of morality. People who had denied the possibility of North Korean involvement or expressed doubts (no matter how rationally explained) in the lack of solid evidence were systematically attacked in a media smear campaign, particularly in the weeklies and monthlies. These people's legitimacy (even in matters far removed from the abduction issue) was slandered and many of them fell silent thus increasing the feeling of conformity in the North Korea debate. In the ensuing one-sidedness of the debate KKAI and especially SKAI sailed up as the opinion leaders playing on emotional strings to gain people's sympathy and support. The families' roles as victims in their dichotomical relationship with North Korea – the offender – have certainly boosted KKAI's legitimacy in the public debate. As we have seen with the example of Hirasawa, any freewheeling or deviation from the will of these opinion leaders can potentially lead to social ostracism no matter how adherent to the anti-North Korea campaign one may have been in the past. The conformity needs to be upheld at all times. People and political entities whose stance was regarded as in breach with this new climate of opinion could end up suffering great damage socially and politically as was the case with for example SDP, CS and most of the normalization pioneers of the 90s who operated in an era where conciliatory attitudes were tolerated.

As already mentioned, the change in attitudes toward North Korea brought by 9/17 have made the prospect of normalization nearly impossible. Japan has since the days of Koizumi insisted on a solution to the abduction issue without specifying what this means in reality. It is often indicated that a solution would at the very least mean a truthful and believable investigation of the fates of the abductees which North Korea claims are dead or have never entered North Korea in the first place. North Korea has several times launched investigations without coming up with new information on the dubious abduction cases and now considers the issue to be solved. In this deadlock it's difficult to see how the issue can progress without one of the sides yielding fundamentally. In fact, one factor that always presents itself as a major obstacle is the lack of diplomatic relations. If normalization had been realized, Japan would from its embassy in Pyongyang be able to monitor North Korea's investigations better

and perhaps even participate in the investigation process. Diplomatic connections in Pyongyang would perhaps also lead to more reliable intelligence acquisition than the questionable witness reports by North Korean defectors on which Japan is relying now. Using the embassy for intelligence purposes would probably not please North Korea, but even if Japan opted for a less Cold War-like approach, normalization could serve beneficial in reaching some sort of solution. Normalization would mean a realization of the economic cooperation stated in the Pyongyang Declaration and perhaps also compensation money for Japan's colonial rule as was the case in Japan's normalization with South Korea in 1965. For an economy annually flirting with collapse this is attractive money which North Korea might be willing to go to some length for. Offering North Korea money in exchange of compliance and good behavior is a strategy that has frustrated many a policy maker worldwide and it would perhaps serve Japan no better, but at least normalization offers Japan alternatives. As of now, the situation is deadlocked and dealing with North Korea is difficult and dangerous. Japan's public opinion has since 9/17 attacked everyone who has engaged with North Korea. It is ironic that the frenzied public opinion has turned normalization – which is its best, and possibly only, option for a satisfactory solution – into an impossibility.

As the stances of Japan and North Korea remain incompatible, the deadlock remains. Looking at how the events unfolded after Kim Jong-il's historic abduction confession on September 17, 2002, it is rather evident what lessons North Korea drew from the unprecedented display of honesty. The abduction issue is a powder keg and we will not get burned again, must have been what the North Koreans thought as they decided to close the case. Unless some very tangible incentives are presented, it seems highly unlikely that a break in the deadlock will be initiated by North Korea. This ungrateful assignment seems befallen upon the Japanese government alone. If the Japanese government is as determined to solve the abduction issue as it proclaims to be²⁶⁸, it needs to clearly define what a solution concretely means and it should also strive toward normalization of diplomatic relations. At the same time it needs to be aware that, outside of a potential solution to the abduction issue, normalization will bring few benefits for Japan. Japan has a chance to clear its name on the Korean peninsula and thus possibly lay down the foundation for a solution to the abduction issue, but Japan must abandon any illusions of immediate, economic benefits.

²⁶⁸ The much acclaimed journalist Tahara Sōichirō claims that MOFA knows that the unreturned abductees are dead, but is content with letting the public believe in their survival.

Is Japan willing to do that? That depends largely on whether it is willing to defy public opinion which certainly will oppose both a clearly formulated definition of a solution and the proposal of normalized relations. One thing seems certain: Until the day Japan's powerful actors, be it the government or the media, dare to oppose and defy the public opinion, public attitudes will stay the same and the Japan – North Korea relations will remain deadlocked.

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