

Chapter 4 Repatriation from the Internment of a Long Period

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Section 1 Background to the Return

On April 22, 1950, the day when the repatriation ship from Nakhodka (Находка) entered Maizuru port, *ITAR-TASS* reported the Soviet government's announcement, "Repatriation of the Japanese prisoners of war has been completed, excluding 1,487 suspected war criminals and nine prisoners who are receiving medical treatment, has been completed." This was a terrible shock to the people of Japan, particularly to the families of the many survivors not yet repatriated. The Japanese government presented this problem to the United Nations from a humanitarian perspective, and made efforts to push forward the repatriation of internees, but after this, the repatriation of Japanese internees was interrupted for a long time.

Stalin's death on March 5th, 1953 cued a change in this situation. The Korean ceasefire agreement was signed in July of that same year, and *the Geneva Accords of 1954* for ceasefire the war in Indochina was signed in July of the following year, 1954, resulting in epochal changes in the international situation. Japanese-Soviet negotiations started in June 1955, and in July, an agreement was reached concerning some types of adjustments including exchanges between East and West at a top-level conference between the USA, UK, France and the USSR in Geneva. There was a shift to what became known as the second phase of the Cold War, and what can be seen as a thaw in national attitudes began.

According to Victor Karpov's, *The Captives of Stalin: Siberian Internment of the Japanese Army 1945-1956* (Виктор Карпов, *Пленники Сталина: Сибирское Интернирование Японской Армии 1945-1956 гг.*), the policy on the Japanese internees changed rapidly in the USSR after Stalin's death.

The 216 Japanese (25 of whom were prisoners) were included among the persons granted an amnesty by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet order dated March 27, 1953. Subsequently, on April 15 the Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Central Committee determined the release before the expiration of their term of internment and repatriation to Japan of 564 Japanese (including 374 prisoners), and this opened the way for the Soviet government decision dated September 18 “About repatriation to Japan of Japanese prisoners of war and citizens” for the returning of those Japanese still remaining in Soviet territory. This led to the restarting of group repatriations under an agreement between the Japanese and Soviet Red Cross Societies (The first group landed in Maizuru on December 1, 1953).

The USSR’s change of policy concerning Japan was not limited only to the problem of internees. The USSR was aiming to normalize Japanese-Soviet diplomatic relations. As a crucial change, at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union held in February 1956, Stalin was denounced in “Khrushchev Report (Secret Speech),” aiding the normalization of Japanese-Soviet diplomatic relations. The report by the Central Committee of the Communist Party at the 20th Congress stated that it would follow a positive policy of improving relationships with western-bloc countries including Japan, and would make efforts to intensify mutual reliance and to develop trade relations, and contacts and cooperation in aspects of culture and science.

Section 2 Japanese-Soviet Negotiations and Repatriation Problems

The concrete movement for normalization of Japanese-Soviet diplomatic relations started with the approach from the Soviet side.

The Chinese-Soviet Joint Declaration on the Relationships with Japan dated October 12, 1954 attested that if Japan made efforts to establish political and economic relations with the USSR and the People’s Republic of China, Japan would receive the all-out support of China and the USSR. The Administration of Ichiro Hatoyama, President of the Democratic Party, was

formed on December 10th, 1954. Andrei Domnitskii (Андрей Домницкий) of the USSR's Representative Office in Tokyo handed Prime Minister Hatoyama the "USSR government announcement on normalization of Japanese-Soviet diplomatic relations (Domnitskii note)," suggesting that negotiations should start a little more than one month later, on January 25th of the following year, 1955. At its Cabinet Council of February 16th, the Hatoyama Administration determined the start of negotiations for the normalization of Japanese-Soviet diplomatic relations, and the diplomatic talks began in London on June 7, 1955 with two plenipotentiaries, Shunichi Matsumoto and Yakov Malik (Яков Малик).

Both Japan and the USSR submitted their own original plans for the peace treaty, and they held many negotiation sessions, but the opinions of the two sides clashed over the territorial problem, and there was no progress in concrete negotiations on the treaty. When Japan strongly advocated giving preference to the problem of the repatriation of internees, which the Japanese side considered an important problem as the humanitarian one, the Soviet side said that the problem of repatriation of internees would be solved when the peace treaty was concluded, strongly insisting that the two were inseparable; the USSR did not concede and insisted that the peace treaty be settled first.

On September 5, the Soviet delegation handed the Japanese side two lists (the so-called "Malik lists") showing a total of 1,365 Japanese, a "List of Japanese military prisoners convicted in the USSR (1,011 persons)," and a "List of civilians with Japanese nationality in the USSR (354 persons)". The Soviet government had never before mentioned the fact that it had interned Japanese civilians. Presenting a list at this time that clearly referred to civilians was an epochal act showing the enthusiasm of the Soviet side for the negotiations. But the Soviet side said that all of the Japanese internees were war criminals, so they could not leave the USSR unless they were granted amnesty under Soviet domestic law, and amnesty in special situations was determined by the Supreme Soviet, so there was no other way but to wait until the peace treaty was signed. The negotiations encountered difficulties, and were temporarily suspended after the 15th meeting was held on September 30. Plenipotentiary Matsumoto returned home.

While the peace talks were suspended, the Japanese side handed over a list of 385 persons not yet repatriated and not included in the “Malik lists,” with data showing that according to the survey done by Japan they were still alive, and asked the Soviet side to do its own survey. Also, on January 31, 1956, after the negotiations were restarted, Japan added 10,792 persons not yet repatriated to the previous list, to prepare a new list of 11,177 persons not yet repatriated, presented this new list to the Soviets and requested that they check their information.

The London peace talks, restarted in January 1956, were again suspended for an undetermined period after the 23rd session on March 20, and all members of the delegations left London. In the provision-by-provision discussion of the original peace treaty plans, the two sides did not show any agreement whatsoever on the economic provisions, and had completely opposite views regarding the territorial problem. There was no way of achieving a breakthrough, so the negotiations were finally suspended. In their last meeting, Matsumoto asked the Soviet side to reconsider the internee repatriation problem, but Malik refused to consider it separately from the peace treaty.

There were conflicting opinions in Japan. The one opinion is that the state of war should be ended and the other opinion is pending questions should be settled and diplomatic relations should be normalized. The biggest point at issue was territory. Should Japan make a peace treaty at the sacrifice of territory in order to help the internees, or persist in demanding the northern territory even if it meant sacrificing over 1,000 fellow countrymen? The internees had actually been taken as hostages by the Soviet side. The Japanese government and ordinary Japanese citizens including the families of internees were asked to make a political decision. Prime Minister Hatoyama consistently held firm to the decision that “We should not take lightly the life of even one person.”

In this period, on March 6, 1956, information about the “Khabarovsk incident” was reported by the 6th group of latter-term repatriates who had been returned to Maizuru. In the previous year, on October 16, 1955, their fellow countrymen interned in Khabarovsk opposed the unjust handling of internees by a strike at the risk of their lives. The Soviet side tried to

suppress the strike by mobilizing the army under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Home Affairs, and the health of the Japanese internees markedly worsened (According to information clarified later, sabotage spontaneously developed into organized labor refusal in December 1955. And in March 1956, the Japanese internees also started a hunger strike which was forcibly stopped). Concerning the Khabarovsk incident, the Japanese government had Matsumoto ask Malik to take proper measures, in London on March 13, and the Japanese government sent “comfort items” to those fellow countrymen twice, in May and October, through the Red Cross route. The health of these internees was reported to be in grievous condition.

In Japan, a “rally of all internees’ families for the repatriation of internees from the USSR” was held on March 30 in the Japan Red Cross head office auditorium. Takeshi Shibata, leader of the 6th Nakhodka repatriation ship echelon, also attended, and reported on the situation of his fellow countrymen in the USSR. The rally faced the reality of the difficulty in obtaining agreement with its demand, based on humanitarian theory, that the USSR separate the topic of repatriation and give it precedence over other topics as had already been requested in the London negotiations, and participants in the rally focused on the line of demanding the earliest possible normalization of Japanese-Soviet diplomatic relations. In an interview with the rally delegation the following day, Prime Minister Hatoyama stated his conviction, “Even if the Hatoyama Cabinet falls apart as a result, I want to solve this internee problem, which is a humanitarian question.”

After the Japan-USSR Fisheries Talks was signed on May 15, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mamoru Shigemitsu, was expected to go to Moscow himself for negotiations on the normalization of Japanese-Soviet diplomatic relations, but these negotiations were postponed because Shigemitsu had to attend the international meeting on the Suez crisis being held in London starting on August 16. On September 1, the internees’ families set up a special “headquarters for emergency measures to immediately rescue our fellow countrymen in the USSR,” held a “rally of all internees’ families to immediately rescue our fellow countrymen in the USSR,” set up a tent village in *Chidorigafuchi*, and earnestly continued their campaign with

the goal of early conclusion of Japanese-Soviet negotiations, for about a month, until Prime Minister Hatoyama left for Moscow.

Section 3 The Japan-Soviet Joint Declaration and the Final Repatriation of All Internees

Prime Minister Hatoyama sent a letter dated September 11th to Nikolai A. Bulganin (Николай А. Булганин), Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union (Prime Minister), stating, “We are prepared to enter into negotiations for the normalization of diplomatic relations after we have obtained consent on five points: ending the state of war, the mutual establishment of embassies, immediate repatriation of internees, effectuation of the Fisheries Convention, and Soviet support for Japan’s bid to join the United Nations, with the condition that negotiations concerning the territorial problem be continued at a later date” and obtained a reply consenting to this. Plenipotentiary Matsumoto also sent a letter dated September 29 with similar significance to Andrei Gromyko (Андрей Громыко), First Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs, in particular to confirm the understanding that negotiations concerning the conclusion of a peace treaty and the territorial problem would continue after normal diplomatic relations between the two countries had restarted, and obtained a reply agreeing to this.

At the cabinet council meeting on October 2 it was decided that Prime Minister Hatoyama would visit the USSR, and the delegation departed on October 7th. The negotiations for normalization of diplomatic relations were carried out between the Japanese delegation headed by Prime Minister Hatoyama and the Soviet delegation headed by Bulganin, the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, and the Japan-Soviet Joint Declaration was announced on the 19th.

Section 5 of this declaration clearly states as follows: on the entry into force of this Joint Declaration, all Japanese citizens convicted in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics shall be released and repatriated to Japan. With regard to those Japanese whose fate is unknown,

the USSR, at the request of Japan, will continue its efforts to discover what has happened to them.” This joint declaration came into effect after the written ratifications were exchanged in Tokyo on December 12, and the repatriation of internees following the normalization of diplomatic relations began with the 11th group of latter-term repatriates from Nakhodka. The repatriation ship *Koan-maru* with 1,025 Japanese on board entered Maizuru port on December 26.

This was the last ship for the repatriation of internees from Nakhodka in the latter term, completing the “final repatriation of all internees.”

On that day, a very impressive “memorial service for persons who died in Soviet territory” was held on the premises of the Maizuru War Victims’ Relief Bureau, co-sponsored by the Overseas Interned Fellow Countrymen Rescue National Movement General Headquarters and the Association for the Acceleration of Repatriation of Fellow Countrymen in the USSR. The Chief Priest of *Higashi Honganji* (The Eastern Temple of the Original Vow) was invited to this ceremony. A repatriated persons’ “thank-you” meeting was also held, and four representatives of those who had been repatriated made speeches about their repatriation. Then, after a resolution to reconstruct the motherland and an announcement of the disbanding of the echelon by Jun Ushiroku, the echelon chief were made, the meeting ended. This splendid meeting celebrated the last of the Nakhodka repatriations. Those final returnees had endured harsh living conditions and survived in the concentration camps for over 11 years and attained emancipation. The number of the final returnees is 940 persons including 221 civilians, and Former Major Saburo Ishida, the person responsible for the Khabarovsk incident, and others were included (Those who landed at Maizuru port also included 81 interned fishermen and four persons of foreign nationality). There were 51 people included on the “Malik lists” but not repatriated in this final repatriation. Among these, eight had died, and 21 were assumed to be non-Japanese. For 22 people there were data showing that they were still alive.

Behind the joy of achieving the final repatriation of all internees, there was the grief of the families of more than 11,000 internees who had been taken away to Soviet territory; there had been information about them until a certain period but they were not repatriated, and their

families lost their last hope. After that, Japan continuously requested Soviet cooperation concerning the survey of Japanese in Soviet territory and assistance for repatriation of any Japanese still there, but by 1976 a total of only eight more Japanese had been repatriated from the Soviet mainland. In 1957-59, 766 Japanese were repatriated from Sakhalin in seven repatriation groups (total of 12th to 18th groups). The majority of these were Japanese who had remained in Sakhalin, Japanese women married to Koreans, and their families.

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