

# Victims Twice Over: Return Narratives of Ethnic Korean Atomic Bomb Survivors

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(Abstract) After World War II, more than two million people returned to their homeland, Korea, from Japan, Manchukuo, and the battlefields in the Asian Pacific area. Among them, it was reported that over ten thousand migrants were repatriated from Hiroshima and Nagasaki to the liberated Korean Peninsula. While preceding studies of Korean atomic bomb survivors have focused on their experience of victimization, their historical migration experiences were rarely given attention by social scientists. As the new national governance was reordered following the collapse of Imperial Japan, the returnees were represented as natural members to be incorporated into the new nation. From a sociocultural perspective on Korean atomic bomb survivors' return migration experiences and based on family registries and life history interviews, this paper traces how their identities and sentiments toward the homeland were intertwined with their life experiences and sociocultural networks they had built in colonial Japan. In spite of national integration propaganda, the returnees from Japan were often discriminated against as pro-Japanese, and were sometimes excluded from sociocultural reintegration at the community level because of anti-Japanese nationalistic sentiment. This paper concludes that Korea's liberation in 1945 needs to be studied more critically and ethnographically, not as an integrated space of nationalistic purity to be taken for granted but as a differentiated, subtle place in which sociocultural identities conflict.

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## 1. Introduction

The expansion of imperialism in the early twentieth century was accompanied by large-scale migration between colonies and metropolitan states. With the end of World War II and the dissolution of colonies, this population flow rapidly changed. The collapse of imperial Japan at the end of the Pacific War, too, provoked an extensive population reflux throughout East Asia. This reverse flow included some 2.2–2.5 million Koreans who had been living in places such as Manchuria, Japan, and other war zones in the Asia-Pacific region. Among these, the approximately 1.1–1.4 million Koreans returning from “defeated Japan” to “liberated Korea” constituted the highest proportion (Yi Yeonsik, 2016b). The large-scale population flow after liberation is normally depicted as an arduous rite of passage or odyssey in search of a “yearned-for fatherland” or a “people longed for in one’s dreams.” National integration following liberation was regarded as the most urgent task in the building of a new nation-state headed for independence, and migrants who had lived overseas during Korea’s colonial period were seen as obvious members for integration into the new nation-state and presented as part of a single nation.

Until now, extensive study of the mass migration that occurred following the collapse of imperial Japan has been conducted by historians and sociologists. Some have examined the relationship between occupation policies and the return of overseas Koreans from a state and governmental perspective, based on material such as documents from the Allied Forces based in Japan and South Korea as well as newspapers and journals; others have used empirical studies to make considerable progress in researching forced mobilization (Kang Incheol 1998; Kim Gwangyeol 2010; Kim Yerim 2010; Yi Yeonsik 2016a, 2016b; Yi Hyeonju 2005; Chae Yeongguk 2003; Choe Yeongho 1995; Hwang Seonik 2013; Hyeon Muam 2006; Kobayashi Sōmei 2012; Shiina Masae 1988). While many studies of Koreans returning following national liberation are conducted from diachronic, macroscopic, and policy-based perspectives, there has been relatively little research when it comes to the specific differences between returning Koreans in terms of place and time of return into Korea, region of origin, generation, gender, profession, and political character (Yi Yeonsik 2016a, 2016b). Moreover, when it comes to different types of migration, there has been a relative lack of study of colonial migrant families who lived overseas for longer periods of time before returning to their “motherland” after

Japan's defeat. In short, there is now an urgent need for studies of the population reflux and migration that occurred across East Asia at the end of the Pacific War, from macroscopic policy-based and political perspectives; for specific empirical studies of the return of colonial migrants who lived overseas for long periods of time before returning, rather than those sent overseas as part of forced mobilization related to drafted labor and conscription; and for microscopic studies that examine the daily lives, life histories, and identities of such returnees from a bottom-up perspective.

Kim Yerin's (2010) study viewed ethnic Korean colonial migrants returning to the liberated space at this time as refugees; as such, the study is notable for introducing a new perspective that contrasted with that of previous studies. According to Kim's diagnosis, the homeland for migrants returning after Japan's defeat was a place of vague yet passionate fantasy and expectation, to which they must return in order to overcome the apprehension, danger, and hostility they had encountered in metropolitan Japan and in the "postcolonial ethnic melting pot" of Manchuria. But once they actually arrived in the homeland, the state entirely failed to take care of them, leaving them to fend for themselves on the streets, thus turning most of them into refugees. From this perspective, returnees wandering the streets are defined as those whose initial fantasies and expectations of becoming citizens, of belonging to their own state, had been betrayed. Kim's research shows a fundamental difference between the chaotic spaces of liberation that appeared in the gaps between the collapse of an empire and the building of a new nation-state, and the view taken by previous studies of returnees as nationalistic symbols. Nonetheless, I believe it is necessary to go further, here, by examining in more detail the formula of "longing," whereby the chaos emergent in the postcolonial ethnic melting pot posited by Kim—the chaos in the space left by a collapsed empire after its defeat—can be resolved by "returning to the homeland."

Did returning migrants really see postwar Japan as a dangerous place from which they had to distance themselves but expect Korea to be a place of safety and integration? To ethnic Koreans in metropolitan Japan, were the space of defeat, with its ongoing mixture of defeat, occupation, and de-imperialization, and the space of liberation, with its intersection of liberation, early cold war, and de-colonialization, completely separable? In pictures of "citizens" or "refugees," the movements of returning migrants are easy to portray in terms of spaces of defeat and of liberation, using nationalist symbols, while erasing narratives not captured by the framework

of citizens versus states, or refugees versus states, or interpellated by ideological narratives, and erasing memories that do not square neatly with nationalism.

In this article, I focus on the migratory experiences of the 1.5th- and second-generation of nuclear bomb victims living in Korea—victims of colonialism who returned from Hiroshima following Korean liberation. In particular, I will address the experiences and memories of survivors who were born and raised in Japan in the 1920s and 1930s. While many previous studies of Korean nuclear bomb victims have researched how these individuals came to be bomb victims,<sup>1</sup> their unique sociocultural status in Korean society has not been an important focus of interest among historians or sociologists. The lack of attention paid to colonial migrants returning to their homeland is not unrelated to the fact that attention to return itself was also a belated development within the study of migration. This may be because migration research, given its interest in questions of social integration in nation-states, has never doubted the ethnic and sociocultural homogeneity of return migrants, instead assuming that they return naturally to spaces of automatic integration.

Among colonial migrants, the view of “return to the homeland” itself also reflects the perspective of the first generation of returning parents. From their perspective, the “homeland” was a place to return to; for the second generation, it was instead an unfamiliar land to be newly discovered. This article, based on life-history interviews with 1.5th- and second-generation ethnic Koreans living in Hiroshima and on family register research, focuses not on their status as nuclear bomb victims but on their status as colonial migrants within the population flow following liberation. Here, I examine the traces of the space of defeat and the space of liberation that remain from their migration as well as how they recall these traces. Focusing on Korean nuclear bomb victims in connection with their migratory patterns following national liberation provides important empirical data for studying the return of colonial migrants at this time. But it is also highly significant in furthering understanding of the sociocultural context of the history and political actions of Korean nuclear bomb survivors (*hibakusha*).

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<sup>1</sup> See Ichiba Junko (2003), Yi Jiyeong (2012; 2017), Kim Seungeun (2012), Jeong Geunsik (2005), Heo Gwangmu (2004; 2011), O Eungjeong (2013, 2014), Gwon Hyeoktae (2009), Bak Gyeongseop (2009), Jin Ju (2004) and Oh (2017).

## 2. The Ethnic Koreans of Hiroshima

Hiroshima grew into the military hub of Japan's Chūgoku and Shikoku regions in the process of the country's modernization. Military railways and other facilities appeared there early on in the Meiji period; among these, the city's Ujina Port served as both a key economic and logistical hub as well as a departure point for troops sent to fight in the Russo-Japanese and Sino-Japanese Wars. The city of Kure, located 16 kilometers to the southeast of Hiroshima, was also home to a large number of naval installations, developing into a naval port along with Hiroshima. From the early twentieth century, Hiroshima thus saw the appearance of various military-related heavy industrial facilities; by the 1940s, it was home to numerous machine factories, steelworks, shipyards, weapons manufacturers, and precision instrument factories. In the closing years of World War II, these factories provided munitions and military equipment to a variety of installations including the Second General Army, stationed in Hiroshima, and the local military police. Under the wartime regime, munitions producers, industry, residential construction and related civil engineering work all experienced a boom (Ichiba Junko 2003: 254–256). The high concentration of industrial and munitions facilities created high labor demand; ethnic Koreans who had entered the country during the colonial period provided unskilled labor in such factories and served as low-ranking day laborers on civil engineering and construction sites. Records indicate that the number of ethnic Koreans living in Hiroshima, having stood at approximately 700 in the 1920s, rose gradually as the war intensified and had already reached almost 40,000 by the 1940s (Kim Gwangyeol 2010: 236, 228).

It can, of course, be assumed that the number of ethnic Koreans in Hiroshima increased further after Mitsubishi Heavy Industries began employing Koreans through the mass drafting of labor from their country in around 1945. Migrants from Korea, a colony of Japan at the time, often worked in small factories, on civil engineering projects, or as stevedores, rather than at the large military factories concentrated in Hiroshima. Of course, some ordinary Koreans did work at Mitsubishi Heavy Industries' machine factory at Tōyō Kōgyō or in jobs described by authorities as "expert professions"<sup>2</sup> (public institutions, financial institutions etc). But such indi-

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<sup>2</sup> (Translator's note) 有識的な仕事 (*yūshiki-tekina shigoto*). Jobs deemed to require at least a high school education.

viduals represented only a small proportion of Koreans and were generally 1.5th- or second-generation migrants who had gone to Japan for their education. This shows that such Koreans, educated to a higher degree than their compatriots, had started to form a separate professional class from that of their parents and those around them. This also implies that by the 1940s, ethnic Koreans in educated professions, of whom there had been hardly any in the 1920s and 1930s, were generally descendants of original migrants. Even here, however, unemployment and jobless rates were high among ethnic Koreans in comparison with rates for the whole of Japan, and even among those with jobs, the proportion of day workers in construction and stevedoring jobs and of self-employed restaurateurs and traders was high.

Meanwhile, approximately 20,000 of the ethnic Koreans living in Hiroshima just before the end of WWII are reported to have survived the nuclear blast. According to official records remaining today, some 5,000 of these remained in the city, while between 10,000 and 15,000 returned to Korea (Korea Atomic Bombs Victim Association 1989).

I studied materials from the Korea Atomic Bombs Victim Association (KABVA) in 2008 and 2011. At these times, I also helped with managing association members and other related tasks; in 2011, I summarized members' family register records and conducted life-history interviews. Tables 1 and 2 below show the regions of origin of KABVA members, based on my 2011 research of family registers.

Table 2 further breaks down KABVA members, excluding multiple records from the same family. Both tables indicate that at least 90 percent of returnees registered with the association originated in Korea's Gyeongsang Provinces. Among them, an overwhelming proportion were from Hapcheon and South Gyeongsang.

Meanwhile, since KABVA members from the same family have duplicate records, distribution of region of origin can be categorized after

**Table 1.** Regions of origin of Korea Atomic Bombs Victim Association members (based on recorded domicile of origin; total: 3,320 people)

Region of origin	Gyeonggi, Gangwon	Jeolla, Jeju	Chung-cheong	South Gyeongsang		North Gyeong-sang	North Korea	Records ambiguous	Total
				Elsewhere	Hapcheon				
No. of people	78	78	107	809	1,730	498	11	9	3,320

Table 2. Data from the family registers of KABVA members (Regions of origin of KABVA members, excluding duplicate records from members of the same family)

	Gyeonggi, Gangwon	Jeolla	South Chung- cheong	South Gyeong- sang	Hapcheon	North Gyeong- sang	North Korea	Total
Hiroshima - general	7	29	27	336	671	173	1	1244
Nagasaki - general		4	7	12	3	22		48
Hiroshima - conscripted	58	10	19	4	3	2	4	100
Nagasaki - drafted	3	8	19	5		4	6	45
Total	68	51	72	357	677	201	11	1437

excluding these duplicates. Cases in which families migrated together are distinguished from those in which individuals were forcibly drafted or conscripted into the military.

Table 2 shows the number of Koreans who were forcibly sent to Japan and mobilized as workers or soldiers, later returned to Korea and registered as KABVA members, and are still in possession of their family registers. Though this indicates that a relatively small proportion of drafted Koreans returning from Hiroshima and Nagasaki joined KABVA, it must not be interpreted as meaning that the number of forcibly mobilized Koreans was itself low. Because relatively few forcibly mobilized Korean returnees joined KABVA in comparison to general returnees, and because they are, in most cases, older than other returnees, no straight comparison can be made between actual returnee population and KABVA membership numbers. The table shows that an overwhelmingly high proportion of members were general migrants living in Hiroshima, while a higher proportion of forcibly mobilized migrants came from central regions of the Korean Peninsula, such as Gyeonggi and Chungcheong Provinces.

Meanwhile, as the above tables show, a far higher proportion of bomb victims from the Hapcheon area of South Gyeongsang Province registered with KABVA than those from other parts of Korea. When further subdivided, family records show that a high concentration of those from the Hapcheon area returned to the former counties of Hapcheon and Chogye. Given that within the Hapcheon region, these local administrative divisions

represented both spheres of life and spheres of intermarriage, regional relationships are generally intimately connected to family-based blood networks. This source shows that many ethnic Koreans living in Hiroshima had migrated there successively due to links with other figures from Hapcheon.

In the next section, I use oral life-history stories recorded in places such as KABVA in 2008 and 2011 to describe the return and space of liberation experienced by 1.5th- and second-generation ethnic Koreans returning from to Korea from Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The actual names of interviewees have been used.

### 3. Space of Defeat, Space of Liberation, and Return

In 1988, the Japan Federation of Bar Associations (JFBA)'s Committee on the Issue of Nuclear Bomb Victims in Korea compiled a report titled "The Return of Korean Nuclear Bomb Victims (*Hibakusha*) to their homeland" [在韓被爆者の故国への帰還]. Report author and lawyer Shiina Masae (椎名麻紗枝) took the view that the primary reason for the emergence of bomb victims in Korea was linked to the question of why they "had no choice but to return to their country" or "simply had to return home" so early—before the most acute phase of disorders incurred in the atomic blast was over (椎名麻紗枝, 1988: 76).<sup>3</sup> Shiina believes that though it was fully predictable that ethnic Koreans had high hopes of returning to their liberated homeland, the problem was how bomb victims from Hiroshima and Nagasaki, who would have been made sick by the nuclear blast, had managed to return to Korea with their injuries, and how the Japanese government responded to this. From around late October 1945, when the temporary medical relief stations for wartime disaster victims operated by the Hiroshima and Nagasaki city governments closed, private individuals were left to care for bomb victims. In such circumstances, it would have taken a long time to deal with issues such as finding a boat to take home, going through the necessary emigration procedures, and liquidating family assets. After

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<sup>3</sup> The most acute phase of disorders incurred in the atomic blast includes those manifesting themselves by the end of December 1945. Many Korean atomic bomb victims, like other Koreans returning from Japan to liberated Korea, had already gone back by the end of 1945.



beginning with such questions, Shiina's investigation reaches the conclusion that "absolutely no example could be found" of the Japanese government helping ethnic Koreans with emigration procedures. Given that a considerable number of the 1.3 million ethnic Koreans who had returned by the end of 1945, and the additional 500,000 who had returned by 1948, paid for their own journeys home, it is assumed that ethnic Koreans based in Hiroshima and Nagasaki followed a similar path.

The urgent return to Korea of ethnic Koreans left in Japan without any particular protective measures was due to the position of the occupying Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP; also referred to as General Headquarters or GHQ) that "the movement of Japanese from Korea to Japan should, as far as possible, be balanced with the repatriation of Koreans from Japan" (Yi Hyeonju 2005: 253–254). The GHQ's return policy for Koreans in Japan and Japanese in Korea was closely related to concerns about the societies and economies of both countries (Jo Yonguk 2005: 249). The GHQ took the view that issues of return should be handled according to the economic and security situations in postwar Japan and Korea, that as few Japanese as possible should remain in Korea, and that the effects of this policy should be countered by the return of ethnic Koreans from Japan to Korea.

The GHQ and Japanese government's hurried measures to send ethnic Koreans back to Korea were also linked to the extensive spread of ethnic Koreans' (left-wing affiliated) democratization movement, which had been legalized in postwar Japan (Wagner 1975). From August 1945 to 1948, the GHQ ordered the Japanese government to repatriate approximately 1,000 Koreans and Chinese (primarily demobilized soldiers and forced migrants) per day, starting no later than November 14, from ports such as Senzaki, Hakata, and Kure (Kobayashi Sōmei 2012). The GHQ's repatriation policy came into effect in earnest from November 1945, with repatriation ships departing regularly. From then on, events such as the effectively forced repatriation of ethnic Koreans who wanted to remain in Japan continued.<sup>4</sup> By the end of 1945, 20,000 ethnic Koreans were gathered in Senzaki and Shimonoseki and 10,000 in Hakata, waiting for repatriation

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<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the GHQ issued a proclamation on January 12, 1946, that ethnic Koreans refusing to be included on the returnee list, in accordance with its plans, would no longer be able to hold Japanese citizenship. Lawyer Shiina Masae (1988) has deemed this an attempt to force ethnic Koreans to return to Korea.

in extremely unsanitary conditions.<sup>5</sup> Among these ports, the situation in Shimonoseki had reportedly grown so bad that it was described by some as “hell on earth” (Kobayashi Sōmei 2012).

The investigation of family registers of Korean atomic bomb victims also offers a good illustration of these circumstances, reflecting the victims’ movements through changes in address and in registered place of birth of siblings in the same family, from Japan to Korea, around the end of 1945. Even those who could not recall specific dates did recollect in interviews that they had returned in late autumn or early winter of that year, with comments such as, “There was frost on the straw-thatched roof, and some white gourds, with their leaves all dried up, were still there” (interview with author); and “Soon after we got back, we made kimchi and boiled red bean porridge for the winter solstice” (interview with author). This shows that the migration of ethnic Koreans back to Korea was more closely related to GHQ policies governing their international movements during its occupation of Japan than to autonomous decisions on the part of individuals or families to return.

In one interview with the author, Han Seoun commented that her parents had died “before the nuclear blast,” and that she had consequently been living with her siblings in Hiroshima at the time of liberation. The bomb completely destroyed their house and left her elder sister severely injured. While receiving treatment at a temporary medical relief station for wartime disaster victims and eating government-issued rations to stay alive, she made a living by working as an illegal trader. She did not want to go to Korea, but in around December that year, several ethnic Koreans got together to pay for an illegal boat home. The voyage lasted 27 days. When Han reached Korea, she immediately buried the remains of her father and mother in a shared grave in their hometown of Geochang.

I wasn’t going to leave Japan then, but Father’s remains were at a temple (in Hiroshima). At the time, people were happy that Korea had been liberated and become independent and were planning to go there, but I didn’t want to

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<sup>5</sup> It was agreed that ethnic Korean migrants returning to North and South Gyeongsang or North Chungcheong Provinces would be transported from Senzaki, Hakata, or Shimonoseki to Busan; those returning to Jeolla or South Chungcheong Provinces from Sasebo to Gunsan or Mokpo; and those returning to Gyeonggi or Gangwon Provinces from Sasebo to Incheon (Choe Yeongho 1995: 117–118). But despite this “principle,” a large number of returning migrants from provincial Japan sailed to nearby Busan (Yi Hyeonju 2005: 254).

go. I went because I thought Father, even just his remains, would long to go back to his hometown. Mother died a long time ago, when I was young. At the time, Father had taken Mother's underwear, put it in some oilpaper, and used it to wrap her ashes, then sent them to his elder brother in Geochang. I remembered that and brought Father home so that I could bury him together with Mother. (Han Seoun, F, b. 1928)

The defeat of imperial Japan prompted the redrawing of economic orders and ruling powers in the nation-states of East Asia. Amid the chaotic migration processes underway at this time, ethnic Koreans who had migrated overseas were sometimes presented as undisputed candidates for integration into their liberated homeland.

But defeat, independence, and liberation were not a clear set of choices to all ethnic Koreans. Locating where they belonged within spaces of defeat and of liberation was not a simple equation defined by simple boundaries of nation-state and ethnicity. The comment, "I didn't want to go, but how Father must have longed for even his remains to go to his hometown" illustrates that liberation and return at this time were not two halves of a simple equation but closer to elements of a higher equation, difficult to answer because of its tangle of variables and unknown quantities. This may be why narratives about return often show that livelihood prospects were a much more important factor in decisions to return than were political or nationalist sentiment, such as the aforementioned "vague yet passionate fantasy and expectation regarding the image of citizens belonging to their own state" in interviewees' views of their liberated homeland (Kim Yerim 2010). In many cases, a mixture of fear and anxiety about renewed migration and adaptation, despite Korea being a "homeland," was apparent.

Above all, assets in Japan that had to be relinquished upon returning to the homeland posed a problem. At the time, those returning from Japan to Korea were allowed to take only 1,000 yen per family.<sup>6</sup> This was nowhere near enough to lay the foundations of a new life. For those who had bought land in Korea while living in Japan or had sent money home and expected to be able to plan a stable life after returning, the decision was easier. A large number of interview respondents said they had returned for reasons such as, "I was the eldest son, so I had to look after the family gravesite in

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<sup>6</sup> GHQ placed strict limitations on the amount of money that returning Koreans could take due to concerns about damaging Japan's economy through an outflow of assets and about triggering inflation in Korea through the influx of assets.

my hometown,” “I had bought some land with money I earned in Japan,” “I was going to go back to the land I had left other people to farm when I went away,” or “I was going to get the money I had sent as postal deposits.”

Jo Gyeongsun’s case was one of returning to find land she had bought in her hometown with money earned in Japan. Jo’s father had graduated from a civil engineering college in Daejeon before going to Japan. One of her uncles had studied law at Meiji University in Japan. A large number of Jo family members, An relatives from her grandmother’s side of the family, and Kang family members from her mother’s side, lived together in Hiroshima. Jo’s father moved around Shikoku and Hiroshima Mugainata, involved with various construction projects, then was placed in charge of large public works just before liberation. In addition to the main company building, there was a separate boarding house that fed more than 100 workers. Jo’s father often traveled to Korea to recruit workers from Hapcheon and the surrounding region. He also brought over many relatives and acquaintances from his hometown. Sometimes, people from his hometown asked him to recruit them so that they could avoid military conscription.

The construction company that Jo’s father was in charge of just before liberation was involved in the stationing of the Second General Army and the building of air raid shelters in Hiroshima, ordered by the Japanese military authorities in 1945 in preparation for war on the mainland. Workers on the project lodged in a boarding house behind Hiroshima Station. At the time, a large number of young laborers recruited from Hapcheon were working on the project. The records of other KABVA members also mention that they had accompanied family members and helped with work at the boarding house; these facts also emerged in the spoken testimony of other interviewees. However, Jo’s father’s story features an unforeseen disaster: following liberation, he was caught by unidentified individuals, thrown into the sea, and died. Having lost her father, Jo returned to Korea with her injuries and her father’s remains. She had already sent all the antiques and money in her home on an earlier chartered boat to Korea. Now, she was going home to the land that her father had bought with money earned in Hiroshima.

It [the body of her father, who had been thrown into the sea] floated up four days later. My grandmother brought along a shaman, who found it. The bodies of the others who had died weren’t there; only that of my father floated up. We looked for him in a boat for three days and nights then cremated him. We burned his remains in a burned-out part of a factory, then

brought him home.... All our relatives came. We went back via a series of islands because my grandmother said the spirit [of Jo's father] would not be able to follow us if we went too far across the sea. On the way back, [whenever they went from one island to the next], the shaman would perform a *gut*,<sup>7</sup> and my eldest brother would hold the box with my father's ashes and say, "Father, we are going from such-and-such to such-and-such. Come with us." They said we spent a huge amount of money [on holding so many *gut*]. (Jo Gyeongsun, F, b. 1937)

In many cases, ethnic Koreans sent home money they had earned in Japan, bought land, and had it cultivated by relatives or tenant farmers. Yu Gabi's father, born in 1909, went with his brother to find work in Hiroshima as a young man. It was around 1930. Like many other people from Hapcheon at the time, Yu's father was recruited by someone from his hometown to work on a public works project. After settling, he got married, started a family, and brought over relatives from Korea. Yu's grandfather was from Daeyang-myeon in Hapcheon-gun, but he later went to live with his wife's family in Daeyeong-myeon, becoming close to his relatives there. As a result, Yu's father also invited aunts and uncles from the family of his paternal grandmother. In Hiroshima, they lived together in a tin-roofed house near Yokogawa Station in suburban Hiroshima. On the day of the bombing, just as her father had come down for breakfast after fixing the roof, the house was engulfed in flames, destroyed by the blast.

The combination of assets and businesses cultivated in Japan and the news and rumors arriving from Korea following liberation, sent complex and ambiguous signals to ethnic Koreans trying to decide whether to return to their homeland. Panic-filled rumors that Japanese expelled from Korea would in turn drive out any Koreans from Japan upon their return, or that the American GIs arriving to occupy Japan were raping women and children, prompted some Koreans to pack their bags and flee. At the same time, news that "the Soviets are coming into the north" and that "the peninsula is divided between leftists and rightists, and war could break out at any time" was also reaching Japan. Poverty and extreme political conflict between left and right after liberation sent a strong signal to ethnic Koreans still in Japan that their homeland would not offer a safe place to settle, nor an enthusiastic welcome, nor a place of safe integration.

Kang Hwaja's father (b. 1910) came from Yeongdong in North Chung-

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<sup>7</sup> (Translator's note) A shamanic rite.

cheong Province. In 1926, at the age of 17, he traveled alone to Hiroshima in search of work and found employment at Sakamoto Foundry. On the day of the bombing, he was on his way to work. His leg was badly injured by a wooden column that was toppled in the blast. Shortly afterwards, they heard that Korea had been liberated. Kang recalls that her family returned to Korea in the autumn of that year, despite attempts by the Japanese in their neighborhood to dissuade them from going back because “the Soviets would make life unbearable.” But, as we have already seen, decisions to return at this time were most strongly influenced not by personal will but by the existing return policy of SCAP.

Meanwhile, given that Japan’s atomic bomb victims, following the country’s defeat, were lumped in the same category as regular war disaster victims, it can be assumed that migrants returning to Korea from Hiroshima and Nagasaki were not included in the scope of any special policy either. As a result, families with injured or dead members sometimes returned later than others. In many cases, it was physically difficult for those in the two bombed cities with dead or injured family members to return quickly after hearing news of the liberation of the “homeland.”

The bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki left at least half of each city’s population dead or seriously injured; it can be assumed that this also applied to their ethnic Korean residents. Despite the extensive damage, they experienced pressure to return, in accordance with the repatriation policy of the occupying forces. When choosing whether to return to Korea or stay in Japan, socioeconomic circumstances were the most important factor to consider for ethnic Koreans left in the two cities. Those who had earned money and used it to buy land in Korea or held assets that offered them decent living prospects upon returning, and, at the opposite end of the spectrum, those who had nothing, making no difference if they lived in Japan or Korea, chose to return.

But those who had already been in Japan for a long time and had no particular prospects to look forward to in Korea, remained. Some put off returning while they sorted their affairs, then ended up staying after all; some had already become established to the extent that it was hard to return. In quite a few cases, people returned completely unprepared, then traveled illicitly back to Japan. According to data from KABVA (1989) and Ichiba Junko (2003), 25 to 30 percent of survivors chose to stay in Hiroshima and Nagasaki rather than return after the atomic bombings. My own interview material confirmed that in 40 percent of cases, interviewees

had family members who chose not to return to Korea or who went back to Japan after doing so.

#### 4. “I Lived Like a Complete Jap Bitch Back Then”

How do 1.5th- and second-generation members of families who returned to Korea following Japan’s defeat describe the “homeland” that they found? What left a deep impression on me in the course of interviews was the way most interviewees spoke in highly ambiguous terms about their feelings when recalling the period following Japan’s defeat, in contrast to the nationalistic attitudes of most Koreans today regarding “liberation” and “independence.”

In 2007, at an interview, Ri Silgeun (b. 1928), the then-chairman of the Council of Atom-bombed Koreans in Hiroshima Prefecture, said that he remained in Japan after Korea’s liberation because he had been settled there for a long time, and his house, located outside the center of the city, had not been badly damaged. Ri had worked for many years at an ethnic Korean school in Hiroshima, but he recalled that, in his own schooldays, he had grown up as a militarist youth like a normal “Japanese.”

Ri’s father was born in Uiryong, North Gyeongsang Province. Before the Manchurian Incident, he had gone to Busan in search of work; there, after learning that many Busan citizens were making the crossing to Japan, he sailed from Busan to Shimoseki on his own. After first going to Kyoto but failing to find his feet there, he made his way to rural Yamaguchi and learned how to make charcoal. There were few ethnic Koreans in the country village where he lived in Yamaguchi and, when he joined middle school, he was the only ethnic Korean there. But because he was living under the name Yamamura Shoichi at the time, nobody knew he was Korean. Then, one day, when he was taking part in military training at school, an officer came and said, “If there are any Koreans here, come out.” He hit Ri with the muzzle of his gun. This made Ri resolve to become successful when he grew up and take revenge, although this was not, he said, how he felt about Japanese people in general. But the incident prompted his mother to take him out of the school and move the family to Hiroshima. There, he lived as a loyal “citizen of the empire,” to the extent where he applied to become a “youth imperial soldier” upon seeing a recruitment notice, despite having already found a job at a railway station.

He passed the necessary examinations and was due to join the army on October 1 but “was ultimately unable to join because the war ended.” Ri recalled, “At the time, so many Koreans came out of nowhere and started singing and banging drums upon liberation, but that wasn’t how I felt. Even then, I was still a militarist youth. I wasn’t at all happy after Korea was liberated. I just lived the life of a bum, drinking and fighting with the local gangsters or whatever.” Ri recalled that he had begun doing things such as becoming a cadre in the Hiroshima Ethnic Korean Communist Party organization after meeting members of the Korean alliance, youth alliance, and democratic student alliance that formed in the city after liberation, which in turn awakened his national consciousness.

Yi Suyeong, a native of Goryeong in North Gyeongsang Province, arrived in Hiroshima at the age of 7 with her father, who had traveled to Japan to make a living. It was around 1934. Yi’s father worked as a laborer on public works projects. Her elder brother was also a laborer of the kind known as a *dobi* (鳶職; someone who worked on high scaffolding on construction sites). Such work was commonly performed by Koreans because it was particularly dangerous, even by construction industry standards. Her mother did whatever work she could, such as selling tofu, cleaning public baths, and cooking in worker boarding houses. Yi completed the sixth grade of elementary school then graduated from high school after two years. She then got a job as a banker at the Hiroshima Branch of the Postal Savings Office, a position that was generally said to be out of reach for Koreans and hard even for Japanese to obtain. She had become a national civil servant. At work, she was known by the name Yoshida Chihoko (吉田千穂子).

When I was 17 and graduated after the second grade of higher elementary school, my teacher told me to apply either to the Postal Savings Office or the city government. But since Koreans couldn’t usually work there, my relatives told me not to bother applying since I was bound to fail anyway. But I still passed the written exam and got an interview. One of the interviewers was looking at my family details and saw that my elder brother was listed as a *dobi*, so she asked me if I had any relatives in Korea. So, I said yes, I did. At the time, places like banks hardly ever gave jobs to Koreans. Since proof of identity was important, that gave them a dilemma too, as my exam score was so good. Later, they told me to bring a proof of identity form (身元証明書). They told me to go and get it from Korea, which put me in a tricky position. I did have an uncle in Korea, but I just sent a letter to the police substation in Ssangnim-myeon, Goryeong-gun. They sent back a letter saying, “This person is definitely who she says she is,” but it wasn’t stamped with the seal



of the head of the township (*myeon*). So, she [the interviewer at the bank] called me and told me that the letter was no good because it didn't have a seal stamp, and she told me to get another copy. So, I sent another letter, and this time they sent it back properly. So, they told me, "Okay," and I joined at the age of 17 and must have worked there for a year and 7 months." (Yi Suyeong, F, b. 1928)

Many other interviewees had, like Yi Suyeong, graduated from elementary or higher elementary school, even as females, and worked in positions such as banker, nurse, station employee, and white-collar factory employee. As seen above, interviewees who were 1.5th- or second-generation migrants at the time of liberation were studying at elementary, higher elementary, or middle school, or had jobs. Some of them had gone on to study at normal high school or technical college. This contrasted with their parents who, as first-generation migrants, were mostly uneducated and had earned a living as unskilled workers, illegal moonshiners, day workers, stevedores, junk dealers, boarding-house managers, housekeepers and the like. This also shows the clear differences that existed between generations, even among ethnic Koreans who returned to Korea (Gwon Sugin 2017).

Seo Jeongnam's father, a native of Chilgok in North Gyeongsang Province, left his wife and children behind, went to find Jeongnam's grandfather in Japan, and ended up settling there. Jeongnam's grandfather was from Hapcheon, the original hometown of many Koreans living in Hiroshima. Jeongnam's family had attended the Holiness Church in Hapcheon since early in the Japanese colonial period and had established a footing in Hiroshima by attending the Central Holiness Church there, too. His father worked as a technician at the Morinaga Caramel factory.

My family lived a decent life. Mother wanted me to become a doctor and told me to study the regular humanities. I was put into a separate exam class and got into Hiroshima City Middle School. The tuition there was on the cheap side. The competition rate at the time was 7:1, and when I got in, my father was so happy that he bought me a Pilot ink pen and a big desk. I was a good student. I was head of my class at times and deputy head at others.... Actually, when I heard about liberation, I was really sad, and I cried because I had been looking forward so much to going to middle and high school, and now Japan had lost. When I was at school, neither the other kids nor the teachers knew that I was Korean. Koreans stood out for their shabby clothes and lack of cleanliness, but my name was Masao, and my surname was Narita, and I wore neat clothes, so nobody thought I was Korean. (Seo Jeongnam, M, b. 1932)

In interviews, these people often recalled themselves while living in Japan as “militaristic youth,” “soldiers of the imperial army,” “completely Japanese to the extent where nobody would know they were Korean unless they said so,” “living as a complete Jap bitch” and “looking back now, living as a traitor.” Masaru Tonomura (2010: 116), in his study of population structures of ethnic Koreans in Japan in the pre-war period, labeled those who predominantly constituted the second generation the “Shōwa single-digit generation,” in that they had been born between the late 1920s and early 1930s (i.e., years 1 to 9 of Japan’s Shōwa era, corresponding to 1926–1934 CE). These individuals were, like Japanese in the “war generation,” exposed to powerful imperial ideology in the education of their youth; this was particular severe in the case of pre-war ethnic Koreans. Many interviewees did indeed describe themselves during their schooldays in such terms. They spoke of the “homeland” that they first encountered upon going to their parents’ hometowns in the Korean countryside as a foreign place with unfamiliar smells and sights.

My mother got married and went to Japan. Her hometown was a remote place in the mountains. When we left Japan after liberation, we realized it was really deep in the mountains. When my father was looking to get married back then, they hitched him to a country woman, as he had already been living in Japan for years. He brought her back to Japan. Back then, our mother still wore her hair with a *binyeo*.<sup>8</sup> She didn’t wear any makeup. But she was still pretty. She had a prim look. She said that when she got married and moved to Japan, she couldn’t eat anything for three years because it had a “Jap smell.” Going from the Korean countryside to live in Japan, she said she found the Jap smell and the Jap soy sauce smell, terrible. She said she used to go somewhere like Kusatsu (草津) and pick wild parsley to eat.... Our father always went to the public baths on his way home from work, wearing a *yugata* and *geta*. When he came home from work, he was completely Japanese. We always followed him everywhere. (O Jaebun, F, b. 1933)

O Jaebun’s family owned a general store called Boone, where they sold Korean goods. The store was so big that everyone in Fukushima, the ethnic Korean neighborhood to the northwest of central Hiroshima, knew of it. It sold herring and cod that arrived seasonally from Korea, and they brewed bootleg liquor on the second floor. O’s father loaded and unloaded freight at the railway station, which also served as a source of goods for him to sell.

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<sup>8</sup> (Translator’s note) A traditional Korean ornamental hairpin.

He often sent money with others going back to Korea, telling them to buy land in his hometown with it. When he came home from work, he lived “completely like a Japanese”; he also had a “Japanese mistress.” He was the exact opposite of O’s mother, such a country person that she didn’t eat properly for three years after moving to Japan because she didn’t like “Jap smells” or “Jap soy sauce smells.” O’s father had her moved to a different school, one frequented by many Japanese, because he didn’t like his children mixing with Koreans. To O, who had grown up this way, the Korea that she saw “for the first time in her life” was a highly unfamiliar place.

The economic circumstances of ethnic Koreans who had lost assets in the nuclear blast, then had to spend more money crossing the Korea Strait, were, in most cases, incomparable to their status while living in Japan. Such cultural differences were first noticed through sensory perceptions, such as the unfamiliar smells of the “homeland.”

When we first went there [Yeongil, North Gyeongsang Province—her hometown], we had no house, no job, nothing to eat... Oh, it makes me cry to think of it. [Interviewee is unable to speak for some time.] Things wouldn’t have been so hard if I was in Japan. I kept thinking of Japan, as I had grown up there. [When we lived in Hiroshima] I lived so much like a Japanese that if I went to a friend’s house, they wouldn’t know I was Korean unless I told them. That was how I had lived, oh, but when I think of how life was when I came to Korea. (Yun Samja, F, b. 1924)

The 1.5th- and second-generation ethnic Koreans I interviewed often spoke this way about their experience of living in Japan “completely like a Japanese,” just before the defeat, in many cases recalling that they did not particularly think of themselves of Koreans. To those who “had become Japs to the extent where they were furious and moved to tears” at the news of Japan’s defeat, returning to the hometown of their father or mother was a new start in an unfamiliar land full of things they had never seen or heard before, an abandonment of aspirations for studying and working, or a parting from people for whom they harbored special feelings. But that is not to say that they were not subject to discrimination or exclusion as ethnic Koreans. On the contrary, the way they had to conceal the identity of their motherland, to the extent that no one would know they were Korean, could accurately be described as a unique means of survival for colonial subjects living at the heart of the empire that had colonized them. In the chaos that followed Japan’s defeat, moreover, being Korean was a dangerous stigma that had to be even more carefully hidden. This comes in

complete contrast to the way Japanese colonizers who migrated to Korea were able to demonstrate their superior socioeconomic status as colonizers by continuing to use their own language and living according to their own culture.

Of course, living completely like a Japanese also left mannerisms and traces that must not be revealed once back in the “homeland.” After return, the years of living as a “Jap bitch” or “militaristic youth,” and the traces and signs that revealed them, had to quickly be erased. These included Japanese-style pronunciation and ingrained Japanese expressions. Upon return to their homeland, such mannerisms, imprinted in the body and the senses, led to sociocultural hardship for 1.5th- and second-generation ethnic Koreans who had been born or educated in Japan. While living in metropolitan Japan as colonial subjects, living as “complete Japanese” had been a safety mechanism and a way of concealing their national identities. But after their return, this same safety device became a stigma that attracted mockery and social exclusion.

When I got here, I went straight to our hometown to see my grandfather. Our hometown was by the sea, and our parents had found us a place there. But my father had never worked on a boat and didn't know how to sail one; he had never done any farming and had no money, so they say he eventually went to Japan once, to see if there was any work for him there.... Around that time, I started going to school. They spoke Korean there, but I couldn't speak it very well. I even called Mother *O-Kā-chan*<sup>9</sup> at home. People seemed to badmouth me for doing that, so when I went to middle school, Mother told me to call her *eomma*.<sup>10</sup> That was so difficult for me. I was ashamed to say the word *eomma*, so I couldn't bring myself to utter it. (Bak Cheoru, M, b. 1941)

Return migration between Korea and Japan after liberation/defeat was “an act accompanied by huge denial and oblivion, and a time when the geographical nation-state border formed by the Korea Strait was demarcated and constructed by perspectives of Korea(n) versus Japan(ese), self versus other, enemy versus comrade, and colonialism and imperialism” (Kim Gyeongyeon 2013). To colonized Korean migrants, the Japanese empire before liberation and after its collapse was a place in which their identities as “Koreans” could not be revealed, while the liberated “homeland” to

<sup>9</sup> (Translator's note) “Mum” in Japanese.

<sup>10</sup> (Translator's note) “Mum” in Korean.

which they returned was a place where they had to erase their past lives as Peninsular-Japanese. Those who did not erase their previous lives would likely be mocked as “pig trotters,” “Japs,” “traitors,” or “collaborators.” In Hapcheon, so many young, unmarried women had returned from Japan and could not speak Korean that it was a compliment for them to be told by their in-laws that they “were clever and didn’t speak with a short tongue (i.e. Japanese-style Korean).”

Meanwhile, the “place of liberation” to which they returned was also still the home of a feudal order that distinguished between nobles and commoners. An Gyeongseon got married soon after returning to her hometown. Her face was scarred from the bombing. “I had had no education, but since, even then, they still looked for *yangban*,<sup>11</sup> without even looking at your face, I got married just for being from a *yangban* family.” An recalled that this was a time when if a woman was from “the An family from Jeokjung,” people would simply want her as their daughter-in-law.

Eom Bunyeon, the first head of the Busan branch of KABVA, was the only daughter in a “high-ranking *yangban* family” with no sons. She went to live in Japan at a young age, following in the footsteps of her father, who had emigrated earlier. In August 1945, when she was in the fourth grade at Hiroshima Girls’ High School, she was mobilized as part of a Student Volunteers Corps Service and sent to work in the inspection department at the Tōyō Kōgyō factory in Hiroshima. She was on her way to work there when the bomb dropped. Her legs were badly damaged by rubble from a collapsing building; several rounds of treatment failed to cure her completely, leaving her with a limp. Eom’s family, which had been very rich before emigrating to Japan, returned right after liberation. She got married not long after arriving back in Korea.

When I got married, I just thought I was injured. I didn’t worry about it having been a nuclear blast or anything. My husband believed in Korean independence when he was young. He had graduated from Hokkaido Imperial University, and I think he was very active in the student movement. So, he wanted to marry an educated woman like me, even though I was disabled, and I got married on crutches. I was from a high-status *yangban* family, and I was educated and cultured, so he was actually the one who came after me. But I wasn’t happy in our neighborhood. They teased me for being disabled and called me a cripple. When the Korean War came, my husband

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11 (Translator’s note) Aristocrats.

joined the army and was killed in action. He signed up and went off three years after I got married, when we had a child, and got killed. (Eom Bunyeon, F, b. 1929)

Eom commented, “When I got back after living through the Greater East Asia War, the Korean War broke out. I was carrying war around with me.” As a war widow, she raised her child while working as the director of a welfare center for mothers and children in Busan. The liberated homeland that met migrants returning following liberation was neither the home of a perfect nation nor a place of unity. On top of the political and economic chaos, it was also a place of sociocultural discrimination and exclusion for those who had returned from Japan. It was subject to a feudal order of noblemen and commoners. It accorded different social roles to sons and daughters. And it was a place where life’s opportunities and prospects were created within sociocultural networks based on blood and regional ties. The roughly 8-year period following their return to the space of liberation was recalled by most of the atomic bomb victims I interviewed (born in the 1920s and 1930s) as the hardest and most sorrowful time in their lives. This is why it was a period in which the border between Japan and Korea, not completely controlled, was crossed again and again through gaps between the complex, overlapping layers of the space of defeat, the postwar space, and the space of liberation.

## 5. Across the Korea Strait Again

Strait of Korea, Strait of Korea,  
 Yeongju is crossing for the third time  
 Are you going to treat her better this time?  
 Strait of Korea, Strait of Korea,  
 Every time we crossed you, tragedy awaited us  
 This time, give Yeongju a warmer welcome  
 Strait of Korea, you owe us  
 Strait of Korea, Strait of Korea  
 Unjust Strait of Korea  
 You owe us  
 You owe us  
 - From the play *I am a Hibakusha* -<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> This quote is from the script of Kai Hong’s play *I am a Hibakusha* (1984). In 1986, Mu Se-jung of Seoul Institute of the Arts took an interest in Hong’s work and created the

Life in the homeland for those who had returned on illegal boats was hard in several ways. Half of returnees were unemployed, though some relief organizations helped them to find housing, food, and jobs; life was harsh even for those who had already been living in South Korea, making it impossible for returning migrants to make a reliable living straight away. The South Gyeongsang Province regional branch of the United States Army Military Government in Korea left the following record of the circumstances of returning migrants: “With the economic situation worsening daily, returning migrants could live for no more than a few days with the 1,000 yen they bring with them, and had no means of making a living” (quoted in Kobayashi Sōmei 2012: 68). Some returnees had prepared in advance by buying plenty of rice paddies and dry fields in their hometowns, using money earned in Japan. But even for them, life in the homeland was not easy. The postal savings they had accumulated with money earned in and sent from Japan were reduced to worthless scraps of paper after liberation, while the land they had purchased was lost in the process of land reform, becoming a lifelong source of sorrow. The frequent occurrence of such stories was a fact of life in the homeland for migrants returning to the chaos that reigned after liberation.

Moreover, the political situation of ideological conflict between left- and right-wingers in South Korea after liberation pervaded the everyday lives of its people. When it was decided at the Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers (December 1945) that Korea would be governed by trusteeship, the political turmoil grew worse. This combination of economic problems and political chaos influenced the decisions of ethnic Koreans left in Japan who were considering a return to Korea; it also caused those who had already returned to Korea to consider re-entering Japan. The number of migrants returning to Korea fell sharply (Choe Yeongho 1995b), while some who had already returned chose to stow away back to Japan. In many of these cases, some family members and relatives stayed in Japan or traveled back there clandestinely after returning to Korea in order to try and make a living.

The same kind of situations are found among returning Korean atomic bomb victims. Many told how some of their relatives had gone back, legally or secretly, to Japan. Kang Suni’s family returned to Korea three or four

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production “Hibakusha | Wonpokpihaeja” (Translator’s note: The Japanese and Korean terms for “atomic blast victim”). (Kyunghyang Shinmun, July 8, 1986).

months after liberation. But her eldest brother went back to Japan straight after returning, before the Korean War, because he couldn't find work. He decided to help with the business of his maternal uncle's family, settled in Nagoya.

The elder brother just above me stowed away to Japan after returning because he couldn't make ends meet here. He failed three times but got there in the end. He left my sister-in-law, went over on his own, and started living with a Japanese woman. I wasn't married yet, [O Jaebun: A lot of people did that.] so I went to Hiroshima and then lived with my eldest brother and sister. He was successful there. (Im Isaeng, F, b. 1933)

Heo Jongbun (b. 1931)'s elder brother received serious burns to his face in the blast. The burns turned to keloid, leaving his face ugly. After returning to Korea, he tried to keep himself hidden away because of his scars. However, because he was proficient in English and Japanese, he was hired as an official interpreter for the US military stationed in Miryang, his hometown. Later, when the unit to which he was attached was relocated to Okinawa, he went with it.

Jo Gyeongsun (b. 1937)'s eldest brother also went back to Japan. One of their relatives defected to North Korea, and Jo's brother was suspected of being a "commie" and having helped her cross into the North. Jo's mother hid her brother in the mountains, then she went to the docks in Samcheonpo and begged until she could find an illegal boat to take him to Japan.

Bak Subyeong (b. 1936) returned to his Korean hometown of Sacheon. His elder sister, who had married and left home early, stayed in Japan after liberation. His elder brother, who had returned with him to Korea, got caught up in a political incident and clandestinely fled back to Japan.

My elder brother Sunam came with us at the time, but in 1950, just before the war started, he stowed away to Japan. He went because he was an active member of a right-wing group. There was a meeting between left-wing and right-wing leaders, and on the way back, on a bridge in Sacheon, my brother and two other people killed the head of the left-wing group. He went that way to Japan and didn't come back. My elder sister, Sujeom, got married before liberation and never came to Korea with us in the first place. (Bak Subyeong, M, b. 1936)

As more and more ethnic Koreans went back to Japan after returning to Korea, and their illegal actions in Japanese society became an issue, a



debate about how to treat them ensued. On February 19, 1946, the US military government made it mandatory for individuals intending to leave Korea to obtain a travel certificate from its office of international affairs (Kobayashi Sōmei 2012). But obtaining the necessary documents was extremely difficult for ordinary Koreans, so the new rule effectively prevented them from leaving the country. In Japan, too, restrictions were placed on immigration. On March 16, 1946, GHQ issued an edict banning immigration of non-Japanese into Japan without the permission of SCAP until commercial transportation services became available. Entering Japan without going through official procedures became illegal, and those who attempted it became illegal immigrants.

But the cholera epidemic that swept through South Korea from June to August of 1946 added to the political and economic chaos, prompting a sharp increase in the number of people attempting to stow away to Japan. The GHQ, worried that illegal travelers would spread the disease from South Korea to Japan, clamped down harder on their activities. But the tightened Japanese immigration restrictions remained in place even after the cholera epidemic had eased. The GHQ branded illegal immigration by Koreans “an act detrimental to the purposes of the occupation.”<sup>13</sup> Illegal immigration was treated not just as a public health issue but as a serious crime that threatened the occupying regime itself and thus had to be strictly controlled. As the clampdown intensified, it gradually became harder for Koreans to stow away back to Japan; but their need to survive drove them to try.

Myeong Nosim (b. 1929) and her husband were considering going back to Japan after returning to Korea. They had rushed back to Korea when some of Myeong’s family was still in Japan, but life in Korea was extremely hard. They wanted to enter Japan on an illegal boat but were caught, placed in a prison camp, then sent back to Korea. Myeong’s father, who had settled in Japan, sent them money, but they were unable to go back to Japan after that.

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<sup>13</sup> GHQ saw managing the return to Korea and re-entry into Japan by formerly Japan-based ethnic Koreans in terms of social order and public safety (May 1946–July 1948) and of anti-communist policy (August 1948–April 1952). Kim Taegi (1998: 268) indicates that this was due not so much to animosity towards Koreans as to aspects of US society, in which discrimination against black people and ethnic minorities ran rampant at the time. The policies thus revealed racial prejudices on the part of GHQ, Japan’s new ruler.

Seong Iju (b. 1932)'s father did not go back to Japan but moved to and settled in Jinju after liberation. He made a lot of money trafficking goods between Korea and Japan. Speaking good Japanese and aware of the situation in Japan, he traveled to Hiroshima via a small port called Ōmura (大村), bought goods, took them back to Korea on a boat, and sold them in Masan. He mainly traded in cosmetics and in chainsaws used for construction. It was dangerous but lucrative work. But on December 28, 1950, the Japanese government built a prison camp at Ōmura to house illegal immigrants, forcefully evicted ethnic Koreans and Chinese in Japan. Surveillance increased, and many Koreans were caught and placed in the camp. Seong Iju's father abandoned his business.

The space of defeat entered by returned atomic bomb victims via illicit and legal journeys to Japan was thus also a place of life opportunities and expanded prospects. Returnees who had made their way from Hiroshima and Nagasaki to Korea following liberation were crossing back over "in order to live."

## 6. Conclusion

In this article, I have examined the history of Korean atomic bomb victims via the history of return migration. More specifically, I have examined spaces of defeat, spaces of liberation, and return, based on the oral life histories of 1.5th- and second-generation ethnic Koreans from Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and on family register research.

The return narratives of bomb victims who went back to Korea following liberation are infused with ambiguous sentiments that distinguish them from the typical nationalistic rhetoric generally used in Korea to describe the space of liberation in symbolic terms. The chaos following liberation was a space not just of political ideology or economic standards but one in which those who had formerly been "subjects of the empire" had trouble finding their bearings under their newly conferred identities as "citizens" within the boundaries of newly emerged nation-states. These spaces of defeat and liberation, moreover, were home to many leftover memories that could not be recalled within the existing nation-statist narrative discourse of "coercion" and "Independence Movement" that evoked the space of liberation. To returnees from Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the space of defeat and the space of liberation were not simply limited to the territories labeled

“Japan” and “Korea.” They experienced liberation on the defeated mainland of imperial Japan and continued to live with the scars and pain of defeat in the “homeland” to which they returned. When the war was over and they made the decision to stay in Japan or return, neither territory was a space of unconditional fear or a place of “vague yet passionate fantasy and expectation” to which they clearly had to return. The “homeland” was also a foreign place that evoked the fear and anxiety of renewed migration, while Japan was also a place for which they longed when the poverty and pain became too much.

Liberation evoked their national identity as Koreans and made the traces of their former lives as “complete Japanese” something that had to be rapidly concealed; danger lay not in their location but in the cultural attributes, identities, economic statuses and classes, and gender differences that remained in their bodies and their language. The spaces of defeat and liberation in the occupation period, faced with collapse of an empire and the task of building new nation-states, were not only spaces of political and ideological confrontation between state and state, state and individual, and individual and individual, they were also places where a variety of sociocultural differences intersected. The space of liberation that was the “hometown of compatriots” and the postwar space of defeated imperial Japan were not spaces of unity governed by perfect homogeneity; people regarded each other with hostility and as others, exclusively through the boundaries of nation-state and ethnicity. They were spaces in which complex elements relating to nation, gender, class, status (traditional divisions between *yangban* and commoners), blood ties, regional ties, political orientation, and generation, worked in combination, creating an ebb and flow of political and sociocultural collision and conflict. This article has shown generation to be a particularly significant source of difference.

Such conclusions mean that the postcolonial space of liberation following the collapse of imperial Japan must not be seen in terms of political-ideological conflict, or of relationships between returning migrants and their motherland—namely, in terms of dichotomies such as citizen/state or refugee/state—or solely in terms of national identity and natural integration into the motherland. Instead, we must begin by understanding it as an unfamiliar space of hybridity where such multi-layered elements exert complex influences. This suggests that anthropological and other social-scientific studies of the space of liberation require the intervention of historical-anthropological imagination that can break through typical

structures and discourses constrained by the boundaries of state and nation, both in the present and the past, based on reliable empirical sources.

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