

Now, 40 Years Later

Ehime Prefectural Matsuyama Higashi High School (愛媛県立松山東高等学校)

1st grade, Nozomi Fujioka (藤岡 希)

A single aircraft comes into land at the airport. Down the aircraft steps comes Megumi Yokota wearing a blue ribbon. People in Japan around the world would surely be transfixed by this historic moment. If Megumi were to return to Japan, what would happen? Megumi retains traces of the face we have all seen so many times as a photograph. Mr. and Mrs. Yokota shed tears. It is the first time they have seen her since all those years ago. In 1977, Megumi was just 13 when she was abducted by North Korea. She suffered the sadness of having everything taken from her. Her parents were sad, not knowing whether their daughter was alive or dead. Perhaps the family were no longer able to enjoy their time together, feeling as if time had stopped. They suffered every time her birthday came around. They were unable to see her in a kimono at the coming-of-age ceremony. They must have been filled with sadness and longing seeing other parents embrace children as old as her. North Korea abducted many other people, but in 2002, the same year when I was born, five of the abductees returned to Japan. Although I was born after these matters took place, I taught myself about what happened through the animation Megumi and through the stage play "The Pledge to Megumi –Regain-". I was so shocked that it scared me to think about is happening to me, and I felt that I could not stand it.

Why did such cruel abductions occur? It is said that North Korea's main objective was to train spies that could pass and enter South Korea as Japanese. But do North Koreans, who forcibly involved innocent Japanese people, have no morals? I read an article that said that "as North Koreans witness cruel human rights violations from a young age, they are unable to judge right from wrong". In North Korea, their country comes first, and their society is based on "the strength of the fist rather than the strength of the law". I think we can say that it is not a question of the presence or absence of morals but rather that North Korea has a completely different notion of "common sense" and this produces the cruel human rights issues that are affecting Japanese people.

Why, after more than 40 years have passed, are we unable to solve this issue? Japan refuses to offer any economic assistance to North Korea unless the abductions issue is solved. North Korea, still angry over Japan's past occupation of the Korean Peninsula, claims that the abductions issue has already been solved. Should the abductions be solved first or should diplomatic relations be normalized first? Time is passing with neither country giving way. While we can think of this issue as a matter of human rights, it also has a political background. It is now being used as a tool for jockeying between nations. I wonder if there is any way to find an answer to this issue that has become so complex that even politicians have been unable for many years to solve it. If there is a solution, I think that it lies in the opinions of each of us as an individual in building a public consensus. Unlike 40 years ago, people around the world are now linked together via the Internet and social media. Information and communications in North Korea is also reportedly changing. Perhaps the ability of people around the world to broadcast information can help find a resolution to this issueproblem. The power of a strong public opinion can perhaps change how people think about certain issues. What I can do for this purpose is to collect information and make my opinions known. The abductions issue is a huge matter but I can try to learn just a little about it, talk about it with my friends, and give shape to my opinions as I did through this essay. I can then help tell future generations that we must avoid this ever happening again. Hoping for a solution, I will continue to build up the small steps.