



## **How Do Public Actors Influence Foreign Policy? A Case of Abduction Issue between Japan and North Korea under the LDP Government**

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**Abstract:** In Japan, since the North Korean leadership admitted that its agents were responsible for kidnapping a certain number of Japanese in 2002, the government-sponsored normalization campaign has been halted. In addition to the missile and nuclear issues, the abduction is one of the strong obstacles to prevent both countries to normalize relations. Nevertheless, the issue between Japan and North Korea offers an interesting insight over the public-government relations in a democracy. The public reaction against North Korea had an official policy of normalization with North Korea turned over, which is a quite interesting to observe, because even a democratic government does not necessarily take all public demands into serious consideration. Thus, the North Korean abduction issue fits in a category of public-oriented policy realization. This study indicates that the public actors could get involved in the policy-making arena, if a government does not tackle an issue with certain determination and is polarized to reach consensus.

**Key Word:** Japan, North Korea, Abduction, Policy Construction, Public Actors

On April 28, 2006, President George W. Bush invited Yokota Yukie, whose daughter, Megumi, was abducted by North Korea about three decades ago, to the Oval Office. He emotionally commented, "It's a heartless country that would separate loved ones, and yet that's exactly what happened to this mom as a result of the actions of North Korea. If North Korea expects to be respected in the world, that country must respect human rights and human dignity and must allow this mother to hug her child again."<sup>1</sup>

From the 1970s, a number of missing citizens had been reported in Japan. Police investigation and some testimony from alleged North Korean spies suggested that some of them could have been abducted by the North Korean agents. Since 1991, the Japanese officials had contacted the North Korean counterparts, but they repeatedly denied any wrong-doing.

At the same time, Tokyo, under collaboration between the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and the powerful central bureaucracy, had addressed improving relations with Pyongyang since the beginning of the 1990s.<sup>2</sup> The Koizumi administration shifted the policy to citizen groups-sponsored confrontation against North Korea, after the North Korean leader, Kim Jong Il, admitted at the Pyongyang Summit in 2002 that the North Korean intelligence community had abducted the Japanese citizens and brought them to the country. Consequently, Tokyo was forced to take macho-style measures, neither compromising nor discussing normalization further, until the abduction issue would finally be resolved.

The Japanese government officially recognizes the abduction of seventeen Japanese citizens by North Korea. Although the five victims returned to Japan in 2002, and the North Korean regime insists that the rest of them have been dead, Tokyo has asserted that all the remaining victims should be alive. The negotiation between the two sides has taken place sporadically but stagnated.

The abduction issue between Japan and North Korea indicates a complicated process of policy construction, especially over the relations between the public actors and the government. The policy shift caused by the abduction was one of the rare cases in Japanese diplomacy where pressure from the public actors effectively influenced an entire foreign policy outlook of the government. In other words, the public interest directly overflowed into an arena of bilateral foreign relations as an input, and the government produced an output supported and favored by the particular citizen groups. Thus, one question concerning the abduction is; why did the Koizumi Administration absorb socially-oriented norms and poured them into policy construction, rather than following politically normal and merit-based stances for normalization with North Korea? This study explores the course of actions which led to such a political reality in Japan.

For any types and styles of government, their ultimate purpose to handle issues is to survive as long as possible. In order to achieve that objective, government leaders try not to alienate the public actors. At the same time, a concrete policy outline drives policy-makers to stick with certain political position especially in the field of diplomacy, no matter how controversial with the actors.

The North Korean abduction issue exactly fits in this category of publicly-oriented policy realization. An item of concern in this study is the interrelation between publicly-oriented perspectives and government policy-making. This study analyzes two intertwined components, the nature of policy planning and characterization of the issue by the interest groups.

#### A. Policy Planning

Historically, Japan and Korea had maintained relatively good relationships except for the time of Japanese invasions from 1592 to 1598. With a rise of Western imperialism as well as emergence of the powerful neighboring state, Korea gradually

lost its autonomy and was forced into depending on China for external policies in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Through the two wars, one of which was with China in 1895, and the other was with Russia in 1905, the Japanese government was able to grab initiative to take care of the state matters on the Peninsula, which finally led to annexation of Korea into Japan in 1910. Japanese colonization of the Korean Peninsula ended with Japan's defeat in the Second World War in 1945. Hostile sentiment against the Japanese, stemmed from forced assimilation and exploitation during the colonization period from 1910 to 1945, has still lingered on the peninsula.

In the post-war period, Japan's approach towards the Korean Peninsula reflected the nature of the Cold War. A huge demand for military supplies by the United States in the Korean War (1950-1953) made the war-damaged Japanese economy revived. As a part of the Western camp, the Japanese government finally normalized relations with South Korea in 1965, but Tokyo kept no commitment for such a deal to the communist North. On the other hand, the Union of Korean Nationals, *Chosen Soren*, founded in 1955, strengthened connection with the Kim Il Sung regime at the private level. Encouraged by Pyongyang, the Union initiated the Return to Motherland Movement in 1959. Within a decade from the start promoted by this private organization, almost 90,000 Korean nationals left Japan and settled in North Korea. On the other hand, government-level talks had been kept in low key.

In the late 1980s, official interaction among Eastern and Western leaders accelerated, which provided a favorable ground for improvement of bilateral relations between Japan and North Korea. A remarkable step was the congressional statement in 1989 by Prime Minister Takeshita Noboru to recognize Japan's responsibility for war damages during the Second World War to North Korea. In the following year, Kanemaru Shin, the most influential leader of the LDP at that time, and Tanabe Yasuo, Chairman of the Japan Socialist Party (JSP), led a party-level delegation to Pyongyang.

The matter of normalization turned into a realistic political agenda between the two countries. The Cold War-characterized relations would have ended with the demise of the central force of ideological confrontation. However, the political reality was more complicated.<sup>3</sup>

In spite of LDP, JSP, and central bureaucracy's support and promotion,<sup>4</sup> a variety of issues, such as nuclear facility inspection, war damage compensation, return of Japanese wives from North Korea, and provision of food aid, interrupted governmental negotiations for normalization. Especially for the Japanese government, suspicion over abductions of its own nationals, along with unreasonable, unconvincing, and ambiguous explanations by the North Korean agents hindered further and tenacious efforts at the negotiation tables.

It goes without saying that the suspicion that Pyongyang would have presumably committed terrorist acts caused a dilemma for Tokyo. If normalization had been defined as the political objective, the Japanese government would have put the abduction issue aside as having been stubbornly requested by the North Korean regime. On the other hand, if the government had advanced solution of the issue prior to normalization and pressured Pyongyang to return the abductees, relations with North Korea could have worsened, and expectations for normalization would have receded.

Recognizing that neither course would produce guaranteed results, the Japanese government adopted a two-pronged approach, in which both normalization and resolution of the abduction issue should be dealt with simultaneously.<sup>5</sup> In order to make it forward, a balancing maneuver would be a must. However, the government officials did not carefully design the process to manage the two issues of such different natures. Congressional debates since 1997 shed light on the zigzag road of policy planning by Tokyo.

On April 18, 1997, at a meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the Lower House, Matsuzawa Narifumi, a congressman from the New Progress Party, brought up

the abduction issue. Foreign Minister Ikeda Yukihiko stated that no clear evidence had been obtained to conclude that the North Korean agents abducted Japanese citizens.<sup>6</sup> In the following month, Ikeda again commented that alleged and systematic abductions by the North Korean agents were only suspicions, no more or no less. For a practical purpose, in addition, the government followed a flexible approach toward North Korea.<sup>7</sup>

Contrary to Ikeda's comments, on May 1, 1997, Chief Secretariat Kajiyama Seiroku asserted that in spite of no clear confirmation, there could be little doubt that the North Korean intelligence had been involved in the abductions.<sup>8</sup> Further, on November 18 at a meeting of the Budget Committee in the Upper House, Date Kougi, a senior officer from the Central Prosecution Office, affirmed that the North's state-led involvement was beyond doubt.<sup>9</sup>

Responding to those who had asserted North Korean responsibility, the Japanese government adopted a strategy to shift the definition of the issue from "abduction" to "missing" to make the case less confrontational. At a meeting of the Special Committee for Financial Reforms on November 19, 1997, the then Financial Minister Obuchi Keizo stated that the government was seriously seeking an opportunity to resume normalization talks with the North. Tokyo and Pyongyang shared a mutual ground to deal with items on the table, and the North Korean regime had coped with the Japanese government and been searching for the "missing Japanese," not the "abducted ones."<sup>10</sup> From then on, the concept of searching "missing Japanese" prevailed and dominated among the government and bureaucrat circles.

By evading the publicly and politically recognized understanding of the "abducted Japanese," Obuchi went on mentioning a possibility that those Japanese citizens could voluntarily go into North Korea and disappear there for some reasons unknown. His statement entirely altered substantial problem underlying the prolonged

suspicion over the North Korean acts. Finally, Obuchi asserted that the abduction was no longer a political obstacle to normalize relations between the two countries.

At the same meeting, a senior official from the Department of Foreign Affairs even stated that the abduction issue was not an item being negotiated with North Korea at the department level.<sup>11</sup> The government's intention was to promote ongoing negotiation process for normalization while setting aside negative factors.

As the above arguments indicate, in spite of some opposition, Tokyo had obviously tended to pursue normalization with Pyongyang. However, in the late 1990s, the then Lower House congressman, Abe Sinzo, who had energetically advocated a concern of North Korean responsibility over the abductions, stated that the degree of public and congressional attention was rather low mainly because of little media coverage. Abe also expressed harsh criticism against the Japanese prosecutors not to conduct a serious search.<sup>12</sup>

At any rate, suspicions over Pyongyang did not make Tokyo discard an option for engagement with the North Korean regime. A timetable had not been clearly set; however, normalization had already become a real political agenda. As Obuchi stressed, the Japanese government regarded it as one of the most urgent diplomatic assignments.<sup>13</sup>

Prior to the year 2000, Tokyo clearly emphasized its policy on normalization and no longer advocated balancing acts. On March 26, 1999, at the Special Committee for Japan-US Defense Cooperation, the then Prime Minister Obuchi clearly articulated that his priority was establishing normal relations with North Korea.<sup>14</sup>

A party-level delegation led by former Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi visited Pyongyang to participate in top-level meetings with the Labor Party leaders from December 1 to 3, 1999. The communiqué indicated that both parties would pressure their own governments to foster talks over normalization. Obuchi looked on it as a favorable accomplishment, and stated that his administration would foster further

dialogue with its counterpart. Regarding the abduction issue, both Japanese and North Korean Red Cross should take initiative for settlement of the 'humanitarian concern' under "government's supervision."<sup>15</sup> Immediately after the visit, both Red Cross affiliations held meeting in Beijing from December 19 to 22. North Korean Red Cross promised to continue a vigorous search for "missing Japanese."<sup>16</sup> At the same time, the Japanese counterpart pressured the Japanese government for extensive food aid to North Korea.

Normalization with North Korea as a decisive policy of the Japanese government was strongly felt at a meeting of Foreign Affairs Committee in the Upper House on December 14, 1999. A senior officer from the Prosecution Office claimed they regarded abductions of ten missing Japanese as the most serious of criminal acts, and undertaken extensive search with cooperation of the South Korean counterpart. On the other hand, Vice-Foreign Minister Azuma Shozo stated that the abduction should be treated as a political matter; therefore, solution must be processed in the inter-government negotiations between Tokyo and Pyongyang.<sup>17</sup> Foreign Minister Kono Yohei supported that statement and further implied,

"Everybody has taken the abduction issue seriously; however, the most substantial concern is to build a sense of trust with the neighboring country. Most underlying security matters must be solved through respectable negotiations between the two countries."<sup>18</sup>

Criminal investigation on the North Korean nationals is absolutely impossible without taking measures beyond the law, and there is little opportunity for that. The Japanese government attached little importance to the legal processing of abductions and discarded multilateral level approaches. Therefore, a narrowly defined political solution based on normalization talks was the only option which Tokyo could pursue to deal with the abduction issue.<sup>19</sup>



The Koizumi administration with the highest popular support in the post-Second World War period did not take a provocative stance against North Korea at first. Foreign Minister Tanaka Makiko did not favor the extensive investigation led by the Japanese agency. She insisted that the issue should be settled through mediation by South Korea as a political matter.<sup>20</sup> At a meeting of the Transportation Committee in the Upper House in October 2001, a congressman asked Transportation Minister Ogi Chikage about the safety measures of the Japanese coastline where suspicious boats that could have sailed from the North Korean water should be discussed. Ogi responded that her Ministry cooperated with all responsible agencies to improve the defense system of the coastline. However, she never mentioned anything about the North Koreans who presumably imposed a threat.<sup>21</sup> Beyond doubt, Ogi avoided irritating Pyongyang.

Not all government leaders accepted the moderate and negotiation-centered approach to deal with North Korea. Just prior to the historical summit between the top leaders of the two countries in 2002, Abe stated at a meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committee that the government constantly had to review a policy towards Pyongyang, because not all strategies were effective to settle the issue between the two countries.<sup>22</sup> From Abe's point of view, any government actions that seemed to put less value on Japanese lives than on foreign relations would attract little support from the citizens.

At the government level, the abduction issue certainly influenced the course of political developments between Japan and North Korea. In spite of continuous emphasis on interaction by the government circles, Tokyo failed to establish concrete agendas and detailed process stepping towards normalization.

Furthermore, the historical summit in 2002 where the top leaders officially agreed to move normalization talks forward was not successful, because Pyongyang suddenly admitted the abductions of Japanese citizens. It was beyond doubt that Tokyo neither prepared for designing methodology to negotiate with its counterpart nor acted

based on a concrete agenda. Even the merits of normalization were not fully discussed at Diet sessions. Since Pyongyang did not have any reasons to prevent normalization, which was regarded as an enormous opportunity for financial compensation from Japan, it was the Japanese government that shut the door for it.

In this regard, the strategy of “Killing Two Birds with One Stone” ended up with “Killing No Bird.” A lack of strong determination for a political end prevented Tokyo from realizing its policy. From then on, normalization with North Korea has not been put on the table as a political agenda item. With the declaration by Koizumi in September not to start normalization talks without the resolution of the abduction issue<sup>23</sup> and the return of five abductees to Japan in the following month<sup>24</sup>, the political settlement between the two countries has been deadlocked.

#### B. Characterization of the Issue by Public Actors

At the public level, strong pressure groups normally form socially oriented perspective on various issues. They are agents to get the public acknowledged about claims, concerns, details, and view points that are related to their own particular interests. Regarding the abduction issue in Japan, two organizations, the AFVKNK, the Association of the Families of Victims Kidnapped by North Korea and the NARKN, the National Association for the Rescue of Japanese Kidnapped by North Korea, have played a central role for promoting public awareness to tackle the matter.

In March 1997, the eight families that had missing family members supposedly kidnapped by North Korean agents established the AFVKNK, after media coverage about the abduction of Yokota Megumi appeared for the first time in the previous month. To impose strong pressure on the North Korean regime, first, those family members showed their determination to reveal the names of their missing sons and daughters that had been kept in secret from the public.<sup>25</sup> Second, they published several

memoirs to help the public noticed about their experience and despair related to the abduction.<sup>26</sup>

Supporters for the AFVKNK founded a number of regional organizations to back up the families. In October 1998, those organizations established the central organ, the NARKN. Sato Katsumi, chief editor of *Modern Korea*, became the head of the central organization. Now the NARKN has forty branches all over Japan.<sup>27</sup>

Most abduction seems to have occurred in the late 1970s through the beginning of the 1980s. The general pattern was that the North Korean agents looked for young Japanese who supposed to be able to instruct Japanese language to train intelligent agents for Japan-oriented clandestine activities. Moreover, the agents assigned for such missions carefully researched the targets and planned each kidnapping case. At the time of this writing, only five victims as well as their family members have been able to return to Japan. For the rescue of the remaining victims from North Korea, what activities have AFVKNK/NARKN engaged in? What is the theoretical perspective behind those actions?

Both AFVKNK/NARKN have stated on a number of occasions that the abduction was a violation of national sovereignty as well as breach of human rights. Pyongyang used the victims as a strategic card to draw concessions from Tokyo. In order to force North Korean leaders to alter the course of such unlawful acts, both organizations have advocated that strong pressure on the North Korean regime should be the only option. Neither negotiation nor engagement could produce a desirable result, because positive approaches merely offer the regime what they seek without any return. In this sense, both organizations have strongly opposed any official aid or financial offers to North Korea.

From the behavioral point of view, AFVKNK/NARKN mainly engaged in three layers of activities, grass-roots appeal, political pressure, and international awareness.

The organizations sponsored numerous regional meetings and conducted street fund-raising campaigns. The central purposes of those activities were to collect activity funds and to arouse nation-wide awareness for the rescue of victims.<sup>28</sup>

Except for six groups that collect membership fees, regional organizations relied only on contributions based on grass-root fund-raising and small operation revenue. The amount of money they collected varied, reflecting regional interests. The branch in Niigata where the abduction of Yokota Megumi was first reported in 1997 was the top regional organization for collecting contributions. In 2005, the Niigata branch collected a total amount of \$85,000, compared to the Yamagata branch where nothing related to the abduction seemed to happen, received only \$1,270.<sup>29</sup>

The roller coaster developments related to the abduction as well as North Korean situations also influenced an annual amount of contribution as such:

2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
\$241,471	\$529,477	\$302,312	\$362,558	\$459,664 <sup>30</sup>

At the summit of 2002, Kim Jong-Il apologized for misconduct of abduction committed by the North Korean agents. Five abductees returned to Japan from North Korea after the summit. Although the issue was not entirely settled, since AFVKNK/NARKN did not take information given by Pyongyang seriously, the first step for the resolution was achieved. Therefore, public enthusiasm was on the ebb. However, a matter of the victims' children left in North Korea and false reports on other victims, including Yokota Megumi whom Pyongyang reported had committed suicide in 1994, aroused media attention. The amount of contributions in 2003 was to double that in the previous year. In 2004, Pyongyang let the children of two abducted couples, the Chimura and the Hasuike, who returned home in 2002, to migrate to Japan for family reunion. Then, the contributions went down. After that, because of intensive organizational campaigns and attack over government's efforts, the contributions were on the rise. The amount in each

year was a strong indicator of the degree of public interest in the ongoing process on the abduction issue.

AFVKNK/NARKN had organized nation-wide rallies in Tokyo since 1999. On each occasion, the organizations issued a communiqué to clarify their appeals on three points; the North Korean regime should admit misconduct of abduction and return all victims; the Japanese government should not engage in financial support to the North; and the government should impose economic sanctions to settle the issue. The number of participants in the rallies each year also fluctuated. For example, the rally of 2003 at Tokyo International Forum gathered 6,000 in addition to 5,000 who could not enter the hall. However, in 2007, only 2,000 participated in the rally, although the top government leaders including Prime Minister Abe Sinzo took part in for the first time.<sup>31</sup>

The members of AFVKNK/NARKN took direct pressure as a means to change the course of foreign policy in which normalization with North Korea was a political objective. An attempt to exchange information regarding missing victims between Tokyo and Pyongyang was, in fact, impracticable. As a result, the abduction moved into the international political arena where governmental negotiations were the sole method to settle the issue. Therefore, AFVKNK/NARKN defined their role not merely as interest groups trying to save abducted victims but as lobbyists influencing foreign policy of the government. In this sense, the members of both associations utilized all political occasions to promote their causes to policy-makers.

Yokota Shigeru, Megumi's father, testified at the U.S. congressional meetings in 2004 and 2006. At the Foreign Affairs Committee meeting in the Lower House on February 24, 2004, he presented the organizational goal. AFVKNK/NARKN tried to trace more than 100 victims and to get them back to Japan. In order to do so, he mentioned that pressure should be an essential means not only for enhancement of national security but also for settlement of the abduction issue. If the North did not

comply with the request from the Japanese government, economic sanction must be enforced in a timely fashion.<sup>32</sup>

Once a government adopts a concrete policy over a certain issue, or policy-makers are not interested in solving it, no appeal from interest groups would produce any results. As Nishioka Chikara, professor at Tokyo Christian University and powerful supporter of the NARKN, pointed out, the government and policy-makers put the abduction issue secondary to the normalization. Nishioka argued at a Security Committee meeting in the Lower House on July 25, 2002, that the Japanese government neither took care of nor responded to the issue in a serious manner. He admitted that the government leaders and, especially, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials, tackled it energetically; however, they had no reliable information regarding the victims supposed to be confined in North Korea, which seemed to make their investigation towards the abduction half-hearted.<sup>33</sup>

Arimori Akihiro, whose daughter was supposedly abducted by the North Korean agent in 1983, introduced an episode at the committee meeting. When he visited the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to get informed about his missing daughter in 1988, due to the fact that Akihiro had received a letter concerning his daughter from Pyongyang, officials just mentioned that since there were no diplomatic relations between Japan and North Korea, they could do nothing to help him.<sup>34</sup>

Hashuike Toru, a brother of Kaoru, expressed strong indignation against policy-makers at the Foreign Affairs Committee meeting on February 24, 2004. Hasuike commented that the Japanese government was responsible for leaving the issue behind more than two decades. No officials earnestly dealt with saving missing Japanese, even protecting their own nationals.<sup>35</sup> These complaints were deeply rooted because of insincere reactions around government circles.<sup>36</sup> In a sense, both associations felt that their urgent task was not confronting the North Korean regime, but changing the attitude of Japanese policy-makers over the abduction issue.<sup>37</sup>

One of the direct actions appealing to unconcerned policy-makers was staging sit-ins. The members of both organizations normally took that action when the government announced financial aid to North Korea. For example, on March 6 and 7, 1999, the members of AFVKNK/NARKN protested against the cancellation of economic sanctions, and went on sit-in in front of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the headquarters of the Liberal Democratic Party. The act brought an opportunity to discuss the issue with Kono Yohei, the then Minister of Foreign Affairs. His remarks disappointed the members. Kono made several comments irritating the organization members as follows, (1) the government determined to supply 100,000 ton of rice to North Korea, (2) only negotiations, not forceful actions, produce a desirable result, (3) the timing is the key for such a delicate issue. In response, the members posed some questions to Kono; why the government imposed economic sanction on North Korea when a missile crisis occurred in 1998, but not in the case of abduction, and what the government's next move was, in the case of which financial aid was not paid off. Although Kono did not reply clearly, the members were able to show what they stood for.<sup>38</sup>

In spite of negative remarks from the government circles, both abduction-related organizations effectively utilized political pressure to force the government to reconsider the way to deal with North Korea. Since Abe was inaugurated prime minister in 2006, discussion for normalization with North Korea also disappeared from policy agenda item. In December 2006, the Abe Administration sponsored an international conference to discuss the abduction issue. The conference was the first meeting entirely supported by Tokyo. Prime Minister Abe made a speech and advocated that his government should not process normalization without settlement of the abduction.<sup>39</sup>

Internationally focused activities were the other method for AFVKNK/ NARKN to arouse global awareness of the issue. Their strategy was directly appealing to the

influential policy-makers around the world. With the objective for Pyongyang having been the guarantee of regime survival from the United States, both organizations dealt mainly with the US government circles. The tours sponsored by the organizations began in 2001 culminating in a meeting with President George W. Bush in 2006.

The first American tour, with a group consisted of eleven members of AFVKNK/NARKN headed by Shigeru Yokota, took place from February 25 to March 4, 2001. The members talked with the top American policy-makers including Condoleezza Rice during their visit. She received the materials detailed in the abduction and encouraged the group for the further search. The tour members also visited the United Nations Headquarters in New York to discuss the matter with vice secretary-general and to present their causes at the OHCHR (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights). As President Bush was deeply moved and expressed an emotional regret when he met Yukie Yokota in 2006, the responses from the various American politicians and the international organizations were remarkably positive.<sup>40</sup>

An official at the OHCHR advised the tour members to visit the headquarters in Geneva. AFVKNK/NARKN quickly organized the second tour to Switzerland in the following month. When two members of the NARKN, Shimada Yoichi, professor at Fukui University, and Fukui Yoshitaka, professor at Aoyama Gakuin University, visited the United States to prepare for the second American tour in February 2003, the American policy-makers whom they met expressed the following recognition: the abduction was one of the serious human rights violations that the American governments tackled: therefore, negotiations on normalization with Pyongyang should not have proceeded without settlement of the issue.<sup>41</sup> In this way, their activities and efforts for arousing international awareness produced fruitful outcomes.<sup>42</sup>

On the other hand, the members of AFVKNK/NARKN admitted that the organizational actions did not attract public interest expect for the Niigata region at first. For example, when Hasuike conducted a signature collecting campaign in the Ginza



District in Tokyo, only a few passersby responded.<sup>43</sup> He also expressed negative responses from regional politicians. When Yokota and Hasuike contacted various regional council members in Tokyo in December 1997, they felt that indifferent attitude prevailed among those.<sup>44</sup> A dreadful concern for the members of both organizations was that the abduction could only give a temporary impact on the public, but fade away as the time went by.

The public interest showed a degree of fluidity depending on various developments related to the abduction and relations with North Korea. Not all politicians supported energetic efforts by the organizations. Strong international pressure on Pyongyang solely by a reason of the abduction was not realistic, because the regional security issue represented by North Korea's nuclear weapons program was a main concern for the international community. However, one thing that could be certain was that without active and extensive operations conducted by AFVKNK/NARKN, the Japanese government would not have taken any steps for the settlement of the abduction. In other words, the five victims who could return to Japan in 2002 would still have been in North Korea.

## Conclusion

This case study verifies that the public actors could influence policy-making, only if a government does not show a strong determination to tackle a certain issue. The so-called a fill-in-the space theory that social movement agents utilize vacuum within policy-making processes for realization of their claims explains such a political outlook.

The agents see a lack of determination in the government and a shift of public opinion to pursue its own interest. If a space widens, public actors are likely to get involved in the policy construction area which the government leaders usually occupy and monopolize. If the space is neither available nor detectable, the interest groups cannot force the government to take their demands into serious consideration.

Therefore, political space is a crucial factor allowing the public actors to influence government circles.

Regarding the abduction issue, speech and presentations by policy-makers at Diet sessions indicated that the objective for the Japanese government was apparently normalization with North Korea. Party-level delegations visited Pyongyang, and special envoys met their counterparts in order to discuss normalization. Both Japanese and North Korean agents could at least pave a way for such a political goal. However, the internal and external atmospheres did not allow both actors to finalize normalization. The North Korean acts of missile launch as well as nuclear programs disturbed the inter-governmental talks. The interest groups reacted against such developments and largely supported a proposal for economic sanction on North Korea. In addition, the United States, Japan's strong ally, did not even accept a proposal from Pyongyang for bilateral treaty negotiation; therefore, the Japanese government could not act moving on to normalization by itself.

Even after the government officially confirmed the North Korean involvement in the abduction in 1998, policy-makers continued to favor normalization. The turning point was the Pyongyang Summit of 2002, where the top North Korean leader eventually admitted it. Then the political interest for normalization quickly withered away. Finally, Abe Shinzo, a hardliner and a strong supporter for AFVKNK/NARKN was inaugurated prime minister in 2006. Abe energetically tackled the abduction issue and suspended almost all channels for negotiations. His leadership was the most favorable occasion for AFVKNK/NARKN to carry on organizational activities and to arouse the public and international awareness. In this way, the space in which abduction-related organizations could fill in policy-making processes was gradually widened.

The abduction issue is a rare case that completely altered the nature of foreign policy in the national government. Political developments divided government circles, and the interest groups effectively conducted public campaigns.

AFVKNK/NARKN successfully utilized the space available for them. All three of their targets, the Japanese public, the policy-makers, and the international community, responded positively for their causes. Although the organizations could not reach a final resolution, they created a path to return all alleged victims, which is their ultimate contribution as social movement agents in the public.

As a final remark, both Japanese government and North Korean regime made a tremendous mistake that made normalization talks disappear from the table against their will. The Japanese policy-makers regarded diplomacy entirely as the monopoly of the central government, because only the government could deal with it based on defined national interests. North Korea could not expect the development in Japan that social pressure would pour into the national policy construction of the government. Here is a lesson for both national leaders: recognition of the abduction by North Korean and return of some abductees to Japan were not good enough for the public actors to welcome normalization. Resentment and sorrow of their families are immeasurable; therefore, they will keep pressuring both Tokyo and Pyongyang until the final resolution certainly comes out. Prime Minister Abe formed his second administration in December 2012. His energetic style to deal with North Korea is worthy of notice. A bad news: time is running out. The abductees who have supposedly been held in North Korea and their family members in Japan are aging.

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[3] For the author's view on a cooperative approach to North Korea, see, Yutaka Okuyama 'Does A Cooperative Approach to Dissident States Work? A Case Study of North Korea,' *International Journal on World Peace* 25 (2008), 57-82.

[4] For details of LDP and bureaucrat's policy towards North Korea, see Christopher Hughes, *Japan's Economic Power and Security: Japan and North Korea* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

[5] At a meeting of Foreign Defense Committee in the Upper House on November 30, 2000, Prime Minister Kono Youhei mentioned that normalization and the abduction were linked. Inter-government negotiations between Japan and North Korea could solve both matters.

[6] Committee hearing of the Foreign Affairs at the Upper House on April 18, 1997.

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[7] Committee hearing of the Foreign Affairs at the Upper House on May 13, 1997.

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[8] Committee hearing of the Budget Committee at the Upper House on May 1, 1997.

<http://www.kokkai.ndl.go.jp> Kajiyama was the first policy-maker to mention a suspicion of North Korean act abducted Japanese citizens in the Diet in 1988.

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[9] The mentioned victim was Taguchi Yaeko, who could be a Japanese instructor for Kim Jong He, a North Korean intelligence officer who bombed a KAL in 1988. Committee hearing of Budget at the Upper House on November 18, 1997.

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<http://www.kokkai.ndl.go.jp>

[13] Committee hearing of the Cabinet at the Upper House, November 25, 1997.

<http://www.kokkai.ndl.go.jp>

[14] Committee hearing of the Japan-US Defense Cooperation on March 26, 1999.

<http://www.kokkai.ndl.go.jp>

[15] `Gaikoseisaku -Tomen no taikitachosen seisaku ni tsuite. <http://www.incl.ne.jp/hase/gaikou/seisaku-120307.html>.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Committee hearing of the Foreign Affairs at the Lower House on December 8, 1999.

<http://www.kokkai.ndl.go.jp>

[18] Ibid.

[19] See Kono's statements at the Committee hearings of Foreign Affairs at the Upper House on November 30, 2000, and Budget at the Lower House on March 1, 2001.

[20] Committee hearing of Foreign Affairs at the Upper House on May 29, 2001.

<http://www.kokkai.ndl.go.jp>

[21] Committee hearing of Transportation in the Upper House on October 25, 2001.

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<http://www.kokkai.ndl.go.jp> Two water-proof scooters supposed to be made in North Korea were found out in Japan; one in Fukui in 1991 and the other in Toyama in 2001.

[22] Committee hearing of Foreign Affairs at the Upper House on October 10, 2002.

<http://www.kokkai.ndl.go.jp>

[23] "Rachimondai sinten ga seijyouka no daizentei," *Asahi Shinbun*, September 4, 2002.

[24] "Rachi no gonin kikoku," *Asahi Shinbun*, October 16, 2002.

[25] Kazokukai, *Kazoku* (Tokyo: Kobunsha, 2002), 93-94.

[26] See, Yokota Sakie, *Megumi okasan ga kitsuto tasuketeageru* (Tokyo: Nihon TV Publisher, 1999), Hasuike Toru, *Dakan, Hikosakareta 24nen* (Tokyo: Sinchosha, 2002), Hasuike Hidekazu and Hatsui, *Kaoru he* (Tokyo: Sinchosha, 2002), Kayoko Arimoto, *Keiko ha kanarazu ikireimasu* (Tokyo: Kobe Shinbun Publisher, 2003), and Izuka Shigeru, *Imotoyo* (Tokyo: Nihon TV Publisher, 2003).

[27] The NARKN and its regional branches do not own their office. All contact numbers to the branches are cell phone numbers or home phone numbers of representatives. No office hires full-time employees.

[28] "Sukuukai zenkokukyogikai news, 2005, 2.7" <http://www.sukuukai.jp>.

[ 29 ] "Sukuukai zenkokukyogikai kameisosiki no Heizei 17nenndo Ketsusan Hokoku," <http://www.sukuukai.jp>.

[30] "Sukuukai zenkokukyogikai shusikesanhoukoku," <http://www.sukuukai.jp>.

[31] "Dai 5 kai kokumindaishukai daisekyo de shuryo,"

<http://www.sukuukai.jp/houkoku/log/200305/03-05-08.htm>, `Abe sori mo sanko si kokumindaishukai wo kaisai` <http://www.sukuukai.jp/mailnews.php?itemid=1227&catid=43>

[32] Committee hearing of Foreign Affairs at the Lower House, February 24, 2004.

<http://www.kokkai.ndl.go.jp>

[33] Committee hearing of National Security at the Lower House, July 25, 2002.

<http://www.kokkai.ndl.go.jp>

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[34] Ibid.

[35] Committee hearing of Foreign Affairs at the Lower House, February 24, 2004.

<http://www.kokkai.ndl.go.jp>

[36] For example, Nakamura Hideki, a representative of the Fukuoka branch and professor at Nakamura Gakuen University, stated in December 1999, "all parties and the government trick the nation and attempt to wipe the issue away from national agenda. This is an act of treachery for the Japanese citizen."

<http://www.suluukai.jp/houkoku/log/199912/99-12-13.htm>.

[37] Particularly, AFVKNK/NARKN repel such an argument linking settlement of the abduction and compensation over historical Japanese occupation of the Korean Peninsula. As Masami Imagawa, a lawmaker at the Upper House, mentioned, normalization was the way to solve all matters underlying both countries. In order to normalize relations, setting a feeling of distrust aside should be the first task. Nishioka opposed Imagawa and argued that the priority was not creation of a sense of trust between the Japanese and the North Koreans, but rescue of Japanese citizens. See arguments between Imagawa and Nishioka at Committee hearing of Foreign Affairs at the Lower House, February 24, 2004.

[38] <http://www.sukuukai.jp/houkoku/log/200003/00-03-12.htm>.

[39] <http://www.sukuukai.jp/houkoku/log/200612/20061214.htm>.

[40] <http://www.sukuukai.jp/houkoku/log/200103/01-03-04.htm>.

[41] <http://www.sukuukai.jp/houkoku/log/200302/03-02-07.htm>.

[42] <http://www.sukuukai.jp/houkoku/log/200104/01-04-10.htm>.

[43] Hasuike, 118.

[44] Ibid. 127.