

Nomination Form
International Memory of the World Register

**Return to Maizuru Port—Documents Related to the Internment and Repatriation
Experiences of Japanese (1945-1956)**
(Japan)

2014-12

1.0 Summary

When the Japanese Empire collapsed due to defeat in World War II in 1945, an estimated 600,000 to 800,000 Japanese military personnel and civilians were interned in labour camps in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). The Maizuru Repatriation Memorial Museum has a unique and extensive collection of materials related to the internment and the survivors' repatriation from 1945 to 1956. The materials describe the human determination to survive in the face of great hardship. These experiences form an important part of the collective memory of Japanese people that led to aspirations for permanent world peace. Similar experiences endured at the same time are part of the collective memory of people in nations in Europe.

The nominated materials, which include diaries, illustrations and poetry, convey universal themes: the internees' distress and despair, their zest for living, love for their families, and dreams of returning home. There are records of the thoughts of families waiting for the internees' return and of the solidarity of the Japanese people. The scarcity of official government records heightens the value of these priceless private records, which have miraculously survived. They are unique and authentic records of individuals who maintained their humanity throughout post-war calamities. (200 words)

2.0 Nomination and contact details

2.1 Name of nominator

Maizuru City (Kyoto Prefecture, Japan)

2.2 Relationship to the nominated documentary heritage

Maizuru City owns the collection of materials related to the internment of Japanese people in Siberia and their repatriation to Japan. The collection is held in the Maizuru Repatriation Memorial Museum.

2.3 Contact person

Ryozo Tatami (Mayor of Maizuru City)

2.4 Contact details

Name: Ryozo Tatami

Address: 1584, Taira, Maizuru City, Kyoto Prefecture, 625-0133, Japan

Telephone: +81-773-68-0836

Facsimile: +81-773-68-0370

Email: hikiage@post.city.maizuru.kyoto.co.jp

3.0 Identity and description of the documentary heritage

3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated

Name: Return to Maizuru Port—Documents Related to the Internment and Repatriation Experiences of Japanese (1945-1956)

3.4 History/Provenance

Eighteen Japanese ports, including the Port of Maizuru, were designated as entry facilities for Japanese military and civilian repatriates. Maizuru received approximately 660,000 people from internment camps in Siberia and also from north-eastern China between 1945 and 1956. 450,000 of these repatriates had been interned in forced-labour camps in Siberia and in other places in the Soviet Union.

In 1985, 40 years after the beginning of the repatriation, the City of Maizuru held a national conference in memory of the people who never returned and the people who did return to the Port of Maizuru. During the convention it was decided by the participants to try to construct a Repatriation Memorial Museum. Maizuru was chosen as the location because that is where the repatriates began their second lives in Japan.

Remarkably approximately 74 million yen (about 720,000 US dollars in 1988) was raised in donations from the general public. The Maizuru Repatriation Museum opened in 1988 and by December 2013 approximately 12,000 items had been donated to the museum. The donations of funds and materials came from people all around the nation.

Most of the materials were contributed by former internees or by family members of former internees. Because 450,000 of the 660,000 Maizuru Port repatriates had survived forced-labour camps in Siberia and elsewhere in the Soviet Union, most of the museum's collection is related to internment in Siberia.

4.0 Legal information

4.1 Owner of the documentary heritage (name and contact details)

Name: Maizuru City

Address: Maizuru Repatriation Memorial Museum
1584 Taira, Maizuru City, Kyoto Prefecture, 625-0133, Japan

Telephone: +81-773-68-0836

Facsimile: +81-773-68-0370

Email: hikiage@post.city.maizuru.kyoto.co.jp

4.2 Custodian of the documentary heritage

The same as the owner

4.3 Legal status

Properties of Maizuru City

4.4 Accessibility

The nominated materials are on display in the permanent exhibition of the Maizuru Repatriation Museum.

Part of the collection can be viewed on the website of the Maizuru Repatriation Museum.

4.5 Copyright status

Copyright of the text belongs to Maizuru City.

Copyright of the photographs belongs to Maizuru City.

5.0 Assessment against the selection criteria

5.1 Authenticity

The Documents Related to the Internment and Repatriation Experiences of Japanese (1945-1956), the collection at the Maizuru Repatriation Memorial Museum, consist of materials contributed to the museum by repatriates themselves (former internees) and also by the families of former internees who had passed away. Thus, the provenance of the materials is clear and their authenticity has been thoroughly proven.

5.2 World significance

The Documents Related to the Internment and Repatriation Experiences of Japanese (1945-1956) comprise historical materials, indicating indescribable hardships experienced by Japanese people who lived in former Japanese colonies and lands occupied or dominated by Japan after the collapse of the Japanese Empire due to its defeat in World War II. In particular, the materials represent the plight of the Japanese military personnel and civilians who were interned in the region east of Moscow in the USSR, especially in Siberia and in the Russian Far East, and their repatriation to Japan, journeys of which were no less painful.

The USSR interned military personnel and civilians of its enemies as a measure to compensate for its loss of manpower due to the war. The government of the USSR interned not only Japanese, but also German and other European military personnel and civilians. Accordingly, the internment of Japanese people holds historical meaning similar to that of their European counterparts.

The internment and repatriation of Japanese people greatly influenced the mindset of the Japanese people, providing a basis for post-war nation building as a peaceful, culture-oriented nation. The nominated materials exhibit the daily realities of the lives of the internees and their repatriation, their sufferings, and the struggles of their families, along with the wishes shared by the general public for their safe return.

In consideration of the extreme difficulty the Japanese internees had in recording their experiences and bringing the documents to Japan, the very existence of the Documents Related to the Internment and Repatriation Experiences of Japanese (1945-1956) must be regarded as a sheer miracle. They are extremely rare, unique and authentic documents, displaying the humanity maintained by people in extremely inhumane situations. Given the extreme scarcity of official documents, these private documents, communicating real voices of individual persons, are very rare, unique, and truly irreplaceable.

5.3 Comparative criteria:

1 Time

The Documents Related to the Internment and Repatriation Experiences of Japanese (1945-1956) highlight a challenging period for Japan (from 1945 to the end of the 1950s), from the collapse of the Japanese Empire due to its defeat in World War II through the post-war occupation by the Allied Powers to the epoch of rebuilding the nation.

At the same time, the incident of the internment of Japanese people took place at a turning point in international politics—the time between the aftermath of World War II and the beginning of the Cold War.

From another perspective, the internment by the USSR resulted from an extreme labour shortage on the part of the USSR due to the loss of manpower during the war. To meet the need for manpower in post-war recovery projects, the USSR interned and exploited its former enemies, including Japanese and German military personnel and civilians.

The nominated materials are unique, authentic, and priceless documents that attest to the daily realities of life in the labour camps, as well as the distress of the internees' families waiting for their return.

2 Place

The Documents Related to the Internment and Repatriation Experiences of Japanese (1945-1956) comprise diaries, letters, illustrations, and other materials, all depicting the hardships experienced by people who were interned in the USSR. After the end of World War II, many Japanese people remaining in northern China were interned in various labour camps in the USSR, east of Moscow. Because of the coldness and scarcity of food, particularly in Siberia, about 10% of the internees are estimated to have died in such camps. Exhibiting the daily realities of those people who survived such harsh conditions, the nominated materials are rare, invaluable documents. The USSR interned German and other European military personnel and civilians in the western part of its territory, while Japanese internees were mainly sent to labour camps in the eastern part of the country.

The Documents Related to the Internment and Repatriation Experiences of Japanese (1945-1956) also include diaries and other materials written by their families and other Japanese people who remained within Japan. The diary by Mrs. Hamako Kitada, for instance, portrays her aspiration for reunion with her husband, who was interned in the USSR, along with her serious concerns and frustration over not knowing when he would return. Until 1956, Japan did not have diplomatic relations with the USSR, and during the occupation period, the Japanese government did not have the right to engage in international diplomacy. In this environment, families of the internees did not have sufficient information about the internees' safety or the schedule for their repatriation. In addition to the families themselves, many Japanese people felt great sympathy for the families of the internees. The nominated materials also include materials (for instance materials created by Mr. Niichiro Sakai) displaying sympathy from the general public.

When the repatriation of Japanese people began immediately after the end of the war, the Japanese government specified several ports across the country as gateways for their return journeys. Situated on the coast facing Nakhodka Port in the USSR across the Japan Sea, Maizuru Port was specified as one of the official ports to receive internees from the USSR. After 1950, Maizuru Port was the only port via which internees returned home. Accordingly, Maizuru became the one port that symbolized the internment and repatriation of Japanese people after the end of the war.

In Japan, these internees in the USSR were commonly known as “internees in Siberia.” In actuality, the labour camps for interned Japanese were located not only in Siberia,

but also in various other locations east of Moscow. Accordingly, geographically, the use of the term “Siberia” may not have been applicable in all cases. However, the majority of the internees were interned in camps in Siberia, and the rest were transported to labour camps in various other locations by way of Siberia. In addition, many Japanese associated their plight—heavy labour in intense cold and hunger, which resulted in the deaths of many compatriots—with the name “Siberia.” So the term “internment in Siberia” represents the common mental image of the hardships experienced by the internees, rather than purely a geographical location.

3 People

The Documents Related to the Internment and Repatriation Experiences of Japanese (1945-1956) comprise documents conveying the stories of the lives of Japanese military personnel and civilians who were interned in the USSR, their families waiting for their return to Japan, and the rest of the Japanese people, who sympathised with the internees and their separated families.

After the defeat of Japan in World War II, Japanese people living in Japan’s former colonies and territories desired to return home as soon as possible. Many, however, were interned in the USSR, and were forced to engage in physical labour, such as railway construction, logging, and mining, in arctic weather with little food provided.

Although some were allowed to return home in one or two years, others were interned much longer, some for as long as 11 years. Many died in the first couple of years due to the low temperatures and starvation. It is estimated that about 10% of the Japanese internees died over the entire period.

In this extreme state, even the survivors were little more than skin and bones and were in mortal danger. Yet, their strong aspiration to return home inspired them to live through their critical situations. The deaths of fellow internees reinforced their determination to return home even more strongly.

The diaries (such as the *Shirakaba Nisshi* [“white birch diary”]) and illustrations that internees brought home (which was indeed a miracle), as well as memoirs and paintings produced after their return based on their vivid memories, vividly exhibit their daily realities and feelings.

After the internees were allowed to exchange postcards with their families, this correspondence functioned as the sole means of communication between separated family members. However, strict restrictions were on the content of the messages, and not all such post was delivered.

Many families waiting for the return of the internees were forced to lead difficult lives in Japan due to the absence of their primary wage-earners. Some documents, such as the diary by Mrs. Hamako Kitada, indicate the daily struggles and sentiments of the wives and other family members of the internees.

Meanwhile, most Japanese people, who had themselves experienced the misery of the war, were truly concerned about the internees and their families. Some materials, such as those related to Mr. Niichiro Sakai, show the concern and sympathy shared by people nationwide.

In consideration of the scarcity of official documents, all the documents included in the Documents Related to the Internment and Repatriation Experiences of Japanese (1945-1956) are rare, unique, and authentic, attesting to the sense of personal integrity of each individual who had lived through the calamity of the war and post-war internment.

4 Subject and theme

The Documents Related to the Internment and Repatriation Experiences of Japanese (1945-1956) represent the daily realities and sentiments of the Japanese people who were interned in the USSR and their families waiting for their return. Their diaries, memoirs, letters, lists of names, and illustrations display the universal nature of humanity, particularly love for families and homelands, friendships, aspiration for permanent peace, and zest for living, embraced by people living in desperate situations. Vividly depicting such universal themes common to all humans, the nominated materials hold significance that should be widely recognised and shared by people throughout the world.

5 Form and style

Among the Documents Related to the Internment and Repatriation Experiences of Japanese (1945-1956), the *Shirakaba Nisshi* (“white birch diary”) has a particularly unique form.

Most of the diaries and memoirs extant today were written by internees after their return to Japan, since it was extremely difficult for them to write documents in labour camps. The *Shirakaba Nisshi* by Mr. Osamu Seno is a rare exception, since the diary was written during the author’s internment. Even though the internees were not permitted to take home their diaries or any sort of notes, the author was able to bring it back home without being detected by Soviet soldiers, a sheer miracle. The diary, a truly authentic, unique document, depicts Mr. Seno’s daily life in the labour camp and his longing for his home in Japan. Over the period of his three-year internment, he composed more than 200 short poems in his diary, on various subjects about his daily life in the camp and his thoughts about his homeland.

Moreover, the form of the diary is extremely unique. Instead of paper, the author used strips of white birch bark on which he wrote with the wind-up opening keys attached to cans in place of pens, and in soot instead of ink.

The diary’s style is also unique. In writing the diary, the author employed the styles of traditional Japanese short poems, known as *tanka* and *haiku*. *Tanka* and *haiku* are traditional Japanese literary forms. A *tanka* is a short poem composed of 31 syllables in 5-7-5-7-7 metre, whereas a *haiku* comprised of only 17 syllables in 5-7-5 metre. In a *haiku*, despite its brevity, one word must be included that suggests the season of the year.

In the absence of any paper to write on, the white birch bark strips were very precious for the author, so he employed the style of these traditional poems since he could thereby express his sentiment in the most condensed way.

Probably, Mr. Seno also selected these styles because these traditional poems were ideal

for him to keep his memories intact since they were the simplest ways for him to express his feelings. Still another reason was that he found the rhythms unique to the poems were essential for remembering his homeland during the long days of internment. He had no way to predict when the internment would end and when he would be able to return home. In addition to describing the harsh realities of his life, some poems convey his sentiments regarding the seasonal changes he experienced in the camp. Probably, such changes reminded him of the climate of his hometown, and by composing poems depicting the passing seasons, he was able to keep alive his memories of his hometown.

6 Social/spiritual/community significance:

There are several factors that explain the background of the internment of such a great many Japanese military personnel and civilians by the USSR and its prolonged period—11 years until the last internees returned home. First, the collapse of the Japanese Empire due to its defeat in World War II; second, the onset of the Cold War between the US and the USSR; third, the loss of Japan's sovereignty and the delay in restoring relations with the USSR even after Japan regained sovereignty; and fourth, the extreme labour shortage in the USSR, due to the great number of Soviet military and civilian deaths in the war. The internment, which took place against this backdrop, was truly a historic incident worthy of note.

During World War II, the USSR began interning military personnel and civilians of its enemies, primarily Germans and other Europeans, in order to compensate for the labour shortage caused by the war. Even after the end of the war, the USSR continued to apply this policy of internment to Japanese people who remained in the territories that came under the control of the USSR.

Immediately after the end of the war, Japanese military personnel and civilians living in Japan's former colonies and other Japanese-occupied lands were ordered to return to Japan amid the post-war turmoil. It is estimated that 6.6 million people, about 9% of the total population of Japan in 1945, were included in the repatriation orders. The repatriation of these people began in September 1945, only one month after Japan's defeat. The repatriation from the south, most parts of China and Southeast Asia, was relatively smooth.

However, Japanese people who lived in Northern Asia faced much greater challenges. An estimated minimum of 600,000 people, both military personnel and civilians who were living in territories occupied by the USSR (in northeastern China and Northern Korea) were sent to forced labour camps in the USSR. Some were interned for as long as 11 years.

Stories of the post-war repatriation that have been passed down from generation to generation relate the endurance of the human spirit in the midst of extremely miserable and painful experiences. These stories have become a part of the enduring collective memory of the Japanese people. In addition to military personnel, civilians were obliged to return to Japan, fleeing for their lives amid the post-war turmoil and chaos. Many died during their return journey without ever reaching their homeland.

Civilians had to struggle through particularly miserable conditions. Many children, separated from their parents were left behind far from Japan in China and in other places. Issues related to many such children who had been raised by Chinese foster

parents surfaced as serious social problems during the 1980s. Some of them returned to Japan; others remained in China. In whichever case, the problems of the war-displaced Japanese children remain unresolved even today.

Even those who were eventually able to return safely reached home penniless. They were lucky if they had families and relatives to depend on at least temporarily. Many people who had remained overseas for many years, however, had no families or relatives who would accept them; they had nowhere to go even in their home country. In any case, repatriates had to endure various hardships spiritually as well as economically before they could rebuild normal lives.

A common viewpoint of people who had lived at home in Japan throughout the war and suffered great losses was that it was a severe additional burden to receive such a great many repatriates. Even though people in Japan welcomed their relatives and other people who returned to Japan, Japan's post-war society simply did not have the capacity to feed these extra people. Absolutely devastated by the war, people had to endure extreme shortages of daily necessities, from food to clothing and housing. Accordingly, problems related to the repatriates affected not only their relatives and friends, but also had a significant negative impact on all of the Japanese people and the entire society.

The hardships that repatriates experienced on their way home, combined with the extreme difficulties experienced by people in a land that had turned to ashes, led the Japanese people to abhor all forms of warfare. Based on this new world-view, the Japanese people came to foster strong aspirations to create a peaceful culture-oriented nation. In other words, the experiences of the repatriates provided a spiritual background for post-war peace movements and nation rebuilding.

The repatriation issue, in general, significantly influenced post-war Japanese society in diverse ways. The slow repatriation of internees from the USSR had a particularly great impact on forming a peace-oriented post-war mentality among the Japanese people. Since the internees had been in forced-labour camps in the USSR for so many years, their repatriation gradually developed into a national concern. This was in striking contrast to the relative ease of the repatriation from most parts of China, southern Korea, and Southeast Asia.. Accordingly, the Japanese people regarded the repatriation from the USSR as a symbolic issue, representing the post-war repatriation of Japanese people from all the regions concerned.

The personal documents of Mr. Niichiro Sakai attest to the fact that Japanese people nationwide shared a deep concern about the safety of the internees in the USSR. Mr. Sakai sent postcards to families of the internees, whose safety he confirmed on the Radio Moscow news. His voluntary activities, on which he had to allocate a considerable portion of his scarce budget, is a sign that Japanese people were truly concerned about and sympathetic to the plight of the internees and their families at home.

Another symbolic event representing the great sympathy that Japanese people felt for the repatriates from the USSR was the great popularity of the song *Ganpeki no Haha* (Mothers on the Quay, sung by Akiko Kikuchi), released in 1954 by Teichiku Entertainment Inc.

The hit song describes mothers standing on the quay in the Port of Maizuru, waiting for

their sons. Each time a ship entered the Port of Maizuru from the Port of Nakhodka in the USSR, many mothers, waiting for the return of their sons, were observed on the quay. With the passing of time, however, the number of mothers became fewer and the mass media began to pay attention to several of them. Of those mothers, Mrs. Ise Hashino became a symbolic representative of all of the waiting mothers.

Based on an interview with Mrs. Hashino, a songwriter composed *Ganpeki no Haha*, which became a great hit, selling more than 1 million records. In 1972, another singer, Yuriko Futaba, released the same song from King Record Co., Ltd., which became an even greater hit selling more than 2.5 million records. In 1976, a film of the same title was produced and its story was made into a TV drama in 1977.

Although Mrs. Hashino's son was on the list of the missing, based on her firm belief that he was still alive somewhere, Mrs. Hashino traveled the nearly 600km distance from Tokyo to the Port of Maizuru each time a repatriation ship entered the port from the USSR. She continued visiting Maizuru until the final repatriation ship arrived in 1956. The Japanese public was deeply impressed by her behaviour and felt great sympathy toward her. As a symbolic story of the internment and repatriation, *Ganpeki no Haha* became a great hit through various forms of media, including a song, a film, and a TV drama.

The establishment of the Maizuru Repatriation Memorial Museum, which has collected and exhibits the Documents on the Repatriation of Japanese Internees (1945-1956), is still another example that demonstrates the fact that the experiences of the internment in the USSR and the repatriation are shared by Japanese people as a key part of an enduring and extremely important part of Japan's collective memory.

Immediately after the end of World War II, the Japanese government opened the Repatriates Relief Bureau at the Port of Maizuru and in several other ports to support the repatriates. The Port of Maizuru had been designated as a port to receive repatriates from the USSR and thus, was the only port which continued to receive repatriates after 1950. Hence, Maizuru City and the Port of Maizuru have become special and unique locations associated with the memories of the repatriation from the USSR.

In October 1985, on the 40th anniversary of the beginning of the repatriation, the City of Maizuru held a national convention in memory of the repatriation to the Port of Maizuru. The participants of the convention decided that a memorial museum should be constructed. As a result, the Maizuru Repatriation Memorial Museum was opened in 1988 within the Repatriation Memorial Park. With donations from across the nation, the museum construction was carried out as part of Maizuru City's repatriation commemorative project. The construction of the museum signifies the fact that the Japanese public regarded the post-war repatriation in general, particularly the internment and the repatriation from the USSR, as an important national experience that should be handed down to future generations.

After the opening of the Maizuru Repatriation Memorial Museum, priceless materials related to the internment and the repatriation were contributed by former internees and their families from around Japan. At present, the Maizuru Repatriation Memorial Museum attracts many visitors as Japan's only full-fledged facility dedicated to Internment and Repatriation Studies and the collection of authentic materials on the

internment and repatriation.

The repatriation of Japanese military personnel and civilians, particularly those who were interned in the USSR, has great significance as a historic experience that cannot be and should not be forgotten. In other words, the experience of the repatriation continues to serve as a cornerstone for Japanese people's aspirations to sustain a peaceful nation that shall not engage in warfare, and which works to seek permanent world peace. At the same time, the experiences of the internees have formed extremely important, collective memories, which should be handed down to future generations.

6.0 Contextual information

6.1 Rarity

The Documents Related to the Internment and Repatriation Experiences of Japanese (1945-1956) are extremely rare, unique and authentic documents. The very existence of such documents must be regarded as a sheer miracle since it was extremely difficult for the Japanese internees to record their experiences and bring the documents to Japan.

In the internment camps, the internees were constantly under the close supervision of the Soviet soldiers. Moreover, the internees had neither paper nor pen to write with, although their conditions differed from one camp to another and depending on the year. Even in this environment, they recorded their experiences in various ways. The author of "*Shirakaba Nisshi*" ("white birch diary"), for instance, used strips of white birch bark as paper and the wind-up opening keys attached to cans as pens.

The majority of hidden records of camp life were confiscated in the daily searches conducted by the guards or seized at the last moment in the final search as the internees boarded home-bound ships in the Soviet port of Nakhodka. Even after repatriates landed at a Japanese port with documents that had evaded all searches by the Soviet authorities, the documents were at risk of confiscation by the authorities of the General Headquarters of the Allied Powers (GHQ). Accordingly, the collection of the Maizuru Repatriation Memorial Museum comprises materials that miraculously were shielded from the scrutiny of the authorities.

In consideration of the extreme scarcity of official documents, these private documents which communicate the real voices of individual repatriates, are irreplaceable, as well as unique and very rare. They are authentic, invaluable human assets that should be shared by all people worldwide.

6.2 Integrity

The Maizuru Repatriation Memorial Museum pledges to retain its collection intact and integral for many years to come.