

## PRIME MINISTER KOIZUMI'S VISIT TO NORTH KOREA

The *onigiri*, or rice balls, that were served for lunch were left on the table, as if they were some kind of offering. Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi did not touch them at all.<sup>1</sup>

It was September 17, 2002, and Koizumi was sitting in a specially designated anteroom on the ground floor of the Paekhwawon (Hundred Flowers) Guest House in Pyongyang. It was a little past noon, and he had just finished a top-level talk with Chairman Kim Jong-il. Koizumi silently watched the Japan Broadcasting Corporation satellite TV news program that was reporting on the talk.

Armed North Korean police officers were occasionally seen outside the window. Inside the room, seated around the table with Koizumi, were Shinzo Abe, deputy cabinet secretary; Norimoto Takano, deputy minister for foreign affairs; Hitoshi Tanaka, director general of the Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA); Isao Iijima, personal secretary to the prime minister; and Kenji Hiramatsu, MOFA's director of the Northeast Asian Affairs Division. Koro Bessho, another secretary to the prime minister, seconded from MOFA, kept restlessly going in and out of the room.

"The TV is too loud," said Tanaka, but Iijima immediately shot back, "No, it's better this way." He instructed a foreign ministry official nearby to turn the volume even higher. When Koizumi started talking, however, the official immediately turned the volume lower. But Iijima, as if to say, "No, no," pointed his right index finger at his right ear and instructed the official to turn the volume up again.

"If the North Koreans won't acknowledge their wrongdoings," Tanaka said to Koizumi, "you have to push them." Abe pressed further: "Unless they disclose in full what took place and formally apologize for their wrongdoings, you should

not sign the joint statement. If they don't do that, you should get up and leave." At Abe's last sentence, everyone fell silent. Takano broke the silence, agreeing, for the most part, with Abe: "We should consider not signing the statement if their attitude remains the same."

If in the scheduled afternoon session Kim Jong-il would not acknowledge that North Korea had abducted Japanese citizens and, accordingly, would not offer a formal apology, Koizumi could never sign what would become the Japan-DPRK Pyongyang Declaration. The summit would be a total failure.

Abe thought that they had no choice. The prime minister of Japan himself had come all the way from Tokyo to settle the issue directly with the leader of North Korea. Abe was convinced that the Japanese people would not endorse normalization of diplomatic relations with North Korea if Pyongyang did not apologize for the abductions now that, prior to the summit meeting, it had even disclosed the number of deceased among "the missing." Its actions were a state crime. He also was convinced that their conversation was bugged, but he hoped that Kim Jong-il was among those who could hear what he was saying. "First of all, we have to request a formal apology from Kim Jong-il," he thought. "That is the first order of business."<sup>2</sup> Abe was not alone in that wish. Koizumi simply said, "I'll say . . .," before resuming his silence.

Koizumi's visit to Pyongyang was a day trip. Pyongyang is only about a two-hour flight from Tokyo, and the trip took about fourteen hours altogether. Koizumi had two meetings scheduled, one in the morning and another in the afternoon. There was a short preparatory meeting just before the first meeting.

Earlier that morning, Koizumi had arisen at 5:00 a.m. in his temporary official residence in Higashi Gotanda, Tokyo. The government airplane took off from Haneda Airport at 6:46 a.m., carrying him and his entourage. Aboard, Koizumi reviewed the text of the Japan-DPRK Pyongyang Declaration, with which he was very pleased. "This is a very good document," he remarked. He also reread the message from President George W. Bush that U.S. Ambassador Howard Baker had presented to Yasuo Fukuda, chief cabinet secretary, the previous day. The message called for Koizumi's renewed attention to North Korea's enriched uranium program, referring to recent information from U.S. intelligence agencies. President Bush, however, requested that Koizumi not refer to that information in the Japan-North Korea summit talk.<sup>3</sup> Koizumi gave a thin smile. He thought that the United States was overreacting. He had no intention of normalizing diplomatic ties with North Korea if he had to depart from the Pyongyang Declaration. Nevertheless, he appreciated the message, which had the effect of reassuring him that President Bush was fully on his side.<sup>4</sup>

Koizumi's plane touched down at Pyongyang Sunan International Airport at 9:14 a.m. It was a perfect, clear autumn day. Kim Yong-nam, president of the presidium of the DPRK Supreme People's Assembly, was at the airport to welcome

Koizumi and his party. Koizumi slowly walked down the ramp to become the first Japanese prime minister to visit North Korea since the end of World War II.

At 10:00 a.m. sharp, Korean Central Television and the Voice of Korea reported on the arrival of the prime minister.<sup>5</sup> The Japanese delegation proceeded to the northern section of Pyongyang, where the Paekhwawon Guest House, believed to be the most prestigious of the more than 100 state guest houses in North Korea, is located. The Kumsusan Memorial Palace, where the body of the late Chairman Kim Il-sung lies in state, is nearby. Kim Jong-il held all of his summit talks at this guest house, including those with President Vladimir Putin of Russia in July 2000 and President Jiang Zemin of China in September 2001. Inside the guest house, on the left about 150 feet (50 meters) from the front entrance, are three conference rooms. The central room was chosen for this Japan-DPRK summit.

It was only several minutes before the first session of the summit meeting that the Japanese delegation was informed of the results of the North Korean "investigation" concerning the whereabouts of the Japanese abductees. Prior to the first session, a preparatory meeting was held in an annex building between Hitoshi Tanaka and Ma Chol-su, director of the Asian Affairs Department of North Korea's Foreign Ministry. During the meeting, Ma informed Tanaka that five of the abductees were still alive and that eight had died. Tanaka immediately requested that North Korea thoroughly examine and report on the causes and circumstances of the deaths of the eight abductees. In response, Ma promised that the North Korean Red Cross Society would dispatch the results of the investigation to the Japanese Red Cross Society. Ma chose to refer to the abductees as "the missing."

After the end of the preparatory meeting, Tanaka half ran to the main building. It was quite a distance. North Korea must have deliberately held the meeting in the remote annex building so that Prime Minister Koizumi would have to walk into the summit talk without ample time to review and analyze the North Korean information. Tanaka realized that the Japanese were caught in a trap, but it was too late to do anything about it.<sup>6</sup> He felt pressed. Upon entering the main building, he tripped on the thick carpet. Koizumi was shocked into silence when he heard Tanaka's report.

Kim Jong-il appeared wearing one of the khaki-colored military jackets, obviously of the best-quality cashmere, that he wears whenever he appears before his subjects or meets foreign dignitaries.<sup>7</sup> At the outset of the talk, Kim Jong-il expressed his appreciation to his guest, saying, "As the host, I regret that we had to make the prime minister of Japan come to Pyongyang so early in the morning in order to open a new chapter in the DPRK-Japan relationship." Continuing, he said, "I strongly hope that we can use this opportunity to begin a new, genuinely neighborly relationship between our two countries, thereby making

the expression ‘a country nearby, but remote’ a saying of the past.” He went on to praise the draft of the Pyongyang Declaration, which, if signed by the two leaders, would become the basic document for normalization of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Kim specifically referred to the contribution that Hitoshi Tanaka had made in drafting the document. During the subsequent talks, he mentioned Tanaka’s name twice to express his appreciation for Tanaka’s contribution. Hearing that, one of the Japanese delegates marveled at Kim Jong-il’s diplomatic niceties. Kim Jong-il proudly emphasized that the secret negotiations between Japan and North Korea that had led to the meeting had been conducted without being leaked to the outside. He said that he himself had not mentioned the negotiations to anyone, not even the Chinese and the Russians.

“I, too, hope that the opportunity that this meeting presents will greatly advance bilateral relations between our two countries,” Koizumi responded, repeating the word “opportunity,” which Kim had used. Kim Jong-il continued to speak, occasionally dropping his eyes to read from a small memo pad in his hand. He looked a little stiff.

At the very beginning of the summit talk, Koizumi had raised the abduction issue. “We note that pertinent information was presented by the DPRK at the preparatory meeting immediately proceeding this session,” he said. “However, I was utterly distressed by the information that was provided and, as the prime minister, who is ultimately responsible for the interests and security of the Japanese people, I must strongly protest. I cannot bear to imagine how the remaining family members will take the news.”<sup>8</sup> Kim just listened silently. Abe observed that he looked unsure and less confident of himself, while Koizumi looked very stern.<sup>9</sup> Kim did not acknowledge Koizumi’s remarks or offer an apology. Time ticked away, but Kim did not clarify his attitude regarding the abductions.

Toward the end of the first session, Koizumi raised the abduction issue once again: “I ask that you arrange a meeting for us with the surviving abductees. And I would like you to make an outright apology. In addition, I want you to provide information about the deceased abductees.”

Kim listened, taking notes on a memo pad, then suggested, “Shall we take a break now?” The Japanese agreed, ending the first session, which had lasted for about one hour. Koizumi and his party were gravely discouraged by the first session, from which they had expected a much more satisfactory explanation of the abductions.

Diplomatic protocol normally would call for a lunch hosted by Chairman Kim after the morning session. However, when Koizumi had agreed to visit Pyongyang, he gave strict orders not to accept any North Korean offer to host lunch or dinner, even though he knew that the offer would be made; not to host a meal for a foreign dignitary who had traveled a long distance would be a breach of diplomatic protocol. Moreover, he knew that the host would lose face if the

offer were declined. As a compromise, the North Koreans sounded out the possibility of hosting a working lunch. But that, too, was turned down by the Japanese, who explained to the North Koreans that "it is our prime minister's strong wish to make the visit a very practical event, eliminating diplomatic protocol as much as possible." Accordingly, a one-day visit without a luncheon was planned.<sup>10</sup> Koizumi had the abductions on his mind, a solemn and heavy issue.

Because it was totally uncertain how the abduction issue would evolve, Koizumi thought that it would be improper for the Japanese delegation to enjoy a gala reception or any other social activity at the summit. Expecting the worst possible outcome, he issued instructions that simple *onigiri* and Japanese tea be prepared for the delegation and transported to North Korea on the government plane. Koizumi's intuition proved to be accurate. All of the members of Japan's delegation had been distressed at the thought enjoying a lunch offered by the North Koreans after hearing of the death of eight abductees.

The afternoon session began at 2:00 p.m. Chairman Kim made the first remarks, reading a memo: "I would like to give an explanation about this matter. We have thoroughly investigated this matter, including by examining our government's role in it. Decades of adversarial relations between our two countries provided the background of this incident. It was, nevertheless, an appalling incident." With a humble attitude, Kim continued: "It is my understanding that this incident was initiated by special mission organizations in the 1970s and 1980s, driven by blindly motivated patriotism and misguided heroism. . . . I believe there were two reasons behind the abduction of Japanese citizens. First, the special mission organizations wanted to obtain native-Japanese instructors of the Japanese language. Second, the special mission organizations hoped to use abductees to penetrate into 'the South.' As soon as their scheme and deeds were brought to my attention, those who were responsible were punished. This kind of thing will never be repeated. I would like to take this opportunity to apologize straightforwardly for the regrettable conduct of those people. I will not allow that to happen again."<sup>11</sup>

The "South" that he mentioned was the Republic of Korea. Hearing Kim's comments, Koizumi thought that they contained too many undertones suggesting that Kim himself had not been aware of or involved in the incident. Nevertheless, he decided to sign the declaration then.<sup>12</sup> Both Kim and Kang Sok-ju, North Korea's first deputy minister for foreign affairs, who was seated next to Kim, kept staring fixedly at Koizumi, as if analyzing his facial expressions. Koizumi maintained a mild but strained demeanor throughout the meeting.

Koizumi also brought up the issue of the intrusion into Japanese territorial waters by mysterious vessels believed to be North Korean. On September 11, just before his visit to Pyongyang, Japanese authorities had raised a vessel that had exploded in Chinese waters in December 2001 after being chased by the

Japanese coast guard. “We ask for your guarantee that this kind of regrettable incident will not happen again in the future,” Koizumi insisted. Chairman Kim once again responded without defiance: “We have thoroughly investigated this incident, and we have just learned what happened,” he said. “I had absolutely no knowledge about this matter. Those vessels were used in training exercises that special mission units conducted independently. We have already identified the specific unit that was responsible for the misconduct. I wish to assure you that this kind of thing will never happen again in the future. We still have quite a number of those special mission units, but we wish to dissolve those remnants of the past.”<sup>13</sup>

The afternoon session ended at 3:30 p.m. Kim Jong-il stood up to shake hands with all the members of the Japanese delegation. When he walked out of the room, Kim shook hands again, this time only with Iijima and Yasutake Tango, another secretary to the prime minister, seconded from the Ministry of Finance. Iijima found Kim’s hand to be rough; he felt as if he were holding the toughened heel of a foot.<sup>14</sup> Then Kim disappeared into his outsized Mercedes. According to a Japanese diplomat who was present, it shot off immediately, roaring “as if it were in an F-1 race.”<sup>15</sup> The Japanese delegation proceeded to the Koryo Hotel, where they relaxed for a while in the penthouse suite. The rest of the afternoon flew by, highlighted by the signing ceremony for the Pyongyang Declaration at 5:30 p.m. and a press conference at 6:30 p.m.

At the press conference, Prime Minister Koizumi began his remarks by saying “I feel heartbreaking grief about those abductees who lost their lives without coming home. I am utterly speechless when I imagine the tremendous grief their surviving family members must be experiencing.” Continuing, he declared, “I have come to Pyongyang today in order to take a giant step toward building stable peace in this region, fully determined to prevent—at any cost—the recurrence of this kind of despicable conduct.”

Back in Tokyo, Yasuo Fukuda, chief cabinet secretary, informed the families of the abductees of the grave news at 4:00 p.m. (There is no time difference between Tokyo and Pyongyang, as there is between Tokyo and Seoul.)

Relations between Japan and North Korea have been marked by occupation, isolation, and failed attempts at normalization. From 1905 to 1945, while occupying the Korean peninsula, the Japanese colonial government suppressed the Korean culture and language; the Japanese even forced the Koreans to take Japanese names. The occupation remains a defining event in the history of Korea. In North Korea, stories of Kim Il-sung fighting against Japanese colonizers are taught with great embellishment, while Japan’s support of the United States in the Korean War and subsequent mistreatment of *zainichi*, ethnic Koreans living in Japan, have reinforced North Korea’s resentment. Later, when Japan

normalized relations with South Korea in 1965 and China in 1972, North Korea was simply ignored. Japan accepted South Korea's argument that it was the only legitimate government of Korea, and the United States provided security for Japan against North Korea.

However, with the end of the cold war, Japan made several attempts at normalizing relations with North Korea. Those efforts included visits to North Korea by several parliamentary delegations, but they often met with mixed results. Relations took a turn for the worse when in August 1998 North Korea test-fired a Taepodong-1 missile over Japan. The missile flew over northern Japan, landing in the Pacific Ocean. Suddenly, Japan's strange neighbor to the west was a serious security concern. However, while the security threat posed by North Korea was of great concern to policymakers and security experts, the primary focus of the Japanese people has been the abduction issue.

Claims that Japanese citizens had been kidnapped in the 1970s and 1980s by North Korean agents were at first treated as nothing more than a conspiracy theory. In 1980, when the *Sankei Shimbun* reported on the case of three people who went missing in the summer of 1978 under suspicious circumstances, the government and policymakers considered the report to be mere speculation. However, North Korean defectors confirmed the report in 1987 and again in 1993, stating that Japanese citizens had been abducted in order to train North Korean spies in the Japanese language and culture. Other motives include abducting Japanese in order to steal their identities or to silence those who had witnessed North Korean operatives. In 1977, An Myong-jin, a North Korean defector, described an abductee whom he had once met. His description was assumed to be of Megumi Yokota, a teenager kidnapped in 1977, and raised the profile of the reports.<sup>16</sup>

The charismatic Junichiro Koizumi, an atypical politician in Japan, was elected prime minister in April 2001 on a platform of government reform. As a populist politician, a break from the factional insiders of the past, he sought a political success to secure both his popularity and his legacy. Normalization of relations with North Korea proved to be a target ripe for a diplomatic breakthrough; it also presented an opportunity for Japan to put its colonial legacy to rest.

While, if successful, efforts to normalize relations with North Korea would bring great rewards, they also entailed great risks. One concern was how the United States would react, for it too was trying to denuclearize North Korea. Koizumi, however, elected to go it alone, keeping the United States in the dark about his intentions. Japanese prime ministers had rarely conducted an autonomous foreign policy separate from that of the United States, but that was exactly what Koizumi was doing when Japan began exploring the possibilities of a secret summit with a North Korean interlocutor. That was another way in which Koizumi broke with the past.

## MR. X

Secret preparations for Koizumi's visit to North Korea had been under way since Hitoshi Tanaka became director general of MOFA's Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau in September 2001. Tanaka's first major project was Koizumi's visit to Beijing; Japan-China relations had been bumpy since China reacted strongly against Koizumi's visit to Yasukuni Shrine on August 13, 2001.<sup>17</sup> Koizumi's visit to Beijing took place in October, during which he visited the Marco Polo Bridge in a Beijing suburb, the site, in 1937, of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, which triggered the Sino-Japanese War. He also visited the Chinese People's Resistance against Japanese Aggression War Memorial. Responding to questions during the press conference held that day, Koizumi said, "I walked through the exhibits, which made me wish to express both deep sorrow for the victims and my heartfelt apologies to the Chinese people. We must not repeat such a war again." At the museum, Koizumi offered flowers and, with a calligraphy brush, formed the characters for *chu-jo*, which roughly translates as "sincerity and magnanimity."<sup>18</sup>

At the beginning of the year a signal had arrived from North Korea regarding its wish to normalize bilateral relations with Japan. The North Koreans sounded the possibility of a bilateral summit talk involving Yoshiro Mori, who was then the prime minister. Only a few days before, across the Pacific Ocean, George W. Bush's victory in the U.S. presidential election had finally been confirmed. In January 2001, Hidenao Nakagawa, a former chief cabinet secretary, had a secret meeting in Singapore with North Korea's Kang Sok-ju, the first deputy minister for foreign affairs, which lasted nearly five hours. During the meeting, Kang stated that North Korea wished "to simultaneously settle both past-colonization issues and the 'humanitarian issue.'" "We intend to tackle this task with utmost sincerity," he added, suggesting a summit meeting between the two nations' leaders. The "humanitarian issue" referred to was the abduction issue.<sup>19</sup>

Several attempts at diplomatic normalization had been made during the 1990s, but the abduction issue was a stumbling block each time. Whenever the Japanese brought up the issue, North Korea denied the very existence of the abductees and reacted angrily, terminating the negotiations. In 1997, the Japanese government publicized a list of Japanese citizens believed to have been abducted by North Korea, and the abduction issue began to capture nationwide attention within Japan. Kang Sok-ju started to show a more flexible attitude by referring to the "humanitarian issue" in conjunction with the settlement of past-colonization issues. However, he did not refer to any means by which to arrive at a settlement. Moreover, he demanded what Mori described as "a huge amount" from Japan as compensation for settling past issues.<sup>20</sup>

The Japanese did not accept his demand. Nevertheless, dialogue between the Japanese Red Cross Society and the North Korean Red Cross Society—which

encompassed “humanitarian issues,” including the abduction issue, the return of the “Japanese wives,” and food aid—was continued.<sup>21</sup> Simultaneously, secret negotiations were being carried out between the two governments. Kunihiko Makita, director general of MOFA’s Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau and the predecessor of Hitoshi Tanaka, represented Japan, while Hwang Chul, a member of the standing committee of the Korean Asia-Pacific Peace Committee, represented North Korea. The Korean Asia-Pacific Peace Committee is an organization affiliated with the DPRK Workers’ Party. Chaired at that time by Party Secretary Kim Yong-sun (now deceased), the committee had determined North Korea’s policy toward Japan. Hwang was the right-hand man of Kim Yong-sun, and at one time he had served as Kim Il-sung’s Japanese interpreter.<sup>22</sup>

The two men secretly contacted each other in Kuala Lumpur. Hwang was a veteran intelligence officer specializing in Japan. Early in August 2001, Hwang mentioned something odd during a consultation meeting with Makita in Kuala Lumpur. “If this deadlock continues,” he warned, “there will be pressure inside my country to consider alternative methods, because the government will distrust my ability to accomplish anything.” The Japanese interpreted that statement as a brinkmanship threat, paying little attention to it.

But Hwang was not present when consultations were held again on September 1 and 2. Representing North Korea instead was a fair-skinned man of medium height in his mid-forties. “I have been put in charge of the negotiations from now on,” he politely informed the Japanese. “I hope we will have a good discussion.” Similarly, Makita was replaced by Hitoshi Tanaka less than one month after that encounter.

Makita was a member of MOFA’s so-called China School and therefore was regarded as a leader of the pro-China faction within the ministry. He was accused by pro-Taiwan members of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) of having obstructed Japan’s issuance of an entry visa to Lee Teng-hui, former president of the Republic of China, and of catering to the wishes of the People’s Republic of China. As if being stoned out of town, Makita was appointed ambassador to Singapore. Meanwhile, Hwang simply disappeared. There were even rumors that he had been purged.

Tanaka met the new North Korean representative for the first time on November 17, 2001. All the Japanese, including Tanaka himself, considered the man gentle looking.<sup>23</sup> He later became known as “Mr. X.” The meeting took place at the Swissotel in the vicinity of Labor Park in Dalian, China, a territory that had been leased to Imperial Russia late in the nineteenth century. Labor Park was built during that period. The representatives used the hotel’s penthouse suite on the thirty-fifth floor, from which they could look out the window down on the Dalian railway station. They also could glimpse, further away on the right, between nearby skyscrapers, Dalian Harbor. After that first meeting, Dalian was

the site of frequent secret meetings between Tanaka and X, although they used different hotels each time, respecting the wishes of the North Koreans. Also, because to rent a conference room would call undesired attention to their meetings, they always used a hotel suite, bringing in sofas, extra chairs, and a slightly oversized table.

The North Korean party did not arrive in a group; its members always came one by one. Inside the suite, they would always sit with their backs to the windows. The Japanese thought that it was unrealistic to fear that someone would sneak a look into a room on the thirty-fifth floor, but the North Koreans also asked that the room's curtains be closed before the talks began. Consequently, the meetings were always held with the sunlight blocked out.

X introduced himself as Kim Chul, a high-ranking member of the National Defense Commission. According to the North Korean constitution, "The National Defense Commission is the sovereignty's supreme guiding institution and the comprehensive managing institution for military affairs," and its very name strikes fear in the hearts of the North Korean people. The chairman of the commission is Kim Jong-il.

Tanaka presented his business card, but he did not receive X's card in return. X's subordinates addressed him as *Shiljangnim*, meaning "Mr. General Manager"; they never addressed him by his name. The preliminary consultation thus commenced with the Japanese uncertain of the real name of North Korea's top representative. But it may not have mattered what his real name was, because in North Korea a person's name is more an ID number or a code used within the system than proof of personal identity. The Japanese decided that X's conduct and the outcome of the negotiations would be more important than X's real name.

"This is the first time for me to engage in negotiations with a foreign government," X said at the outset. "But I am sure that you, Mr. Tanaka, are an old pro." When they were about to leave the negotiation table, X gave Tanaka his office and cell phone numbers. "These are my phone numbers," he said. "Please do not hesitate to contact me any time."

Once, at a later negotiation meeting, X remarked, "I am a military man." Tanaka took that as the truth. He had tried to narrow down X's background, deducing that there was no doubt that he was a military person, probably "a staff technocrat affiliated with the military, perhaps belonging to the reformist group." Tanaka found X to be quite different from the other Foreign Ministry or Workers' Party types whom he had previously encountered.<sup>24</sup> X was normally accompanied by two deputies and an interpreter. In sharp contrast to the fair-skinned X, the two deputies were deeply tanned. It is said that in North Korea high-ranking members of the Workers' Party or the National Defense Commission are, for the most part, fair-skinned people.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, X did not smoke, while both deputies would hastily light up their cigarettes when X left the room.

Although Tanaka tried various tricks to find out about X's career and background, X almost never talked about himself. He once subtly implied that his daughter went to a prestigious women's university, but he did not identify the university. One time he also said that he had been stationed in a francophone African country, but there was no way to verify that. However, X did understand French, and one time he actually told something like a joke in French.

### CHECKING CREDIBILITY

All things considered, it was not the true identity or credentials of X that mattered. What mattered was his credibility—whether he was directly connected to Kim Jong-il and whether he was in a position to actually carry out whatever would be agreed on by the two sides. X repeatedly emphasized that he was his country's "sole route of negotiations with Japan." He seemed to be sending the message that North Korea would refrain from using other routes, such as the Workers' Party or the General Association of Korean Residents in Japan (Chosen Soren or simply Soren), and that therefore Japan should follow suit by negotiating only through him. To Tanaka and the Japanese, his words implied that he was delivering direct instructions to them from Kim Jong-il. But if that was indeed the case, it would be all the more important to confirm X's credibility. That would be the Japanese delegation's first priority.

At that time, Japan's vice minister for foreign affairs was Yoshiji Nogami. Nogami instructed Hitoshi Tanaka to ask the North Koreans to give him some "souvenir," by which Nogami meant some evidence of North Korea's sincerity that Tanaka could take back to Japan.<sup>26</sup> (Later Nogami and Foreign Minister Makiko Tanaka would clash and both of them would be forced to resign, following the traditional Japanese practice of punishing both parties to a fight. Nogami resigned as vice minister at the end of January 2002.)

However, in December 2001, almost immediately after the secret consultations had commenced, an unidentified vessel apparently was deliberately sunk by its crew just offshore of Amami-Oshima Island after being fired on by a Japanese coast guard ship for having violated Japan's territorial waters north of Okinawa. The ship seemingly self-destructed, exploding in Chinese territorial waters after being chased by Japan's coast guard. There was a strong suspicion that the mystery boat was a North Korean vessel. Tanaka demanded an explanation from X, who turned a deaf ear, saying, "My republic had nothing to do with it. Is there any evidence that it did?" Tanaka subsequently requested a further investigation into the incident but decided not to pursue the issue.

Although Tanaka refrained from referring to a "souvenir," he demanded that his counterpart "show some evidence of North Korea's sincere desire to improve relations with Japan and to settle the abduction issue."

The first evidence of North Korea's sincerity came in the form of the release of Takashi Sugishima, formerly a reporter with the *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, who had been detained by North Korean authorities as a suspected spy. After retiring from the *Nihon Keizai Shimbun* in 1999, Sugishima entered North Korea in November of the same year, only to be arrested five days later. His activities, such as taking photos and making tape recordings, had aroused North Korean suspicions, and he was closely watched. After his arrest, the Korean Central News Agency reported that "the results of the investigation clearly prove that his espionage was conducted under a carefully worked out plan of the relevant organ of Japan and the South Korean authorities and obviously what he did was anti-DPRK espionage."<sup>27</sup>

Tanaka demanded that Sugishima be released. Because Japan's major concern was settlement of the abduction issue, a conclusive test of X's influence and credibility would be whether X could actually arrange for the release of an openly detained person. If Sugishima could not be released, there would be no hope of saving the abductees. "Show us first how much influence you have," Tanaka said to X. "Next, show us how seriously and sincerely you wish to promote the normalization of bilateral relations. But first we request the unconditional release of Mr. Sugishima." Negotiations toward that goal took place toward the end of 2001 and the beginning of 2002, and Sugishima was released on February 12, 2002. North Korea attached no conditions to his release. The timing coincided with the sixtieth birthday (February 16) of Kim Jong-il as well as with a trip to Japan, Korea, and China by President George W. Bush, who in his State of the Union address at the end of January had denounced North Korea as part of "an axis of evil." Bush arrived in Japan for a summit talk with Koizumi on February 18.

X passed the first test of his credibility. He could and did deliver. It also was obvious that he was well connected to North Korea's leaders. How directly he was connected to Kim Jong-il—whether he reported directly to Kim or through a superior who talked directly with Kim—remained uncertain. X rarely said, "I will ask Pyongyang's opinion," or "Let me take this back and respond later." Instead, he often made decisions on the spot, indicating that he had been given the discretionary authority to do so. X also was very well informed, making the Japanese wonder whether he was a member of a department that was a central clearinghouse for intelligence information.

The Japanese also were paying renewed attention to the tone of North Korean media reports concerning Japan and observed that criticism of Japan had been toned down since January 2002. There was hardly any criticism of Prime Minister Koizumi.<sup>28</sup> And in March 2002 a new development arose concerning the abductions. It was reported in the Japanese media that a former wife of one of the "Yodo-go" group, which hijacked a Japan Air Lines plane in 1970, had admitted

to the police that the group, most of whom were residing in North Korea, had been responsible for planning and carrying out the abduction of a certain Keiko Arimoto, who had been officially registered by the Japanese government as an abduction victim. The woman admitted that she also was involved in the kidnapping.<sup>29</sup>

In 1970, nine members of the Japanese Red Army, which aimed for a worldwide revolution, had hijacked Fukuoka-bound JAL flight 351 (nicknamed Yodogo) after it took off from Haneda Airport in Tokyo. It was the first airplane hijacking to take place in Japan. The plane first landed in Fukuoka and then flew to Gimpo International Airport, in South Korea, where the hijackers released all 129 hostages. The hijackers then had the plane fly to Pyongyang.<sup>30</sup> In response to the woman's confession, Japan's National Police Agency formally recognized Keiko Arimoto as a new North Korean abduction victim and set up a special team to investigate her case. In addition, Prime Minister Koizumi met with family members of the abduction victims and declared, "We will not negotiate to normalize diplomatic relations unless the abduction issue is satisfactorily settled." Koizumi set up a special task force consisting of deputy directors from relevant agencies, headed by Shinzo Abe, deputy chief cabinet secretary.<sup>31</sup> Backed by the heightened political attention and sensitivity to the abduction issue within Japan, Hitoshi Tanaka strongly demanded information about the abductees from the North Koreans.

On the evening of March 22, the Korean Central News Agency, while emphasizing that North Korea "was never engaged in the kidnapping or abduction of Keiko Arimoto," announced that the spokesperson of the North Korean Red Cross Society admitted that North Korea had "decided to continue the investigation into 'those missing'"<sup>32</sup> On that particular day, leaders of Japan and the Republic of Korea met in Seoul, and it was obvious that North Korea had timed the announcement to coincide with that particular meeting. That was the second piece of "evidence" that the North Koreans offered in response to Tanaka's request for assurance of their sincerity.

The remaining issue was whether a date for discussions between the Red Cross societies of the two countries could be promptly set. X suggested that the discussions should take place toward the end of April. That could be interpreted as a third piece of "evidence."

But Tanaka was not satisfied with the three pieces of evidence. He attempted further to have appropriate representatives of the North Korean Foreign Ministry directly involved in the upcoming Red Cross discussions in order to make the meetings more official. He suggested that North Korea's first deputy foreign minister, Kang Sok-ju, who was believed to be a close confidant of Kim Jong-il, participate in one of the sessions. X avoided answering on the spot, but he said that they would consider that proposal. Soon thereafter, X conveyed North Korea's consent.

On April 6, 2002, the secret meeting was held in Kuala Lumpur, with Kang in attendance. X and Kang did not come together. Kang arrived by himself, while X was accompanied by two deputies, as usual. During the discussion, only Kang spoke; X remained silent. What Kang said was essentially the same as what X had said earlier. He criticized the immorality of Japan's colonization of Korea prior to World War II and loudly demanded compensation. During the discussion, Kang and X did not exchange any words. Although X remained in the room for a while after the meeting, Kang left the room immediately after the discussion. Tanaka noted that the two men seemed to keep each other at arm's length, but that might have been a precaution that the North Koreans had taken so that the two would not exchange any honorific expressions or use modes of speech that would make the nature of their relationship clear to the Japanese. The important discovery for Japan was that X was capable of having Kang sent to the negotiation table. That would have been impossible unless X had direct access to Kim Jong-il.

At the same time that Hitoshi Tanaka was checking X's credibility, X was checking Tanaka's. The North Koreans must have been coolly observing Tanaka to see how influential he really was. Tanaka knew that his counterpart would never negotiate earnestly unless Tanaka could prove that he too was capable of fulfilling whatever commitments he made and that he was directly connected to Japan's top leadership. With that in mind, Tanaka decided to visit the office of the prime minister frequently. According to the daily prime minister's log, as reported in the *Asahi Shimbun*, Tanaka met with Koizumi more than eighty times in the prime minister's office from September 2001 to September 2002. (In contrast, the director general of MOFA's Bureau of North American Affairs met Koizumi twenty-five times at the latter's office during the same period.) Tanaka's maneuver to get extensive exposure through the newspaper's reports of the prime minister's daily log was intended to show the North Koreans that he could meet and talk with the Japanese prime minister whenever and wherever he wished. Tanaka also told X so directly. "Please read the Japanese newspapers carefully," he said. "If you look at the daily records of the prime minister's log for Friday and Monday, the days before and after I met with you, you'll find my name there."<sup>33</sup>

Nevertheless, it was not at all easy for the two to build mutual confidence. Initially, X did not hide his bewilderment about Koizumi as the political leader of Japan. He candidly asked, "What are Prime Minister Koizumi's real views?" Koizumi seemed to be a right-wing politician. In his campaign to become prime minister, for example, he had said that it was the prime minister's duty to visit Yasukuni Shrine, and then, moreover, he had actually done so. And yet Koizumi seemed determined to promote normalization of diplomatic relations between Japan and North Korea, which the right wing would surely find repugnant. Was he serious and sincere, or did he have some ulterior motive?

The Yasukuni Shrine issue is deeply intertwined with complicated and delicate history issues between Japan and the Korean Peninsula. X once confessed, "This is a private matter, but my grandfather was killed by the Japanese, so I hold deep resentment toward Japan," and he also mentioned that his grandmother had a Japanese name. He did not disclose the name and Tanaka did not pursue the issue. During the period when Imperial Japan occupied Korea, Koreans were forced to give up their names and use Japanese names instead, and it was recorded that close to 80 percent of Koreans changed their names. X also repeatedly raised the issue of Koreans having been uprooted and moved to Japan to serve as forced labor. "Japan moved 6 million Koreans to Japan for use as forced labor, and the Koreans had to undergo unbearable humiliation there," X said. "How will Japan take responsibility for what it did to these people?" Japan had indeed conscripted a large number of Korean citizens in what the Japanese called a "civilian draft" in order to supply labor to labor-deficient Japanese companies. There are various accounts regarding the number of Koreans who were transported for that purpose.<sup>34</sup> The North Koreans had previously referred to a figure of 8.4 million, but this was the first time that 6 million had been mentioned. X never offered evidence supporting that claim. But Tanaka decided to let his counterpart speak his mind, and he refrained from questioning X and antagonizing him about it.

#### NEGOTIATIONS IN DANGER OF COLLAPSE

Only once did X bring up an irrelevant issue in the course of a discussion. That was the bankruptcy of the Chogin Tokyo Credit Union (better known in Japan by its abbreviated form, Chogin). Toward the end of 2001, the Tokyo District Prosecutor's Office indicted a former treasurer of the General Association of Korean Residents in Japan (Chosen Soren) on suspicion of embezzlement in conjunction with the diversion of funds from Chogin, a financial institution run by North Korean residents in Japan. As a result, the Japanese government had to inject ¥600 billion in public funds into Chogin branches throughout Japan in order to save Chogin from bankruptcy. Japanese investigative authorities suspected that Chogin funds illegally diverted by Chosen Soren may have been sent to North Korea, which also would have been illegal. The authorities carried out an investigation, suspecting that behind Chogin was Chosen Soren, behind which, in turn, was North Korea.<sup>35</sup>

North Korea was very nervous about the investigation, and X asked repeatedly whether there was anything that the Japanese could do to interfere with it. He looked desperate, but he did not seem to care how he looked. Each time he raised the issue, Tanaka spurned his request: "It should be obvious to you that there is absolutely nothing we can do about this issue," he said. "Besides, that is not a

subject of our negotiations.” It was quite obvious that X kept on raising the issue because of instructions from above.

By spring of 2002, both sides were able to confirm the scenario for negotiations on normalization of the two nations’ diplomatic relations. It was agreed that on the surface the abduction issue would be handled through dialogue between the two Red Cross societies, but in reality possible solutions would be pursued through the secret meetings between Tanaka and X. The approach would be to narrow the differences first, then pass the results upward for discussion at meetings of senior officials, then at ministerial-level meetings, and, hopefully, eventually at the summit-talk level.

Nonetheless, it was not easy to prepare a framework for achieving concrete solutions. Tanaka insisted that the negotiations would not move forward until, first, North Korea acknowledged the abductions, disclosed all pertinent information relating thereto, and released and returned all the surviving abductees; second, Kim Jong-il apologized for the abductions; and third, all of those responsible for the abductions were properly punished. Talks on economic assistance could start only after those prerequisites were fulfilled. Without a satisfactory explanation of the abduction issue, Japan’s Diet would never approve an appropriation for economic aid to North Korea. As for Prime Minister Koizumi’s visit to Pyongyang, if it were conceivable at all, it would not be possible unless North Korea were to provide satisfactory information about the abductees.

X, in turn, persisted in his stance that settlement of the abduction issue would be difficult unless Japan explicitly indicated the amount of compensation that it would pay to North Korea, a condition that Japan would never accept. The argument about the abductions went around and around in circles. Occasionally, there were Zen-like exchanges between X and Tanaka. X would say, “Japan can’t see the forest for the trees,” and Tanaka would retort, “But the forest is made of the trees.” In the course of this go-round, X seemed to become suspicious of Tanaka, who kept bringing up the abductions.

Tanaka referred to the possibility of a visit to Pyongyang by Koizumi as only one of the possible scenarios. At the outset, Tanaka had presented X with Japan’s three basic conditions for entering into negotiations and requested North Korea’s acceptance of them: first, participants in the negotiations would speak in their private capacities and could always retract their statements; second, any secret agreements that they reached must, without exception, be confirmed through formal channels; and third, strict confidentiality must be observed throughout the entire process.<sup>36</sup> In the course of negotiations with X, Tanaka never looked down to read from or to check the papers that he brought with him, in that way sending the message that he did not wish to be constrained by what had been written on paper. Moreover, he wished to emphasize the conditions of retraction at will and strict confidentiality. The suggestion that Koizumi might visit

Pyongyang was, therefore, nothing more than a remark by Tanaka in his personal capacity and one that could be withdrawn at any time.

On May 8, 2002, five North Korean nationals attempted to rush into the Japanese Consulate in Shenyang, China, but Chinese security police detained them. A Japanese member of a nongovernmental organization who was there took a video of armed Chinese policemen grabbing five asylum seekers and whisking them off the consulate property, a scene that was broadcast by all the TV stations in Japan. The Japanese government protested to the Chinese government on the grounds that the Chinese action constituted a violation of the Vienna Treaty provision regarding the inviolability of diplomatic properties. China replied that the security policemen merely had been preventing unknown persons from intruding into the Japanese Consulate and thus had been protecting the security of the diplomatic premises. The tension between the two countries immediately heightened.

The next round of secret negotiations between Tanaka and X was scheduled to be held toward the end of the same week, on May 11 and 12. But on May 10 the Japanese requested that the meeting be postponed by one week, until May 18 and 19. The North Koreans were furious at having to reschedule at such a late date, especially because they had already arrived in Beijing, where the negotiations were to take place. But the rescheduling could not be avoided. Tanaka was in Japan, fully occupied in dealing with the tense situation with China, making it absolutely impossible for him to sneak out to Beijing. This was the first discordant incident in the previously unhampered negotiations.

Throughout the Shenyang incident, Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs was a target of highly critical public opinion because of the ministry's de facto policy of rejection of the asylum seekers, and some critics demanded that Tanaka be fired. That was the first trying time that he had experienced since becoming director general. On the rescheduled dates of May 18 and 19, the Japanese and North Korean negotiators met in Shanghai. Hoping to prepare an environment that would make it easier for China to release the detained escapees, Tanaka asked X to persuade North Korea to urgently but secretly convey its intention not to disagree with the decision of the Chinese and Japanese governments on how to deal with the asylum seekers. At that request, X grinned but remained silent. In two weeks, the Chinese government released the five escapees, who subsequently went to the Republic of Korea via the Philippines. The North Korean media simply ignored the incident.

Toward the end of their two-day consultation, X suddenly and unilaterally declared that the next round of negotiations would be canceled. That was the first time that that sort of thing had happened. In response to Japan's demand for an explanation, X simply referred to "domestic reasons." Tanaka stretched his imagination, speculating that perhaps, among other possibilities, North Korea was

revising its position regarding the normalization of diplomatic relations, but he had no clue as to what was really happening.

Bilateral negotiations were next held on June 1 and 2 in Dalian. In that round, X demanded much more forcefully than before that Japan's prime minister visit North Korea. X even declared that further discussions would be a waste of time unless he were to receive a firm commitment from Tanaka regarding such a visit. Tanaka, on the other hand, did not change his original stance: a visit to Pyongyang by the prime minister would be inconceivable without satisfactory information from North Korea concerning the abductees.

X did not hide his annoyance, and his suspicions regarding Japan's intentions appeared to have deepened. "So, that was it, just as I suspected," he might well have been thinking. "Their only purpose in negotiating was to draw as much information as possible from us about the abductees, using Koizumi's visit as bait." X then accused Tanaka of trying to deceive him and proclaimed, "We have no recourse but to terminate these negotiations."

Tanaka calmly responded, "That is fine with us."

Both sides had tried to wrap a rope around the other and tie it up, so to speak, like a spider ensnaring an insect caught in its web. Although in the course of the negotiations there had been moments of human warmth, those were past.

#### KOIZUMI'S DECISION TO VISIT PYONGYANG

The very next day, on June 3, Tanaka related to Koizumi the essence of what had happened. "I am prepared to visit North Korea even though they haven't provided us with satisfactory information about the abductees," Koizumi responded. "If they will provide that information only if I visit them, I can go along with that."<sup>37</sup>

Thus, for the first time during the negotiation process, Tanaka was in a position in which he could use the "Pyongyang visit" card. However, he did not do so immediately. Rather, he waited for two weeks, after which time the North Koreans telephoned to say that they wished to resume the negotiations. It seemed that they had started worrying that Japan might withdraw altogether from attempts at normalization. It was then agreed that the next round of talks would be on July 6 and 7, again in Dalian.

Shortly thereafter, on July 1, North Korea announced the launching of a series of "economic measures," including the suspension of price controls. The Japanese conjectured that the reason for the sudden change in North Korea's attitude—which X might have referred to previously as "domestic reasons"—was that the North Koreans realized that diplomatic normalization and economic cooperation with Japan were essential to the success of their economic reforms.

The negotiations were entering a crucial stage. This time the bargaining took place with Koizumi's Pyongyang visit as a given. Tanaka demanded, as a prerequisite to the visit, that North Korea acknowledge and apologize for the abductions as well as provide truthful information about the abductees and firm assurance that they would be released.

X did not refuse his demands outright. "As a scenario, they are within the bounds of possibilities," he conceded. Tanaka followed up by requesting X to convey directly to Kim Jong-il the essence of the Japanese conditions; moreover, he requested that they be incorporated in the draft of the Pyongyang Declaration. X adamantly rejected that request, saying that it would be Kim Jong-il himself who would determine what would be incorporated in the declaration. Nonetheless, he carefully chose his words to give the impression that information about the abductees could be disclosed if and when Koizumi visited Pyongyang. At the same time, X adamantly insisted that the draft explicitly include the amount of Japan's compensation for its colonization of Korea and "drafting" of laborers. Tanaka adamantly refused to specify any such amount. X stressed that North Korea had to have some idea of the size of the compensation in order to proceed toward normalization of relations, and he once again requested that an amount be indicated.

Tanaka pushed back. "We can't do that," he said. "If no compensation amount means no visit, then that's that."

X nevertheless remained obsessed with the amount of compensation. "As long as you explicitly tell us the specific amount," he would say, "it does not have to be included in the declaration." Tanaka refused that request point blank. He was under strict orders from Koizumi not to mention any amount whatsoever. "Don't compromise there at any cost," Koizumi had told him. "Just repeat 'We can't.'"<sup>38</sup> Koizumi had vowed never to repeat Shin Kanemaru's mistake.<sup>39</sup>

So, between "Give us information about the abductees" and "Tell us the amount," the discussion went round and round in circles, while time ticked away.

On one occasion, X, looking desperate, said, "The worst that could happen to you is dismissal. My situation is much more serious. My life might be at stake."

It was during a short talk toward the final stage of the negotiations, when Koizumi's visit became more or less confirmed, that both sides brought up the possibility of exchanging special envoys. There were some indications that X was considering Kang Sok-ju as the DPRK candidate. Tanaka also thought that exchanging special envoys might not be such a bad idea. Believing that a former foreign minister in whom he had long placed his personal trust would make an ideal envoy, he brought the idea to Koizumi. However, Koizumi showed no interest whatsoever. He curtly replied, "If we send a politician as special envoy, he will surely make concessions, whoever we send." Besides, he continued, "Politicians talk"—as if he were not one of them.<sup>40</sup> The idea of a special envoy was shelved.

More obstacles were waiting for the Japanese. There was the unsettled issue of salvaging a mystery vessel that had been scuttled toward the end of the previous year, described earlier in this chapter.<sup>41</sup> China cautioned Japan to exercise restraint in dealing with North Korea. However, because the vessel went down in Chinese waters, this was also an issue outstanding between China and Japan. The Japanese government decided to raise the ship on June 21. To make matters worse, on June 29, North Korean and South Korean soldiers exchanged gunfire on the Yellow Sea, heightening the tensions over North Korea. It was conceivable that when the Japanese government decided to salvage the vessel, North Korea would react with strong displeasure. But the North Koreans did not make any fuss about it.

On July 12, 2002, Tanaka briefed Koizumi on the result of his negotiations with X, to which Koizumi replied, "Stay the course." That was a clear indication that Koizumi had peremptorily made up his mind to visit North Korea.

In July 2002, the secret negotiations entered the last stretch. At a ministerial meeting at the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) held in Brunei, Foreign Minister Yoriko Kawaguchi met Foreign Minister Paek Nam-sun of North Korea. A joint statement circulated after the talk explicitly described the abduction issue as a "pending humanitarian issue."<sup>42</sup> Two years earlier, Foreign Minister Paek, in a meeting with Yohei Kono, Japan's foreign minister at that time, had strongly opposed such wording. Thus, the joint statement reflected a sea change in North Korea's position.

On August 18 and 19, discussions between the Japanese and North Korean Red Cross societies were held in Pyongyang. During the meetings, the North Koreans explained that they had been investigating the whereabouts of the missing Japanese nationals much more deeply and comprehensively than before, and they promised to further expedite the investigation.

On August 25 and 26, also in Pyongyang, a meeting among the directors general of the foreign ministries of the two countries was convened. Tanaka participated in the meeting, and on August 25 he paid a courtesy visit to Prime Minister Hong Song-nam to convey Koizumi's message to Kim Jong-il. This message read, "We will sincerely tackle the normalization issue and other unresolved issues involving our countries. We expect nothing less than the same from your side."<sup>43</sup> Hong tried to maintain composure while pretending to comprehend the situation, which he obviously did not grasp at all. The key players were X and Kang Sok-ju.<sup>44</sup>

Tanaka and the other members of the Japanese delegation subsequently visited the North Korean Foreign Ministry to pay a courtesy visit to Kang Sok-ju. Kang told Tanaka that Kim Jong-il had already read Koizumi's message and had instructed Kang to convey his reaction: "The message was very encouraging, and I wish to express my gratitude to Prime Minister Koizumi." Kang proudly added, "This is a message sent directly from Chairman Kim aboard his train in

Siberia.”<sup>45</sup> At that time, Kim Jong-il was on his way home from a summit talk with President Putin in Vladivostok.

After the courtesy visit, without being informed of his destination, Tanaka was taken by car to a mansion where negotiations were resumed over dinner. A small group made up of Tanaka, Kang Sok-ju, X, and a few others participated. Kang again demanded an explicit indication of the amount of compensation; Tanaka again refused. Kang next referred to an amount that North Korea demanded as reparation, to which Tanaka refused to respond. The amount Kang referred to was said to be a round figure in excess of \$10 billion. Tanaka found out that Kang had known the details and implications of the previous exchanges between Tanaka and X. Tanaka was again reminded that within the North Korean foreign ministry only Kang was in direct contact with Kim Jong-il.

### JAPAN'S “PIED PIPER OF HAMELIN”

It was in 1987 that Tanaka was first involved with North Korea, when, as MOFA's director of Northeast Asian affairs, he had to deal with the aftermath of the downing of a Korean Airline (KAL) jet due to an on-board explosion. The jet, bound for Seoul, disappeared off Burma after taking off from Baghdad. Prior to that, when it touched down in Abu Dhabi, a couple had gotten off who were found to possess forged Japanese passports. While being interrogated, the two attempted to poison themselves. The man died, but the woman survived. The woman, named Kim Hyon-hui, was taken to Seoul. The South Korean government subsequently announced that the KAL flight had been sabotaged by two North Korean agents.

Tanaka flew to Seoul and interviewed Kim Hyon-hui. He felt a shiver of fear upon learning that North Korea had attempted to entangle Japan in the sabotage. North Korean agents could have posed as South Koreans if their sole aim was to blow up a KAL airplane, but they had impersonated Japanese so that the explosion would seem to be a Japanese terrorist attack on South Korea. Tanaka sensed in that attempt the deep-seated animosity that the Korean people felt toward Japan.<sup>46</sup>

Kim Hyon-hui's testimony led to the discovery of the existence of a Lee Eun-hye, a Japanese woman who had been Kim's Japanese instructor. In 1991, Japan's National Police Agency declared that there was a strong possibility that Lee Eun-hye actually was Yaeko Taguchi, a Japanese national who was believed to have been abducted by North Korea. In 1997, the Japanese government officially recognized Lee Eun-hye as Yaeko Taguchi and a victim of North Korean abduction.<sup>47</sup>

A nuclear crisis involving North Korea then erupted, continuing into 1994. It was the largest security crisis yet faced by postwar Japan. North Korea threatened Japan, South Korea, and the United States, saying that it could and would make

Seoul a “sea of fire.” In response, the Japanese government, led by Nobuo Ishihara, deputy chief cabinet secretary, conducted simulations of North Korean invasions of South Korea. As a result, it became sadly obvious that Japan was not prepared for such a scenario and had no deterrent to use in such a situation. Tanaka, as director of policy coordination in MOFA’s Foreign Policy Bureau, engaged himself in preparing a “crisis management plan.”<sup>48</sup>

The nuclear crisis was temporarily contained by the signing of the U.S.-DPRK Agreed Framework, which proposed providing North Korea with light-water reactors if it would halt its nuclear programs. Tanaka participated in the launching of the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO), an international organization created to arrange for provision of the reactors to North Korea.

Another major task for Tanaka as MOFA’s director of policy coordination was to handle Japan’s efforts to come to terms with its history. In 1995, the Japanese government, commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II, launched three major initiatives, one after another: the Peace, Friendship, and Exchange Initiative; a statement by the prime minister expressing remorse and apologizing for Japan’s past wrongdoings; and establishment of the Asian Women’s Fund.<sup>49</sup> Tanaka was involved in all three of the initiatives, and during the negotiations with X, he tried both to share with X a sense of their being mutual stakeholders in peaceful coexistence between the two countries and to assure X that he had gone through a similar process before. He was convinced that normalization of DPRK-Japan relations would be inconceivable unless they shared the same vision of regional order, in which both sides could coexist peacefully.

Tanaka used to say, “We’ve got to prepare a way out”—that is, prepare an exit strategy. In his vision of the future, Japan and the United States would normalize diplomatic ties with North Korea in exchange for the latter’s abandonment of its nuclear program. Negotiations for normalization between Japan and North Korea would be linked to the framework of regional multilateral processes, and the abduction issue would be settled within the context of those processes. After both sides went through all the processes, they would suddenly realize that they had already gotten out of the maze of intransigence and hostility.

Tanaka negotiated hard down to the last minute before Koizumi’s visit to make North Korea agree to disclose information about the abductees. But if his efforts did not succeed, Tanaka was prepared to shift the focus of the negotiations in order to obtain as many concessions as possible from North Korea, such as North Korea’s agreement both to allow Japan to achieve “settlement of the past” through economic cooperation and to engage in a regular bilateral security dialogue. He was, in other words, pursuing a comprehensive, multifaceted approach—a “grand bargain.”<sup>50</sup>

In order to advance that grand bargain, however, a series of smaller bargains had to be made in one way or another with people and groups that had vested

interests in domestic decisionmaking in Japan. After Tanaka's first meeting with X on November 17, 2001, Tanaka suggested to Yoshiji Nogami, vice minister at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, that Tanaka be authorized to pursue secret negotiations toward achieving diplomatic normalization. In spite of his usual aggressiveness, Nogami was, for once, cautious. "This is too much for MOFA," he told Tanaka. But Nogami continued to go over possible scenarios. It would be too risky for MOFA bureaucrats to suggest the idea to their superiors, because it would become an easy target of the conservative elements in the legislature, who would not welcome the normalization of diplomatic relations with North Korea. If that occurred, there was a strong possibility that Prime Minister Koizumi would not accept the idea because of the political risk that it might involve. It would be one thing if MOFA made a suggestion in response to inquiries from high above, but if the proposal originated with MOFA, the ministry might be forced to take full blame if the proposed activities did not yield the expected fruit.

Besides, there was the "Makiko issue." At that time, Makiko Tanaka was Japan's foreign minister, and she and the ministry were in a showdown over personnel and budgetary matters. If Hitoshi Tanaka reported secret negotiations with North Korea to Makiko Tanaka, she might leak the information, making the negotiations impossible. The United States would intervene to kill the plan.<sup>51</sup>

Hitoshi Tanaka was in close consultation with Yasuo Fukuda, chief cabinet secretary, and Teijiro Furukawa, deputy chief cabinet secretary. Furukawa, who sat at the top of Japan's central bureaucracy, had been in charge of the administrative functions of the office of the prime minister since 1995, serving five prime ministers, including Koizumi. During his tenure, he had dealt with such difficult issues as the Hanshin-Awaji earthquake in Kobe, the sarin gas attack in the Tokyo subway system, relocation of the U.S. Marine Corps Futenma Air Base in Okinawa, and reorganization of the central bureaucracy.<sup>52</sup> Fukuda also had instructed Tanaka to consult with Furukawa before deciding anything. He said, "When it comes to the prime minister's visit to North Korea, a great many matters will be involved, including the handling of the abduction issue and domestic politics. If Furukawa said he had not been informed, that would be the end of it. However, if one could get Furukawa involved, he could become a protective shield if something unexpected happened."<sup>53</sup> Fukuda had immeasurable faith in Furukawa.

When Furukawa heard what Tanaka had to say, he said, "Mr. Tanaka, there is something called a cause. And normalization of diplomatic relations with North Korea is a cause."<sup>54</sup> If the abducted Japanese nationals, or at least some of them, were believed to be alive in North Korea, bringing back as many of them as possible—an act taken to protect the lives and property of Japanese citizens—would be a cause. Creating peace in Northeast Asia by normalizing relations with North Korea would be another.<sup>55</sup> Tanaka did not always report everything to Furukawa,

but he once confessed to Furukawa that he could breathe freely when he was in Furukawa's office. When Tanaka was deeply discouraged by the stalling of the negotiations in May through June of 2002, Furukawa was there to cheer him up.<sup>56</sup>

Now that Tanaka's idea was endorsed by Furukawa, the head of Japan's entire bureaucracy, Tanaka was able to bring the proposal to conduct secret negotiations to the attention of Prime Minister Koizumi as a possible prime minister's initiative. Hearing Tanaka's report in late 2001, Koizumi explicitly ordered Tanaka to proceed but to maintain strict confidentiality, which Koizumi believed to be more essential when dealing with an autocratic state like North Korea than with other nations. Koizumi instructed Fukuda to confine knowledge of the proposal to essential individuals only and to have the Foreign Ministry take responsibility for ensuring that its personnel maintained secrecy.

The thorny issue was what to do with Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Shinzo Abe. It would be difficult to keep Abe out of the scheme, because he had been zealously tackling the abduction issue. But Koizumi was of the opinion that Abe could be informed of the secret negotiations with North Korea after Koizumi's visit to Pyongyang was officially announced on August 30. Fukuda did not consider it proper to do that, so he persuaded Koizumi that Abe should be informed before the official announcement. As a result, Abe was briefed about the secret negotiations by Fukuda on August 29, one day before the official announcement.

In January 2002, Vice Minister Nogami resigned, and he was succeeded by Yukio Takeuchi. In the course of "passing the baton," Nogami informed Takeuchi about the plan. Takeuchi remarked to Nogami, "Hitoshi Tanaka is scary. He acts like the pied piper of Hamelin. If you follow his lead, charmed by his pied pipe, you might end up in the river."<sup>57</sup> The secret plan of Tanaka, the pied piper, was limited to a very small number of people, namely Koizumi, Fukuda, and Furukawa and Bessho at the office of the prime minister and Nogami (and, later, Takeuchi) and Kenji Hiramatsu at MOFA. When Yoriko Kawaguchi succeeded Makiko Tanaka as foreign minister, she, too, joined the club.

It was toward the end of August 2002 that Tanaka finally informed the directors general of MOFA's major bureaus of the secret negotiations for normalizing diplomatic relations with North Korea. On the evening of August 21, Takeuchi called to his office Shotaro Yachi, director general of the Foreign Policy Bureau; Ichiro Fujisaki, director general of the North American Affairs Bureau; Shin Ebihara, director general of the Treaties Bureau; and Hitoshi Tanaka. Takeuchi said, "I apologize for having gone this far without informing you earlier. I'd like you to know, however, that we have had the prime minister's consent regarding this." The draft of the Pyongyang Declaration was distributed among those present. Takeuchi asked Tanaka to explain further. Tanaka apologized again before starting the explanation.

After the briefing, Yachi asked, "What about the settlement of the abduction issue? This draft does not directly refer to the abductions. Will we allow this?" Tanaka replied, "Please leave it to me. I have already obtained the prime minister's approval." Then Ebihara asked, "How did you explain this to the United States?" Tanaka replied, "We need to start working on that. Richard Armitage is coming to Tokyo in one week to attend the U.S.-Japan Strategic Dialogue, and Mr. Takeuchi can brief him directly then."

After that, Takeuchi's office was filled with a heavy silence.<sup>58</sup> There was no further discussion.

### THE JAPAN-DPRK PYONGYANG DECLARATION

By the time that Koizumi's plan to visit Pyongyang was announced, the full text of the draft of the Pyongyang Declaration had been prepared. At the earlier debriefing in Takeuchi's office, Tanaka had assured the other officials that "the prime minister has already approved the substance of this draft." In order to complete the draft, however, they had to have the cooperation of MOFA's Treaties Bureau (later renamed the International Legal Affairs Bureau).

Among the Japanese present at the meeting of senior officials held in Pyongyang on August 25 and 26 were MOFA's Keiichi Hayashi, the Treaties Bureau's deputy director general, and Naoko Saiki, director of the Treaties Bureau's Regulations Division. While it was originally planned that they would conduct the fine-tuning of the Pyongyang Declaration during this visit, they had to postpone it because they had more to discuss on the abduction and the compensation issues. Consequently, officials from the Treaties Bureau had no role to play while in Pyongyang.

Senior officials of the Treaties Bureau became angry, suspecting that Tanaka did not wish to expose his counterpart, X, to senior officials of other bureaus. The Treaties Bureau director general, Ebihara, protested to Tanaka, declaring, "The Treaties Bureau will take no part in this task." Tanaka disagreed with the Treaties Bureau's argument. He was of the view that the Treaties Bureau's task in this endeavor was to attend to technical details regarding treaty obligations and their relationship to those in other treaties and not to interfere with the substance of the negotiations.

Perhaps partly because of Ebihara's outburst, Takao Akiba, director of MOFA's Treaty Division, was invited to participate in the bilateral finalization of the draft, which took place in Beijing after the August 30 announcement of Koizumi's upcoming Pyongyang visit.<sup>59</sup>

The Pyongyang Declaration consists of four articles. The first article expresses a strong determination to "make every possible effort for early normalization of

relations.” The North Koreans had suggested that the declaration be called a “declaration concerning diplomatic normalization.” They wanted to follow the path of the Japan-China Joint Declaration of 1972, which immediately led to the normalization of bilateral diplomatic relations, by giving the declaration a name that would have a great impact. The Japanese, however, insisted that the declaration remain a declaration of political intention on the part of both Japan and North Korea to strive for normalization in the future; they did not want to declare, with great fanfare, that relations had been normalized. In the end, the Japanese position was adopted on this particular issue.

What did the “early” in “early normalization” mean? North Korea had conveyed to Japan its wish to achieve normalization within the year 2002. Although that was a highly unrealistic goal, there was a moment of enthusiasm within Japan in the immediate afterglow of the announcement of Koizumi’s visit, when the Japanese leadership hoped to complete the negotiations within the year in order to ratify the draft treaty in the Diet’s 2003 ordinary session. Although the North Koreans strongly insisted on setting a specific deadline, the Japanese refused to do so. Koizumi and Tanaka shared the vague idea that if everything worked out as planned, normalization could be accomplished within one or two years.

Fukuda was much more cautious. Recounting those days, he said, “It took fourteen years [through seven rounds of negotiations from 1951 to 1965] for Japan to finally sign the Japan-ROK Basic Treaty. Therefore, I thought we could also take time to normalize relations with North Korea.” “We also had to consider the apprehension of some in the U.S. government concerning the speed of the normalization process,” he continued. “However, if we told the North Koreans outright that we would not hurry to conclude the negotiations, they would not respond positively. It is common sense to set a time limit in this kind of negotiation, but we dared not do that. Taking all these things into consideration, we inserted the word ‘early’ in the declaration. It was intended to mean ‘as early as necessary conditions are made ready.’”<sup>60</sup>

The second article states that “the Japanese regard, in a spirit of humility, the fact of history that Japan caused tremendous damage and suffering to the people of Korea through its colonial rule in the past, and express deep remorse and heartfelt apology.” Japan has a heavy responsibility for its role in the history of the Korean peninsula. It had failed to sufficiently express its remorse and sense of responsibility in the earlier Japan-ROK Basic Treaty, and that failure had long left Koreans with ill feelings toward Japan. In contrast, the Pyongyang Declaration is very clear and explicit. That part of the declaration was modeled after a 1995 statement by Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama (widely known as the Murayama Statement) to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II:

“During a certain period in the not too distant past, Japan . . . caused tremendous damage and suffering to the people of many countries, particularly to those of Asian nations. . . . I regard, in a spirit of humility, these irrefutable facts of history, and express here once again my feelings of deep remorse and state my heartfelt apology.”<sup>61</sup>

“Apology” was the word that the North Koreans were obsessed with most. They had envisioned using Koizumi’s visit as a political show; after all, the prime minister of a U.S. ally was coming to Pyongyang to apologize. However, Japan, although it recognized well the necessity for an apology, insisted on the apology being directed to the Korean people; it could never be an apology to the North Korean government.<sup>62</sup> The North Koreans translated the Japanese word *owabi* (apology) as the Korean word for “atonement.”<sup>63</sup> *Owabi* is not atonement, which could imply legal responsibility. The issue was not a simple matter of translation; it concerned a decision having a clear political intention.

Nevertheless, Japan, fully aware of the implications, did not oppose the Korean translation. For one thing, in the Japan–Republic of Korea Joint Declaration, which President Kim Dae-jung and Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi announced in 1998, the South Korean government had translated the Japanese *owabi* to mean *atonement*, and North Korea knew of that maneuver. Japan decided, as with the declaration of 1998, that “this Korean word for *atonement* is not used here to imply legal responsibility. As a matter of fact, in the Pyongyang Declaration, North Korea agreed to ‘mutually waive all its property and claims’ and agreed to accept economic cooperation in place of compensation.”<sup>64</sup>

It should be noted that there actually was some uneasiness and opposition within the Japanese government over the inclusion of an “apology” to North Korea in an official document. When Tanaka debriefed a small number of high-ranking MOFA officials in late August, Shin Ebihara, director general of the Treaties Bureau, challenged him. “Of all the countries with which Japan has bilateral relations, the Republic of Korea has been the only one to which Japan apologized formally in an official document,” he said. “We decided to include ‘apology’ in that official document because we truly wished to build a future-oriented relationship with the Republic of Korea. Are you sure that North Korea deserves the same treatment?” Ebihara, as personal secretary to Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi, had been heavily involved in the drafting of the “apology document” published by the Japanese government on the occasion of the Japan–ROK Summit of 1998, the so-called “Japan–ROK reconciliation summit.” Ebihara further charged, “That this expression is the same as the expression used in the Murayama Statement is not good enough.” Tanaka brushed aside Ebihara’s challenge, simply saying, “I have already obtained the prime minister’s approval concerning this matter.”<sup>65</sup>

Ebihara was not the only one who was apprehensive about “apology.” After Koizumi’s trip, Tanaka visited Masahiko Komura, foreign minister at the time of the Japan-ROK reconciliation summit, to report on the trip. “Although I support the Pyongyang Declaration on the whole, I cannot agree with the insertion of the apology,” Komura told him. “Why did you apologize to North Korea in the official document, when we have not yet apologized to China?” Tanaka replied, “Japan fought a war with China, but Japan colonized the Korean peninsula.” “You are wrong,” Komura retorted. “We included an apology in the Japan-ROK Joint Statement of 1998 because Kim Dae-jung had promised, for the sake of a future-oriented relationship with Japan, that the Republic of Korea would never bring up the history issue if Japan agreed to apologize in the official document. Jiang Zemin did not offer the same promise, and that’s why we have not apologized to China in the official document.”<sup>66</sup>

Although the Pyongyang Declaration states that “the Japanese regard, in a spirit of humility, the facts of history,” implying Japan’s historical responsibility, the Japanese persisted in the view that the wording in no way pointed to legal responsibility. At the same time, the wording matched the refusal of the North Koreans to include in the declaration their “apologies” regarding the abductions of Japanese citizens. They insisted, instead, on stating that “it would take appropriate measures so that these regrettable incidents . . . will never happen in the future.”

The second article of the declaration also clearly states that Japan will provide North Korea with economic assistance after normalization of relations. During preliminary negotiations with X, Tanaka stressed the significance of economic cooperation, citing as examples Japan’s earlier successful economic cooperation with China and Vietnam. In that exchange, Tanaka took time to explain repeatedly that economic assistance would be provided on a project basis and that Japan would provide North Korea goods and services but not cash. X had for a while come close to accepting the economic assistance proposal but then, probably under strong pressure from above, reverted to persisting in demanding the inclusion of “reparations” and “compensation.”<sup>67</sup>

In the negotiations leading to normalization of Japan-ROK relations, both sides had agreed on economic aid totaling US\$500 million. When Shin Kanemaru, LDP strongman, visited Pyongyang in 1990, it was rumored that he might offer economic aid on the order of US\$8 billion to US\$8.5 billion. In the negotiations with the North Koreans, while they referred to an “amount over \$10 billion,” the Japanese consistently refused even to negotiate on the issue; the Pyongyang Declaration therefore contained no specific figure. Neither was there any backroom deal or subtle oral agreement. The Japanese had been consistent on the matter from the beginning to the end. Yasuo Fukuda later stated that “there had been rumors of strange figures with respect to the amount of compensation

or economic cooperation. Economic cooperation with North Korea would not be implemented by simply providing X amount of cash in the vicinity of a few trillion yen. We were extra careful when we drafted the economic cooperation portion of the declaration, and I think it is well written. I also was surprised when North Korea agreed to it.”<sup>68</sup>

The declaration stipulates that economic cooperation will begin after diplomatic normalization, but it would be difficult to normalize the relationship unless outstanding issues—including the abductions and North Korea’s missile launchings and nuclear development program—were settled. In the context of the entire document, the portion on economic cooperation was almost disproportionately specific. The North Koreans made Japan present a specific framework for economic cooperation because Japan failed to include an amount for reparations and compensation. The Japanese, however, by providing very specific descriptions, aimed to stress that they would provide only economic assistance, not reparations or compensation.<sup>69</sup>

The third paragraph of the second article concerns confirmation of the principle of mutual waiver of all claims, providing that “when the bilateral relationship is normalized both Japan and the DPRK would mutually waive all their property and claims and those of their nationals that had arisen from causes that occurred before August 15, 1945.” In the Pyongyang Declaration, the words “reparations” and “compensation” were not used at all; instead, “mutual waiver of claims” was made a basic principle. That, too, was modeled after the Japan-ROK Basic Treaty. Customarily “reparations” is understood to refer to the demands that the victor in a war places on the loser for payment of the victor’s wartime expenditures; “compensation” to refer to payments to war victims; and “property claims” to refer to a war victim’s right to request payment of unpaid wages and other amounts due.

In history classes in North Korea, it is taught that “in the 1930s, the Korean Liberation Army, under the leadership of General Kim Il-sung, began fighting a war against Japan, winning the war after fifteen years of struggle.”<sup>70</sup> But Japan took the stance that Japan and Korea had not fought a war. Japan had claimed, as evidence of that, that neither government on the Korean peninsula was a signatory to the San Francisco Treaty and that the United States had not recognized the Republic of Korea as one of the victors in World War II. In terms of the financial settlement of postwar responsibilities, Japan had adopted an across-the-board “waiver of claims” between states as settlement instead of compensation to individual victims of the war. In this particular exchange, North Korea accepted the Japanese stance.

The North Koreans tried to connect “deep remorse and heartfelt apology” in the second article with “economic cooperation,” which appeared later in the same article. They wished to structure the article so that Japan’s promise of economic

cooperation would look like a token of apology—the logical consequence of an apology by the Japanese prime minister. Tanaka, therefore, strongly opposed connecting the two parts. In the end, the two elements were separated in two different paragraphs.

The Japanese highly approved the second article's agreement concerning waiver of claims. From the Japanese viewpoint, that statement foreclosed the possibility of any future North Korean demands for reparations or compensation. In the summit meeting, Kim Jong-il himself said, "I am prepared to decide on the compensation issue from a broader perspective. I am in agreement with the prime minister's suggestion to continue the negotiations according to the Japanese formula," making it explicit that he intended to make a concession to the Japanese.<sup>71</sup> However, at the Japan–North Korea bilateral negotiations held in Beijing in February 2006, the North Koreans insisted that they had agreed only to waive their property claims, not the right to compensation of individuals such as victims, although the declaration did not include compensation to individual victims.<sup>72</sup> On that occasion, the North Koreans referred to individuals' right to reparations, such as for the so-called wartime comfort women, but did not include the state's right to reparations.

There was the possibility, however, that in the course of discussions on the scale of economic cooperation, North Korea would resume its demand for compensation to individual victims instead of compensation to the country. But even if such a demand had been accepted, it would not have been altogether certain that the compensation would find its way to individual victims, because the North Korean government had made it clear that it would not approve individual compensation. Furthermore, regime change in North Korea was not impossible, either. It was not inconceivable that individual North Koreans would demand personal compensation in the future.

The last sentence in the second article reads, "Both sides decided that they would sincerely discuss the issue of the status of Korean residents in Japan and the issue of cultural property." The North Koreans attached great importance to this sentence. The Japanese interpreted the North Korean attitude not as a wish to upgrade the general legal status of Korean residents in Japan but as an attempt, in anticipation of the investigation and prosecution of the Chogin Tokyo Credit Union matter, to prevent "oppressive" actions by the Japanese government in the form of economic sanctions.<sup>73</sup>

#### OUTSTANDING ISSUES OF CONCERN RELATING TO THE LIVES AND SECURITY OF JAPANESE NATIONALS

The third article of the declaration was written with the abduction issue in mind. It states that "the DPRK side confirmed that it would take appropriate measures

so that these regrettable incidents, which took place under the abnormal bilateral relationship, would never happen in the future.” There was no mention of abductions. X appealed for Japanese understanding, asking Japan to agree “not to include such dishonorable behavior as abductions in the Japan-DPRK Pyongyang Declaration, which will have a long life.” “That is not acceptable,” Tanaka responded. “If the North Koreans wish to use an abstract expression here, we demand that you honor your commitment to make Chairman Kim Jong-il squarely acknowledge the issue and to apologize in person to Prime Minister Koizumi.”<sup>74</sup>

Throughout the 1990s, North Korea had adamantly denied that any abductions had taken place and the existence of any abductees. Often the meeting immediately broke up when the Japanese side used the “A” word. In 1999, former prime minister of Japan Tomiichi Murayama visited Pyongyang and met with North Korea’s Japan-handler, Kim Yong-sun. When Japan raised the abduction issue, Kim shot back, “Why do you Japanese always talk to us of abductions? What about the case of a political leader kidnapped by the South [Kim Dae-jung]? Do you use the word ‘abduction’ in that case too? Just stop using the word.”<sup>75</sup>

The Japanese had to find a different expression, but it would have to be an expression that would still clearly point to abductions. In the past, the North Koreans had used such expressions as “humanitarian issues” and “outstanding humanitarian issues,” which the Japanese were reluctant to accept because they were too broad and too vague. The North Koreans then suggested a slightly more focused expression, “the missing Japanese,” which Japan opposed, insisting that they could not “sit at a negotiating table dealing with such an obscure matter as ‘the missing.’” In the end, they agreed to the phrase “outstanding issues of concern related to the lives and security of Japanese nationals.” The Japanese decided to interpret Kim Jong-il’s explicit reference to the conduct of the North Korean special mission organizations, whose purpose was to secure native speakers of Japanese and penetrate to South Korea, as recognition of the past abductions.

The fourth article of the declaration states that “both sides confirmed that, for an overall resolution of the nuclear issues on the Korean Peninsula, they would comply with all related international agreements. Both sides also confirmed the necessity of resolving security problems including nuclear and missile issues by promoting dialogues among countries concerned.” During the secret negotiations, Tanaka stressed the special concern about nuclear development felt by the Japanese people, who had been the first victims of a nuclear weapon. He repeatedly pointed out that “abductions, missiles, and nuclear development will be huge obstructions to Japan-DPRK diplomatic normalization and economic cooperation.”<sup>76</sup>

“All related international agreements” included the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which North Korea signed in 1987; the International Atomic

Energy Safeguards Agreement, which North Korea signed in 1992; the January 1992 North-South Joint Declaration on Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula; and the Agreed Framework between the United States and North Korea, signed in 1994. Both sides confirmed that they would comply with the agreements. The Japanese were thinking about the North Korean enriched uranium program, which the United States had informed Japan about before the negotiations, and Japan wanted to warn North Korea that the program might violate the spirit of all the agreements. Although Japan and the United States did not go over the wording of the Pyongyang Declaration line by line, they had occasion to exchange general views with each other. The Japanese, in consultation with the United States, decided to insert the phrase “Both sides confirmed . . . they would comply with all related international agreements,” noting the North Korean enriched uranium program.<sup>77</sup>

Koizumi had to make up his mind whether he would pursue normalization with North Korea in spite of its secret highly enriched uranium (HEU) program. Yukio Takeuchi, vice minister of MOFA, queried Koizumi specifically on this point. Koizumi’s determination did not waver. “I will go to Pyongyang as planned whatever secret program they have been seeking.”<sup>78</sup>

Tanaka insisted that the nuclear and missile issues should be addressed in the Pyongyang Declaration, but X persisted in maintaining the DPRK’s traditional position that the issues were U.S.–North Korea bilateral issues; hence no progress was made. Nevertheless, the Japanese pushed further, although the North Koreans resisted, claiming that it would be difficult to address issues that concerned the military. In the end, however, the North Koreans agreed to include these two issues in the declaration, provided that the DPRK’s supreme leader would endorse them.

The Bush administration did not feel uncomfortable with the declaration. Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly clarified this point later: “The Japanese government did not ignore concerns about the Pyongyang Declaration. It clearly emphasized nuclear weapons more so than I would have before. Even though we didn’t want Koizumi to make a position, we did want him to be mindful that these weapons will continue to be a great big problem. The Pyongyang Declaration was a perfectly legitimate way to do that.”<sup>79</sup>

The nuclear situation on the Korean Peninsula was not an issue that Japan and North Korea could settle by themselves. It was an issue for all the “countries concerned,” including the United States, that called for policy coordination among those countries. The Pyongyang Declaration confirmed that point. The Japanese were envisioning a multilateral framework, such as the six-party talks, regarding peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula. In fact, Tanaka made a suggestion to X regarding six-party talks, but X expressed reluctance: “The time is not ripe yet for that,” he said.<sup>80</sup> The North Koreans suggested instead the statement “Both

sides also confirmed the necessity of resolving . . . problems . . . by promoting dialogue among countries concerned," which was included in the declaration.<sup>81</sup>

North Korea had traditionally been highly suspicious of a multilateral framework for ensuring peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula. It had steadfastly maintained that the issue of war and peace was essentially an issue between two countries that had fought the Korean War: the United States and North Korea. The Japanese, therefore, found it significant that North Korea had accepted a multilateral framework by "promoting dialogue among countries concerned."<sup>82</sup> In the subsequent summit meeting with Kim Jong-il, Koizumi reiterated the significance of this portion of the declaration. "It is important to prepare a forum for dialogue among the six countries concerned in order to promote confidence building," he said. "We ask for your cooperation." In response, Kim Jong-il said, "It is my view that a forum for confidence-building dialogues will be prepared as the relations among concerned countries become normalized. Our republic is prepared to participate in such a forum." Koizumi interpreted that response as "not an agreement nor a disagreement, but a cautious stance."<sup>83</sup>

It should be noted, however, that the multilateral framework envisioned by the Japanese was, as a high-ranking MOFA official in charge of Northeast Asian affairs in those days confessed, "a loose forum to facilitate confidence building, something similar to a Northeast Asian version of the ASEAN Regional Forum." The concept was different from that of the subsequent six-party talks, which were designed primarily to make North Korea abandon its nuclear program.<sup>84</sup> Reflected in the Pyongyang Declaration was the determination that agreements in the declaration should be placed within the overall framework of international agreements concerning the comprehensive settlement of all the issues regarding the Korean Peninsula. By introducing cooperation with all the countries concerned, the declaration gave those agreements the potential to develop from mere bilateral arrangements into regional and, further, international frameworks. That potential was partially fulfilled when the Joint Statement of the Fourth Round of the Six-Party Talks, adopted in September 2005, referred to the Pyongyang Declaration as a norm of conduct for Japan and North Korea.

The Japanese hoped that the Pyongyang Declaration would be the starting point of a deterrent process that imposed some kind of constraints on the behavior of North Korea and Japan toward each other.<sup>85</sup> The declaration thus came to have a dual nature: on one hand, it was an instrument to facilitate evolution toward the multilateral framework of the six-party talks; on the other hand, it would be a function of that framework, expanding or shrinking depending on the framework's success or lack thereof.

Immediately following the paragraphs in Article 4 of the declaration came this statement: "The DPRK side expressed its intention that, pursuant to the spirit of this Declaration, it would further maintain the moratorium on missile launching

in and after 2003.” The Japanese, touching on North Korea’s launching of a Taepodong-1 missile over the Japanese archipelago in 1998 and the resulting shock to and backlash from the Japanese people, had stressed to the North Koreans that the missile issue was an extremely serious issue for Japan. Among all the countries in Northeast Asia, Japan was and remains the country most sensitive to the issue of North Korean missiles. In a U.S.–North Korea joint communiqué issued in October 2000 following consultations begun in 1999, North Korea promised that it “would not launch any kind of long-range missiles during the duration of the bilateral consultations on the missile issue.”

In fact, the Japanese government had asked the U.S. government whether the Rodong missile was included in the long-range missiles referred to in the U.S.–North Korea joint communiqué, and the United States said that it was. The Japanese government regarded the reference to the “moratorium on missile launching in and after 2003” in the Pyongyang Declaration as a part of the regime of international agreements, including the U.S.–North Korea joint communiqué, concerning North Korea’s missile launching.

In May 2002, Kim Jong-il had announced to the visiting heads of EU governments that North Korea would maintain the moratorium on long-range missile launching until the end of 2003. The Pyongyang Declaration disclosed North Korea’s “intention” to further extend that moratorium. It should be noted, however, that although North Korea had made promises to the United States and the EU about long-range missiles, the Pyongyang Declaration formally states that North Korea would maintain the moratorium on missile launching.

The Japanese had raised the missile issue in previous bilateral negotiations, including those of April 2000 and August 2000. On those occasions, the Japanese requested that North Korea abandon the development, production, deployment, test launching, and all other activities relating to the Rodong missile. The North Koreans brushed aside the Japanese request, claiming that the issue was a topic to be discussed bilaterally between North Korea and the United States. In those negotiations, therefore, the discussions about missiles did nothing but register Japan’s concerns. It was in the Pyongyang Declaration that North Korea made a concrete promise for the first time. But the sentence concerning that moratorium covered only the launching of missiles and did not mention development, production, or export of missiles. The wording also did not specify whether the Rodong missile, capable of reaching almost all of Japan, was included in the moratorium. But the Japanese decided that detailed specification of the target of the moratorium was not necessary, given the U.S.-Japan common understanding that the Rodong was included among the long-range missiles.<sup>86</sup>

Following the four articles, the Pyongyang Declaration includes, after a blank line, one more sentence: “Both sides decided that they would discuss issues relating to security.” The Japanese deliberately requested that this particular sentence

be separated from the four articles in order to emphasize the understanding between the two parties regarding the need to have consultations on all security-related issues, including nuclear development and missiles. The Japanese aimed to stress their determination that Japan and North Korea continue to negotiate not only on the abduction issue and the normalization of diplomatic relations, but also on security as the occasion demanded. The Japanese also wanted to confirm that security issues such as nuclear development and missiles were issues not only between the United States and North Korea but also between Japan and North Korea. In the end, Japan was able to obtain a concession from North Korea on this point.<sup>87</sup> Based on this clause of the Pyongyang Declaration, diplomatic normalization negotiations between Japan and North Korea at the beginning of 2006 dealt simultaneously with the abduction and security issues.<sup>88</sup>

The Pyongyang Declaration was signed by Junichiro Koizumi as prime minister of Japan and by Kim Jong-il as chairman of the DPRK National Defense Commission. It was the second solemn international agreement that Kim Jong-il had signed, the first being the ROK-DPRK Joint Declaration of June 2000. North Korea later issued a postage stamp that featured a photo of the Japan-DPRK signing ceremony. The *Korea Encyclopedia*, published in North Korea, describes the Pyongyang Declaration as follows:

A declaration to settle Japan's improper past conduct toward Korea and to realize diplomatic normalization. It was concluded as the result of our beloved leader Comrade Kim Jong-il meeting with the visiting Japanese prime minister on September 17, Juche 91 [2002]. It is composed of four articles, declaring that both countries would resume talks toward diplomatic normalization and that Japan would repent and deeply apologize for the damage and suffering it had imposed on the Korean people.<sup>89</sup>

Koizumi was not even identified by name; he was referred to merely as the "Japanese prime minister."

Although it might seem that Japan had gained more from the negotiations, winning a concession regarding reparations and compensation, North Korea also gained a great deal, including Japan's apologies for its past misdeeds, a visit to North Korea by Japan's prime minister, and a road map for diplomatic normalization. One of the Japanese officials who had been directly involved in the negotiations later offered the following assessment: "It was more or less an even match."<sup>90</sup>

Throughout the entire process of drafting the Pyongyang Declaration, at least as far as the text of the declaration was concerned, the North Koreans never presented even one piece of paper, until the very end. It had constantly been the Japanese who presented written drafts. The North Koreans typically

offered only critical comments, which the Japanese typically rebutted. One of the Japanese negotiators commented, "This was a highly unusual case of diplomatic negotiations."<sup>91</sup>

### BACKLASH OVER THE ABDUCTION ISSUE

How many abduction victims did Koizumi expect to rescue when he decided to visit Pyongyang? First of all, how many victims did he expect to still be alive in North Korea? In fact, Koizumi felt certain that not all of them were dead; otherwise North Korea would not have invited him, the prime minister of Japan, to Pyongyang to talk about the normalization of diplomatic relations. Koizumi interpreted North Korea's highly positive attitude toward his visit as evidence that at least some of the abductees had survived.<sup>92</sup>

During the secret negotiations with Mr. X, Tanaka had gotten the impression that North Korea would offer some information about the abductees either during or immediately prior to the summit talk. But not until the end of the negotiations did X disclose how many had died and how many were still alive. If every one of the abductees had been alive and well, the North Koreans would not have had to be so cautious or so secretive about information concerning them. Because the North Koreans were so closemouthed, Tanaka felt sure that at least some of the abductees were dead. "If that was the case," he wondered, "should Koizumi still visit Pyongyang?"

If Koizumi decided against the visit because too many abductees were dead, the whereabouts of the surviving abductees might never be known. The prime minister's next move might even decide whether those who were still alive would survive. This, then, was a matter of human lives that called for extremely prudent judgment. To be sure, diplomatic normalization between the two countries was a strategic issue that could lead to a peaceful Northeast Asia. But, at the same time, the negotiations were also a struggle to settle a humanitarian issue on which the lives of at least a few people might well depend.

Of course, Japan would have to take a firm stand in the negotiations concerning the abductees, but, at the same time, if Japan demanded too many details, the lives of the surviving abductees might be adversely affected. There was a strong possibility that the people watching the abductees were "those kinds of people"—those who were affiliated with North Korea's special mission organizations. Depending on how the negotiations went, the people who were monitoring the abductees might feel that their security was threatened, which might result in their harming the abductees in one way or another. During negotiations with X, Tanaka repeatedly stressed that only the truth would eliminate the problem. "Therefore," he said, "we beg you not to twist the truth at this stage. And we ask that you guarantee the safety of the surviving abductees."<sup>93</sup>

Tanaka attempted throughout the negotiations with X to obtain even bits and pieces of information about the abductees, but always in vain. In any case, if the information had been provided, it might have made the situation all the more complicated. For example, if specific information about the fate of the abductees had been leaked beforehand, it was quite possible that domestic pressure would have forced Koizumi to give up his plan.<sup>94</sup> By that time, of all the victims, Megumi Yokota and Keiko Arimoto in particular had become symbols of the tragedy. Thirteen-year-old Yokota had gone missing in Niigata City in 1977 and twenty-three-year-old Arimoto in London, where she had been studying, in 1982. Whether the two were alive would have a great impact on public opinion in Japan. If it became publicly known that some of the abductees, including those two, were dead, emotional opposition to the Pyongyang visit might erupt, making it impossible for Koizumi to go. If that happened, the dream of diplomatic normalization and all the other positive developments would go up in smoke. That was, perhaps, what North Korea was most worried about and why the North Koreans never disclosed any information about the abductees until the very end of the negotiations.

The Japanese finally decided that there was no way to obtain the information other than for Prime Minister Koizumi to visit Pyongyang and to request it directly from Kim Jong-il. But the question was whether it would be appropriate for the prime minister of a sovereign nation to go to obtain such information.<sup>95</sup> It was a serious dilemma that called for an eleventh-hour decision. Along the way, Tanaka asked Koizumi about what he would do if the abductees were dead, and Koizumi replied, "I still will go." His determination was firm.<sup>96</sup>

Later, during a session of the Diet, Koizumi, in response to a question, said, "The negotiations about the abductions would not have achieved a breakthrough if left to government officials. I had come to believe that there would be no progress without a direct talk at the top level."<sup>97</sup> Koizumi decided to take an enormous risk—the risk of being told that some abductees were dead while trying to persuade the public to support his normalization policy. The breakthrough therefore would come from a comprehensive approach, an approach that Tanaka called a "grand bargain."<sup>98</sup>

Perhaps Koizumi had no real alternative in deciding whether to visit Pyongyang. Some people would criticize him because he visited Pyongyang knowing that some abductees were dead; others would criticize him because he visited Pyongyang without knowing anything about the dead abductees. Either way, he probably would be bashed. It was a risk that he had to take.

On that particular point, Yasuo Fukuda later reminisced,

I thought that the prime minister had to go to Pyongyang if any of the abductees were alive. It would have been a different story, though, if all of

them were dead. I felt sorry for the prime minister and sympathized with his agony. But if we missed this chance, I didn't know when, or if, the next chance would come. A politician sometimes has to hit a ball even if he knows it is a bad ball. Otherwise, I thought, what is the politician for to begin with? The prime minister went ahead and visited Pyongyang because, through a narrow window of opportunity, we had been able to obtain a certain assurance about the abductees. We were prepared for a situation in which, depending on the fate of the abductees, the prime minister might come home without signing the Pyongyang Declaration."<sup>99</sup>

The reference to the "fate of the abductees" included the worst-case scenario—no survivors; "without signing the Pyongyang Declaration" referred to the prime minister's response if the worst-case scenario were to become reality.

It seems, in retrospect, that Koizumi had hoped that with the return of the surviving abductees he could begin a big push toward diplomatic normalization.<sup>100</sup> However, as Masahiko Komura, a former foreign minister, had correctly pointed out immediately after the Pyongyang summit, the Japanese people were driven much more by sorrow and anger over the deaths of abductees than by happiness that some abductees were still alive.<sup>101</sup> People were especially furious about the deaths of Megumi Yokota and Keiko Arimoto.

Two days after Koizumi's visit, the National Association for the Rescue of Japanese Kidnapped by North Korea (NARKN) released an urgent statement claiming that "the official announcement about the dead and surviving abductees is not based on any objective grounds." The statement continued: "The information about the fate of the abductees is utterly ungrounded. There is a strong possibility that the eight who are said to be deceased are actually alive. However, because the Japanese government has informed their families that those eight are dead, there has emerged the danger that they actually will be disposed of."<sup>102</sup>

Since the very day that Koizumi visited Pyongyang, a chorus of acrimonious attacks had been directed at the Japanese government, particularly at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Didn't the government just uncritically swallow the North Koreans' information about the dead and pass it on to their families? Didn't it inform the mass media of the deaths of the eight abductees as if that were an established fact? Didn't the government keep secret a certain portion of the "whereabouts list" presented by North Korea? These and many other suspicions and criticisms erupted.

The "whereabouts list" was a piece of paper, written in Korean, containing the supposed date, place, and cause of death for each of the eight deceased abductees; it had been presented by the North Koreans at the end of the preliminary meeting immediately preceding the morning session of the summit talk on September 17. The list included the names of the following people: Megumi Yokota,

Keiko Arimoto, Tôru Ishioka, Kaoru Matsuki, Shuichi Ichikawa, Rumiko Masumoto, Yaeko Taguchi, and Tadaaki Hara. It had the adverse effect of magnifying the suspicions of the Japanese people about the cause and circumstances of the deaths as well as the way that North Korea had conducted its investigation.

Many questions and suspicions have arisen about the list of five living abductees as well. Why did North Korea include in the list Hitomi Soga, who was not among the abductees on the list prepared by Japan? Was it because North Korea needed to increase the number of survivors in order to present a slightly more balanced list in terms of deceased and surviving abductees? Did North Korea aim to emphasize its "sincerity" in order to pave the way for an easier "final settlement?" Or was it actually Charles Jenkins, the American husband of Hitomi Soga, that North Korea intended to release, together with Hitomi, so that it could initiate talks with the United States?<sup>103</sup> Jenkins had defected to North Korea in January 1965, when he was a U.S. Army sergeant stationed in a U.S. military camp along the demilitarized zone (DMZ), in order to avoid being transferred to the battlefield in Vietnam. He crossed the DMZ and entered North Korea, where he later married the abducted Hitomi Soga.

The denouncements of MOFA especially took the form of personal attacks on Hitoshi Tanaka, who had paved the way for Koizumi's visit to Pyongyang. On September 26, when Tanaka tried to answer a question asked by Issui Miura, an LDP member of the House of Councilors, about the future direction of investigations concerning the abduction victims, he broke into tears, overcome with emotion. He started by saying, "I haven't gotten over the shock and sorrow that I felt when I was told that eight abductees were already dead."<sup>104</sup> Tanaka sobbed as if his emotional faucet had been accidentally turned on, thereby giving Tanaka bashers an additional reason to criticize him: he was a bureaucrat who had cried in a Diet session. The Japanese government, pressured by hardening public opinion, announced early in October that its basic policy was to "give the abduction issue the highest priority."<sup>105</sup>

North Korea's enriched uranium program was another factor that propelled the abduction issue to the top of the list for the Japanese government. On October 6, at the official residence of the U.S. ambassador to Japan, Yasuo Fukuda and Foreign Minister Kawaguchi met with James Kelly, the U.S. assistant secretary of state, who had just visited North Korea. Kelly informed them of the shocking news that North Korea had acknowledged the existence of its enriched uranium nuclear development program. If that news were to become known to the public, U.S.-DPRK and Japan-DPRK relations might immediately become strained, which, in turn, might make it impossible for the five abductees (the four on the list prepared by Japan, plus Hitomi Soga) to return to Japan.<sup>106</sup> Deciding that it was urgent to hurry the return of the abductees, Tanaka contacted X and convinced him to accept the idea of their "temporary return."<sup>107</sup>

On October 15 a Japanese government plane carrying the five abduction victims touched down at Haneda International Airport, two days before the U.S. Department of State announced on the morning of October 17 (the evening of October 16 by U.S. Eastern standard time) that North Korea had admitted the existence of its enriched uranium project. Aboard the plane were Kaoru Hasuike, Yukiko Okudo, Yasushi Chimura, Fukie Hamamoto, and Hitomi Soga. Their emotional reunions with their respective families in Japan were widely covered by the mass media, leaving deep impressions on people all across Japan.

Japan had promised North Korea that the five were being “returned to Japan temporarily” and that their “stay” was estimated to be seven to ten days. That promise became another target of public criticism. To make the situation worse for the Japanese government, it was revealed that the government had set aside an allowance for the five to buy souvenirs to take with them when they returned to North Korea. Although the attacks took a variety of forms—including nagging about the “cold and heartless MOFA,” particularly its North Korea-sympathizing Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau, and accusations about Tanaka’s misjudgments and mishandling of the affair—beneath them was a strong undercurrent of deep distrust of the Japanese government, particularly MOFA, for having consistently ignored the abduction issue too long and shown a lack of compassion for the abduction victims and their families.

Inside the government, a clash of opinions between Fukuda and Abe became apparent. Fukuda insisted that they were obliged to send the five back to North Korea because MOFA had obtained North Korea’s agreement on the basis of a “temporary return.” He pointed out that if Japan did not return the five, the North Korean government might use their remaining family members in North Korea as bargaining chips—in effect, as hostages. He contended that the government had to make some other arrangement so that the families of the five could join them at some unspecified future time in returning to Japan.<sup>108</sup>

Abe, in contrast, took the position that Japan should not return the five.<sup>109</sup> His logic was that “it would be abdication of a sovereign nation’s responsibility to leave to the individuals the decision about whether they should go back to North Korea or stay in Japan permanently.”<sup>110</sup> On October 24, at the prime minister’s office, Fukuda said to Abe, “You insist that we should not let them go back. But what about the five themselves? What does each one of them want to do?” Hearing from Abe that their wishes were not known, Fukuda instructed Abe to contact every one of them immediately, by telephone if necessary. A few hours later, Abe reported to Fukuda that it had been confirmed “that none of the five intends to go back to Pyongyang.”

Subsequently, Prime Minister Koizumi was joined in his office by Fukuda, Abe, Kiminari Ueno (a deputy chief cabinet secretary), Tanaka, and a few others to finalize the government’s position not to return the five to North Korea.

Koizumi was presented with two options, return or not return. He decided not to return.<sup>111</sup>

At a press conference after the decision was made, Fukuda announced, "We will not return the five to North Korea, and we will obtain the return of their family members." One MOFA official who was seconded to the prime minister's office at that time said, on reflection, "When I served in the prime minister's office, that was the only issue that had to be brought to the prime minister in that fashion because his subordinates were unable to agree on a decision among themselves." He vividly remembered a remark that Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Teijiro Furukawa let drop at the meeting. "If we return the five to North Korea and no progress is made after that," Furukawa said, "the Koizumi government surely will topple. We will all be forced to resign."<sup>112</sup>

In response to Japan's announcement, the North Korean government vehemently protested what it regarded as a "broken promise" on the part of the Japanese government. North Korea's anger about being taken advantage of by the Japanese government remained long afterward. It should be noted, however, that the "temporary return" itself was, in a sense, a product of mutual deception. The five abduction victims had been fully aware before they departed Pyongyang that the North Korean government would never approve their departure unless it was for a "temporary return" to Japan. The five therefore chose to return temporarily. The North Koreans, on the other hand, claimed that it was their "free will" to return to Japan temporarily and that therefore they had to be returned to North Korea.

Japan knew that, in truth, the five "temporary returnees" would never want to go back to Pyongyang. However, for them to openly acknowledge their true wishes might jeopardize the safety of their family members remaining in North Korea. The Japanese government had no choice but to announce that it was the government's decision not to return the five without mentioning the wishes of the returnees.<sup>113</sup>

Japan-DPRK relations subsequently degenerated. Tensions between the two countries were heightened, aggravating U.S.-DPRK tension over North Korea's enriched uranium project, an issue whose resolution was interdependent with that of the abduction issue.

As a matter of fact, on October 16 (U.S. Eastern standard time), Park Kil-yon, North Korea's permanent representative to the United Nations, had invited Charles Pritchard, the U.S. special envoy for negotiations with North Korea, and David Straub, country director for Korean affairs at the Department of State, to North Korea's permanent mission, where he made the following statement:

The Japanese government had informed DPRK that there could be no Japan-DPRK normalization talks that did not include a discussion of the

DPRK's covert uranium enrichment program. This action clearly shows that the U.S. government has already launched a campaign of pressure against North Korea concerning HEU issue. Now that the United States has instigated Japan and made the issue public, it leaves us no other choice but to make the issue public ourselves.<sup>114</sup>

Park also warned, "We will use 'physical means,' not words," but he did not clarify what was meant by "physical means." On the evening of the same day, Department of State spokesperson Richard Boucher was forced to announce, due to a leak to *USA Today*, that North Korea had admitted the existence of the uranium enrichment program to the visiting Kelly delegation. U.S. ambassador to Tokyo Howard Baker immediately communicated the North Koreans' response to the Japanese government.<sup>115</sup>

At the Japan-DPRK negotiations in Kuala Lumpur, on October 30, North Korea described the Pyongyang Declaration as "the first significant positive development in the 100-year history of Korea-Japan relations," and proposed promoting normalization of diplomatic relations and economic cooperation between the two nations. But Japan said that settlement of the abduction and nuclear issues would be its top priorities. Japan's ambassador, Katsuya Suzuki, stressing the importance of the "human emotions of family members," demanded that the abduction issue be settled on a fundamental level, but North Korea never changed its stance. To quote Ambassador Jong Thae-hwa, "This issue has been essentially settled. I believe it has already been resolved."<sup>116</sup> The two governments' positions remained as far apart as before. As the year ended, the prospects for Japan-DPRK relations were not bright.

### "DUALISTIC DIPLOMACY"

After the Koizumi-Kim talks, Tanaka held secret meetings with X in order to achieve a breakthrough regarding the return of the abductees, but he could not find a way to end the impasse. It seemed to Tanaka that X had rapidly been losing his extraordinary influence—that the unilateral decision of the Japanese government to change the "return" status of the five abductees from temporary to permanent had weakened X's position in North Korea. X accused Japan of breaking its promise, saying, "I am deeply hurt." While Tanaka tried to explain that in Japan there was a certain thing called public opinion, X confessed his anguish: "I can no longer propose, at my discretion, a scenario for bilateral normalization," he said.

On February 22 and 23, 2003, Tanaka met X for the first time in a while, in Dalian. The nuclear crisis had deepened. All of the Japan–North Korea, North Korea–U.S., and South and North Korea plans had crumbled. X sighed repeatedly.

When Tanaka finally asked when they should get together again, X gave an ambiguous reply. These turned out to be Tanaka's last secret negotiations with X in a third country.<sup>117</sup> At the beginning of 2003, North Korea had announced its intention to withdraw from the NPT, giving rise to the second nuclear crisis involving North Korea, which triggered the move toward the six-party talks under the U.S.-China initiative. The year 2003 slipped away, but Japan could not find any solution to the abduction issue.

At the beginning of 2004 Koizumi began to consider visiting Pyongyang one more time in order to try to achieve the return of the returned abductees' family members who still remained in North Korea. Koizumi was irritated by the lack of progress and felt that there would be no breakthrough if the issue was left to MOFA; in his eyes, MOFA was thwarting any progress. Recalling those days, Koizumi said, "It was around New Year's Day that I started thinking that we must obtain the return of the family members as soon as possible. However, MOFA was, in contrast, very cautious."<sup>118</sup> Around that time, a variety of rumors had reached his ears, including claims that MOFA's pipeline through X was "clogged," that it looked as if Kim Jong-il had "written off X and started using his Ministry of Foreign Affairs instead," and that in order "to move things along," the government would have to take "a different route."<sup>119</sup>

Koizumi also was approached by a few people who seemed to be connected to North Korea in one way or other, suggesting direct talks with Kim Jong-il as a means of achieving a breakthrough. But Koizumi turned down all of them, saying, "If you want direct talks, go through Tanaka."<sup>120</sup>

Fukuda keenly understood and shared Koizumi's feeling of irritation. He instructed Tanaka to "do something," but no remarkable progress was made.<sup>121</sup> However, toward the end of 2003, the North Koreans made a new move. At the request of North Korea, two senior members of the Federation of Diet Members for Early Rescue of Japanese Nationals Abducted by North Korea—Japanese Lower House members Katsuei Hirasawa, of the LDP, and Jin Matsubara, of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ)—met in Beijing with North Korea's Ambassador Jong Thae-hwa, who had been in charge of Japan-DPRK negotiations. In the course of the discussions, Jong offered to release the family members of the returned abductees on the condition that the five returnees came to Pyongyang to get them.

Moreover, the North Korean government granted Japanese officials permission to interview a Japanese male who had been arrested on suspicion of possession of narcotics. His case—plus the case of a thirty-one-year-old Japanese woman, a former member of the Aum Shinrikyo cult (which was later renamed Aleph) who had earlier "defected" to North Korea but now announced her wish to return to Japan—required MOFA to dispatch officials to Pyongyang for negotiations. That was the first contact between the two governments in the fifteen

months since October 2002. The timing of these developments coincided with that of North Korea's consideration of participating in a second round of six-party talks.<sup>122</sup> North Korea had started to show some interest in a barter involving a freeze of its nuclear program in exchange for compensation. The Japanese interpreted these indications as a sign that North Korea was seeking a chance to resume negotiations with Japan.<sup>123</sup>

In addition, X had resurfaced. In a telephone conversation with Tanaka, X promised to set up a meeting between Tanaka and Kang Sok-ju, North Korea's first deputy minister of Foreign Affairs. In February 2004, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs Hitoshi Tanaka and Mitoji Yabunaka, director general of MOFA's Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau, flew to Pyongyang. In consideration of the negative feelings toward Tanaka among family members of the abduction victims, Tanaka had requested that Fukuda not make him the chief of the delegation, and MOFA designated Yabunaka instead. But the Korean Central News Agency reported that Tanaka was the leader of the group.<sup>124</sup>

In Pyongyang, X visited the Japanese delegation at the Koryo Hotel, where they were staying. They met X in the hotel penthouse and Tanaka introduced Yabunaka to X. But X did not show up later at the reception hosted by Deputy Foreign Minister Kim Yong-il or at the talks with Kang Sok-ju. It seemed that X had decided to observe from behind the scenes how things would develop.<sup>125</sup>

The negotiations with Kang at the North Korean Foreign Ministry produced no meaningful results. At the outset, Kang denounced the amendment, only two days earlier, of Japan's Foreign Exchange and Foreign Trade Control Law, saying, angrily, that it "was the result of a conspiracy by a right-wing faction in Japan."<sup>126</sup> The amendment enabled Japan to impose economic sanctions on North Korea on its own, independent of the UN Security Council. Although the timing was merely coincidental, North Korea seemed to suspect that Japan deliberately sent Tanaka and Yabunaka to North Korea after the law had been amended. Kang continued to criticize the amendment. "This is an attempt to constrain North Korea by force," he declared.

Although North Korea's Foreign Ministry had earlier conveyed to the nation's top leaders the ministry's prediction that the amendment would never be enacted, it was approved by both houses of the Diet, causing the ministry officials to lose face. The Japanese suspected that Kang's blow-up was an attempt, by stressing conspiracy on the part of the Japanese, to provide an excuse for the North Korean foreign ministry's misjudgment.<sup>127</sup>

The Japanese handed Prime Minister Koizumi's message to Kang Sok-ju, stating that the return of the eight family members of the five abduction returnees would be Koizumi's top priority. "If North Korea would release the family members of the five returnees, the stage for diplomatic normalization would be set,"

said Yabunaka. Kang retorted, "It was the Japanese who broke their promise. First return the five returnees to Pyongyang. After that, if they wish to go back to Japan, they can go." Thus, the discussion went around and around in circles.

When Kang accusingly demanded to be told why the Japanese would so strongly oppose the "temporary return" formula, Yabunaka counterattacked, "Because we in Japan feel that North Korea is treating the abduction victims as hostages."<sup>128</sup> Yabunaka told Kang that, to the Japanese people, the North Korean announcement that ten abductees had either died or had never entered North Korea was unconvincing and unsatisfactory, and he once again demanded the honest disclosure of information about their fate. Kang simply brushed him off: "What can we do about an issue that has already been settled?"

In this February 2004 meeting, Kang also told the Japanese delegation that the U.S. accusation that North Korea had an uranium enrichment program was totally unfounded, following his declaration with a round of criticism of the United States.<sup>129</sup> The Japanese had been prepared to offer to dispatch an appropriate, high-ranking government official to Pyongyang to receive the eight family members of the returned abductees, depending on North Korea's attitude, but North Korea's unapproachable stance discouraged the Japanese from making the offer until the end of the negotiations.<sup>130</sup>

At a debriefing at MOFA after the team came back from Pyongyang, Tanaka described the negotiations as "the most unpleasant discussions."<sup>131</sup> Tanaka's irritation was directed not only at North Korea's stance, particularly Kang Sok-ju's attitude, but also at the unexpected derailing of the scenario for normalization that he had painstakingly constructed through a series of secret negotiations. At the end of the negotiations in Pyongyang, Kang put his arm around Tanaka's shoulder and said, "Next time, let's talk about the future, okay?"<sup>132</sup> Although Tanaka replied, "Yes, let's do that," his heart sank.

Looking down from the top floor of the Koryo Hotel, the Japanese could see large flakes of snow falling incessantly, covering the entire city of Pyongyang in a white blanket. On one of those winter mornings, Kim Jong-il had praised Pyongyang's snow-covered beauty and ordered that no one sweep the snow away.<sup>133</sup> Outside the window lay a white, chilly expanse that seemed to symbolize the environment surrounding the relationship between Japan and North Korea. There had been no contact between the Japanese and DPRK governments for sixteen long months, and the feeling of emptiness caused by noncommunication had become increasingly acute.

This experience made clear, if nothing else, that the conventional negotiation pipeline would lead nowhere. Koizumi was deeply frustrated.<sup>134</sup> In the spring of 2004, the frustrated Koizumi was approached by the pro-Pyongyang General Association of Korean Residents in Japan (Chosen Soren) with a proposition. Ho

Jong Man, Soren's top leader, had already contacted Isao Iijima, a personal aide to Koizumi. "Prime Minister Koizumi is the only one we can trust," he said. "We wish to pursue normalization talks with him through you."

On April 28, Koizumi called Tanaka to his office. Fukuda already was there. Koizumi said, "We have received an offer from Chosen Soren to return the family members of the five abduction victims if I again visit Pyongyang. I want you to confirm this offer and make the necessary preparations." Fukuda and Tanaka knew that, by "make the necessary preparations," Koizumi meant that they should attend to the details and logistics, because Koizumi had already agreed that he would again talk directly with Kim. Fukuda pleaded for caution, saying, "We should go back to the basics. If we can get all the family members returned to Japan, that will be good, of course. But we should keep in mind that negotiations with North Korea will continue for a long time in the future. If at this point we do something that deviates from the proper course, that might cause problems for future negotiations, and we might have to pay for that." Fukuda added, "We should have MOFA negotiate formally with North Korea one more time. Can't we forget that offer?"

Koizumi shot back, "No, we can't." Turning to Tanaka, Koizumi said, "Go and determine if this is a real offer. If not, we can always cancel." Tanaka replied, "Let's work out conceptually how to make this feasible . . . Please put your project on hold and let us take over from now on." Tanaka gave a final push, asking Koizumi if he would leave it to Tanaka, to which Koizumi nodded his consent. "But," he said, "It is not as if we have to stick to this new offer at any cost."

What mattered to Koizumi was whether the new opportunity could actually result in progress or not. It was not whether the offer was good or bad; if it would not move things forward there was no reason to stick to it. Tanaka repeated his question, "Will you leave it to me, then?" Turning to Fukuda, Tanaka asked, "We will join the negotiations from now on. Now, do we have your consent?" Fukuda nodded by way of agreement, albeit grudging.<sup>135</sup>

By this time, bits and pieces of information about "dubious" activities in the prime minister's office had caught the attention of top-echelon MOFA leaders. Two days before the Koizumi-Fukuda-Tanaka consultation, MOFA vice minister Takeuchi tested the waters in a conversation with Fukuda, saying, "We have detected some mysterious activities in the prime minister's office. Isn't he working through an alternative channel on another visit to Pyongyang?" In fact, the information had already reached Takeuchi's ears that Chosen Soren had been working with the prime minister's office to pave the way for the prime minister to visit Pyongyang once again. But Fukuda confidently replied, "No, he isn't. That's impossible." Takeuchi was relieved to see how self-assured Fukuda seemed.<sup>136</sup>

Tanaka, too, had sensed strange goings-on in the prime minister's office. When he, together with Yabunaka, met Koizumi on April 27, he looked Koizumi in the

eye. "Is there anything we should be aware of?" he asked. Koizumi simply relied, "No. Nothing."

Foreign Minister Yoriko Kawaguchi asked Fukuda the same question that Takeuchi had asked and got the same reply. Fukuda was apprehensive about other channels to North Korea intervening in the normalization negotiations. He was quite displeased, in fact, that Taku Yamazaki, the former vice president of the Liberal Democratic Party, and Katsuei Hirasawa of the House of Representatives had contacted Ambassador Jong Thae-hwa, North Korea's chief negotiator with Japan, in Dalian in April of that year. Fukuda suggested to Koizumi that the only route of communication with North Korea should be through the Foreign Ministry. And yet Fukuda continued to hear of information being passed along a "different route" and "behind the scenes."

Three times, Fukuda had asked Koizumi, "I've heard rumors of a new route. You're not involved in it, are you?" Each time Koizumi had answered, "I've never heard of it."<sup>137</sup> However, Koizumi later acknowledged that he had communicated with North Korea through Chosen Soren; moreover, Koizumi suggested that the new route should be used in the future. It was later revealed that Koizumi had already conveyed his intention to visit Pyongyang again through that route.

It was a humiliating experience for both Fukuda and Tanaka, who had been secretly working on a plan to dispatch Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Hiroyuki Hosoda to Pyongyang to receive the eight family members of the returned abductees. As mentioned earlier, they were actually considering proposing this plan during the negotiations with Kang Sok-ju in February, but North Korea's unapproachable stance made Tanaka decide not to present the proposal. But, without their knowledge, Koizumi had already conveyed to North Korea his intention to revisit Pyongyang. Even though Tanaka had no choice but to accept Koizumi's unilateral initiative, he was very upset inside.

On the next day, Tanaka received an urgent message that Koizumi wanted Tanaka to phone him. When Tanaka called, Koizumi was furious. He said, "Make no mistake. I am the prime minister. As long as I take full responsibility in negotiations with North Korea through my channel, this is the only diplomatic route we should pursue. You can't accuse your prime minister of being the source of dualistic diplomacy." It was obvious that Koizumi had somehow overheard that Tanaka was complaining about the risk of "dualistic diplomacy." Tanaka answered, with deliberate composure, "Yes, sir. I understand, sir." But that did not calm Koizumi or lessen his fury.<sup>138</sup>

That was not the first time that Koizumi had yelled at Tanaka. It had happened earlier, on December 25, Christmas Day, of 2003. Tanaka went straight from Narita Airport to see Koizumi after consultations in Beijing with Wang Yi, China's vice foreign minister. Meeting Koizumi, Tanaka enumerated the problems that Koizumi's annual visits to Yasukuni Shrine were creating in Japan's relations

with China and South Korea. "Are you saying I should not visit Yasukuni Shrine because China told me not to?" Koizumi demanded. "I go to Yasukuni as a private person. From a long-term perspective, it is necessary for China to have this experience." It sounded as if Koizumi was suggesting that China had to learn a lesson so that it would not use the history card anymore and that that was why he kept visiting Yasukuni. When Tanaka further stressed the problems with the visits to Yasukuni, Koizumi at last burst into a fit of anger.<sup>139</sup>

On May 4, 2004, Tanaka and Yabunaka flew to Beijing to negotiate with Ambassador Jong Thae-hwa, North Korea's chief negotiator with Japan, regarding steps to be taken toward Koizumi's next visit to Pyongyang. During the consultation, the North Koreans said that they were prepared to return the family members of the abductees. They seemed to be talking about the five children of the Hasuikes and the Chimuras, but they did not make clear what would happen to Charles Jenkins and his and Hitomi Soga's two children.

Immediately before the North Koreans' statement, the Japanese government had said that it was prepared to offer humanitarian aid to the victims of the April 24, 2004, explosion at Ryongchon Railway Station as well as to provide food aid to the North Korean people as requested by the United Nations. Responding to the offer, North Korea asked Japan to provide the maximum possible amount of rice, which is more expensive than wheat and corn, and referred to the specific amount of aid that it wished to receive. The amount was larger than what the Japanese had considered by tenfold.<sup>140</sup> Nevertheless, after Tanaka returned to Japan, he reported to Fukuda that the children of the Hasuikes and Chimuras were likely to be returned, adding, "I think we can manage to strike a deal."

Hearing Tanaka's report, Fukuda thought to himself, "Now I can resign." It had recently been revealed that at one point in the past he had failed to pay his required national pension premiums, forcing Fukuda to make the issue his first priority for a few days after the revelation. On May 7, Yasuo Fukuda resigned as chief cabinet secretary. At what became his last press conference as chief cabinet secretary, Fukuda apologized, saying, "Of all people, I myself have fueled people's distrust in politics." Fukuda's resignation was a blow to Koizumi because Fukuda was the central pillar of the Koizumi government, and he necessarily affected its policies toward North Korea. The foothold that had been established and the framework that had been constructed for normalizing bilateral diplomatic relations became shaky.

On the very day that Fukuda resigned, Koizumi told Hiroyuki Hosoda, who had succeeded Fukuda as chief cabinet secretary, to "engage in negotiations with North Korea on the assumption that I will again visit Pyongyang. If the negotiations are successful, I will do that. I am sure I can gain the understanding of the abduction victims and of the nation as a whole."<sup>141</sup>

His instructions were based on the impression that the Japanese had received during the Beijing consultations on May 4 and 5. However, no determination had yet been made as to what to do about Charles Jenkins. Koizumi had privately decided that after he again arrived in Pyongyang he would try, face-to-face, to persuade Jenkins to come to Japan. Whether Jenkins would be released had become delicately entangled with the issue of Japan's food aid to North Korea.

Although the Japanese were planning to offer food aid based primarily on wheat and corn, the North Koreans, noting how tasty Japanese rice was, demanded rice. The Japanese tried to reject the request. However, in the end Japan agreed that rice would be added to the package of wheat and corn, for a total package of 250,000 tons of grain. (However, after Koizumi's second visit on May 22, the Korean Central News Agency reported that Koizumi "assured the DPRK side that Japan would . . . supply 250,000 tons of rice and medicament worth 10 million U.S. dollars.")<sup>142</sup>

Before dawn on May 14, Song Il-ho, vice director, Asian Affairs Department of North Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, contacted the Japanese Foreign Ministry to inform them that Kim Jong-il had formally announced that he would welcome Koizumi's visit on May 22. The message also said that by the time that Koizumi arrived in Pyongyang, North Korea would have persuaded Jenkins to depart for Japan.<sup>143</sup> The same morning, the Japanese government formally decided that Prime Minister Koizumi would return to North Korea.