

The Abductions Issue in Japan and South Korea: Ten Years after Pyongyang's Admission

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Abstract

Nearly all foreign nationals allegedly abducted by North Korea (DPRK) were Japanese or South Korean citizens. Suspected abductees' families mobilized in Japan and South Korea in the late 1990s to raise awareness of the abductions, seek information about their loved ones, and hold their own governments responsible for not having protected citizens. But public and political concern for abductee and their families has differed greatly in Japan and South Korea (ROK). The abductions have dominated Japanese public consciousness and policymakers' decisions regarding North Korea for the past decade, since the late Kim Jong-il admitted North Korean involvement in the abductions of thirteen Japanese nationals. Although more than five hundred South Korean abductees remain detained in North Korea, the abductions issue has received less attention in South Korea. What accounts for such variation in the trajectories of the abductions issue and related activism in Japan and South Korea? This article posits that the divergence in the efficacy of families' activism in Japan and South Korea is the product of families' interactions with each country's distinctive media and activist spheres. Thus, this article elucidates key features of the Japanese and Korean public spheres that affect each country's North Korea policy.

Keywords: abductions; media; activism; Japan; South Korea; North Korea

About a decade ago in September 2002, the late North Korean leader Kim Jong-il surprised the world by admitting that his government had abducted thirteen Japanese citizens in the 1970s and 1980s.¹ In part, anticipation of information about these suspected abductions had enticed Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi Junichirō to travel to Pyongyang for a summit meeting. After a half-century of ambiguous but never normalized bilateral relations, the summit also signaled a diplomatic breakthrough and, more broadly, a step forward in efforts to make

Japanese foreign policy more proactive. Both sides signed the Pyongyang Declaration.² And 81 percent of Japanese citizens polled approved of the summit.³

Yet Kim Jong-il's admission also ignited widespread public indignation in Japan, which the Japanese government was ill-prepared to manage.⁴ The families of suspected abductees—who had formed an organization in 1997—proved better equipped to channel the flood of media and public interest. Fuelled by the families' activism and saturation media coverage, the abductions trumped public concerns about North Korea's highly enriched uranium program, revealed in October 2002. A year later, 90 percent of citizens surveyed considered the abductions a concern, whereas just 66 percent listed nuclear development in North Korea (the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, DPRK) as worrisome.⁵

Since then, Japanese abductee families' moral authority as victims of both North Korean aggression and the Japanese government's negligence arguably created conditions that constrained Japanese policymakers. From the families' perspective, however, the Japanese government finally recognized their plight and began taking concrete steps to alleviate their suffering. The five surviving abductees and their children were repatriated to Japan in 2002 and 2004, respectively, and received financial aid from the Japanese government. Officials have also worn the family association's blue lapel pins since October 2002. In addition, a 2006 law mandated that all levels of government educate the public about the abductions and other North Korean human rights issues. Tokyo also prioritized the abductions issue at the six party talks, enacted unilateral sanctions against North Korea in 2006, and regularly mentioned the abductions in official statements. Even though at least a dozen abductees' whereabouts remain unknown and the process of applying for recognition as an abductee in Japan is opaque, abductee families and their allies have sustained public and political attention to the abductions for a decade.

In South Korea, abductee families have languished in comparative obscurity. In July 2000, the first South Korean abductee to escape from North Korea after having been detained there for decades returned to the South. He had been captured while fishing in 1970, fled the DPRK in 1998, and sought asylum from South Korea (the Republic of Korea, ROK). South Korea's abductee families publicized his escape just two weeks before the first North-South summit in June 2000 to urge the ROK

to include the abductions on the summit agenda. The summit was the capstone of ROK President Kim Dae-jung's "sunshine policy" toward the DPRK. Despite the families' protests, the ROK refrained from mentioning the abductions at the summit, preferring to couch the issue in a more neutral term: "separated families."

The South Korean public also seemed more concerned about other problems in North-South relations. When Gallup Korea asked ROK citizens how they felt about the fact that unrepentant North Korean prisoners held in the South—but not South Korean abductees or POWs held by the North—were mentioned in discussions about the tens of thousands of families separated by the 38th parallel, nearly 40 percent thought this decision was "inevitable." By comparison, only 45 percent of respondents thought that the ROK should have tried to link the release of DPRK prisoners held in South Korea with the release of abductees and POWs, and 16 percent did not know or did not answer.⁶

Although South Korean abductee families have not captured as much attention as their Japanese counterparts, they have wrung some concessions from the ROK government. The ROK quietly started including abductees on the lists it submitted to the DPRK for the separated families' reunions in late 2000. Abductees and their families also became eligible for financial relief from their government with the enactment of a special law in 2007. As a result of the law, the Ministry of Unification developed a process for individuals and families to apply for official recognition as abductions victims and spearheaded an inter-agency investigation into the abductions. The DPRK denies ever having abducted ROK citizens, but eight escaped abductees and numerous defectors report having met alleged abductees in the North. Consequently, the ROK government has recognized dozens of previously unknown cases of abductions. Legislation passed in 2011 also enabled recognized abductees' families to establish an organization to represent their collective interests in negotiations with government officials.

What accounts for the relative insignificance of the abductions issue and abductee family groups in Korea, when compared with the prominence of the issue and abductee families in Japan? After all, abductee families in both countries are active. Since the families mobilized, evidence of North Korea's involvement in abducting and detaining foreign nationals has also grown.

Explaining Variation in the Course of Abductions-Related Activism

Scholars have advanced several explanations for differences in the prominence of the abductions issue and related activism in Japan and South Korea. Samuels, for instance, focuses on political agency, tracing how skilled political entrepreneurs hyped “captivity narratives” in Japan but downplayed them in Korea.⁷ In making his case, however, he overlooks crucial differences in the structures of the Japanese and Korean public spheres, which mediated political actors’ efforts to articulate and propagate compelling narratives regarding the abductions. Williams and Moberg, on the other hand, focus on ideology and contend that differences in the two movements stem from the fact that the abductions have unique connotations in each country’s nationalist ideology.⁸ As with Samuels, public discourse about the abductions figure prominently in their argument. But they pay little attention to the ways in which the media and activists filter such communication. Finally, although Lynn does not compare Japan with Korea, he does show how Japanese news media narrowed the public’s views of North Korea policy through their constant and uncritical coverage of the abductions issue after 2002.⁹ Yet he overlooks the ways in which Japan’s activist sector amplified the impact of such media coverage, which becomes evident through comparisons of Japan’s abductee movement with South Korea’s.

This article traces how the abductions issue emerged as a social concern within a distinctive public sphere in each country. The public sphere is the realm of activity and communication that lies between the private arena and the political arena.¹⁰ Situated in the public sphere between grievance groups and their target audiences, the news media and activist organizations filter information and influence how salient issues become for the public and political elites.

As a result, the organizational structures and norms of each the news media and activist sectors create conditions that make a grievance group’s chances of achieving prominence more or less likely. A comparison of both countries’ news media and activist groups reveals that Korea’s public sphere is more diverse, but also more fragmented than Japan’s. Korea’s news media has diversified more since the late 1980s, with the emergence of cable TV, Internet news providers, portals, and blogs in the 2000s. Japan’s media environment remains dominated by five media groups. In addition, Japanese news outlets’ content and citizens’ news consumption patterns are more uniform than the varied

media content and news consumption habits found in Korea. Korea's activist sphere, meanwhile, is dominated by professionalized and politically connected activist organizations.¹¹ In contrast, most Japanese activist groups are small volunteer organizations that lack resources and access to political elites.

Based on these descriptions, one might expect Korean grievance groups to have an easier time building influential social movements. Korea certainly has a wide array of potential resources for grievance groups, including accessible media outlets and powerful advocacy groups. Yet I find that the apparent weaknesses of Japan's public sphere make it surprisingly conducive to grievance groups trying to muster widespread sympathy to influence policy. Japanese citizen-activists mobilized through decentralized networks to support abductees' families. And the Japanese families leveraged the media's penchant for competitive matching to develop and sustain widespread interest in their cause. Although Korea's public sphere is more accessible to grievance groups, coverage of the abductee families in Korea has been comparatively fleeting and reached smaller audiences due to the country's segmented media market. Korean abductee family groups have also had trouble capturing public and political attention because the country's public sphere is dominated by advocacy groups with broader agendas that eclipse the families' cause.

Thus, the organizational structure and norms of the media and activist sphere in Japan created more fertile ground for abductions-related activism. I do not deny that skilled political actors and the position of the abductions within each country's nationalist ideology also help account for the divergent course of abductee families' activism in Japan and Korea. Yet neither explanation acknowledges the central function of the media and the activist sphere in mediating the appeals made by abductee families and their allies for public and political attention. Understanding these dynamics in the public sphere sheds light on conditions under which pressure groups can come to constrain foreign policy decisions.

North Korea's Abductions of Japanese and South Korean Nationals

Japan and South Korea present a well-matched pair of contexts in which to study abductions politics. Their abductee populations constitute the bulk of foreign nationals abducted by the DPRK after 1953.¹² Suspected abductees' families also mobilized in the late 1990s in both

countries to seek information about their loved ones, government recognition, measures to hasten the return of abductees, and redress for their past suffering. This section summarizes the human toll of North Korea's abductions, before analyzing the divergent character of these movements.

Since 1953, but mostly in the 1970s and 1980s, North Korea allegedly abducted or detained hundreds of ROK and Japanese nationals (see Table 1). As of 2012, the ROK government recognized 3,835 total abductees. Although most returned to the South within a year as a result of North-South negotiations, 517 have been detained for decades. Of these, eight have escaped and returned to the ROK since 2000. The majority of ROK citizens abducted or detained by North Korea were fishermen, but the DPRK also kidnapped soldiers, students, professionals, artists, and airline passengers. Abductees from South Korea were welcomed for propaganda extolling the virtues of the North, used to train spies, given jobs broadcasting propaganda, trained as spies to re-infiltrate the South, or sent to work camps.

Japan, meanwhile, officially recognizes seventeen abductees. DPRK agents kidnapped Japanese citizens from Japanese soil to help train North Korean spies and to supply identities with which North Korean agents could travel. Most abductees were young adults, and the DPRK permitted none to leave until after Prime Minister Koizumi's historic visit to Pyongyang in September 2002. At that summit, Kim Jong-il apologized for DPRK agents' excesses and asserted that only five abductees were still alive. Despite Japanese suspicions about the twelve others, Pyongyang maintains that they have either died or never entered the North.¹³

Table 1: The DPRK's Abductions of Japanese and South Koreans at a Glance

Category	Japanese	South Koreans
Abducted (officially recognized)	17	3,835
Still detained or missing (dead?)	12	517
Repatriated	5	3,310
Escaped (after 3+ years in the DPRK)	--	8
Suspected abductees	~ 500	--

This article focuses on the political activism of families of people who were literally kidnapped by North Korean agents or detained after

involuntarily venturing into DPRK territory after 1953. But there are tens of thousands other Korean and Japanese victims of the divided peninsula and North Korea's autarky: South Korean prisoners of war (POWs) and captured intelligence agents, intellectuals and other skilled professionals kidnapped during the Korean War, civilians separated from their families during the Korean War, former ethnic Korean residents of Japan sent to North Korea during the "repatriation movement" (*kikoku undō*) of the 1960s, the Japanese wives of these ethnic Koreans, and members of the Japanese Red Army Faction that hijacked a plane (nicknamed *Yodogō*) to North Korea in 1970. These other categories of individuals believed to be detained against their will in North Korea provide an important backdrop for abductions-related activism in Japan and South Korea.

For decades, families of Korean and Japanese abductees endured not only separation, but also a lack of information about their loved ones. On the one hand, the DPRK rarely answered humanitarian appeals sent through the Red Cross for confirmation about whether someone believed to be in North Korea was dead or alive, because doing so would have been tantamount to admitting an abductions program. On the other hand, the ROK and Japanese governments also downplayed the alleged abductions until the 1990s. The small groups of decision-makers who formulated North Korea policy in Tokyo and Seoul considered the abductions a minor issue that interfered with broader objectives of maintaining national security in the context of the Cold War and, later, of improving relations with the DPRK.

To balance its own national security and interests, Japan had long maintained an unofficial "two Koreas" policy that involved cultivating near equidistance in relations with the ROK and the DPRK. In January 1980, the conservative *Sankei Shimbun* published the first front-page account of three couples' disappearances off the western coasts of Honshu in 1978 and speculated about foreign agents' involvement. Until the 1990s, however, aspirations for normalized relations led Japanese delegations to North Korea to refrain from mentioning the abductions and numerous politicians to argue that the abductions were a myth. When Japanese Foreign Ministry officials did finally inquire about "missing persons" in talks with the DPRK—as they did in 1992 and 1999—the North denied the abductions and terminated the talks.

Japan also had limited capacity to pressure the DPRK for information or investigate the disappearances. Jurisdictional divisions

and a lack of coordination among Japan's National Policy Agency (NPA), the Public Security Intelligence Agency (PSIA), and other ministries' small intelligence outfits stymied investigations and led to the premature closure of suspected abductions cases due to lack of evidence.¹⁴ In November 1987, however, two North Korean agents traveling with fake Japanese passports planted a bomb on KAL flight 858, which exploded midair killing 115 people. Japanese officials asked the ROK to question the surviving female bomber about her claims of having learned Japanese from a Japanese abductee in Pyongyang. As a result, the National Public Safety Commissioner reported to the Diet in early 1988 that Japan had sufficient evidence to believe that North Korean agents had abducted Japanese nationals. But the testimony sparked no further actions by the government.¹⁵

The Japanese government's lack of independent intelligence-gathering capabilities and contingency planning became clear during the 1994 nuclear crisis and the 1998 Taepodong missile launch over Japanese airspace. Consequently, Japanese political elites revived debates about the national defense posture, article nine, ballistic missile defense, the ban on arms exports, contingency plans for regional crises, and the rise of China.¹⁶ Growing public concerns about the abductions resonated with these debates in the late 1990s.

The ROK government similarly sidelined the abductions issue both before and after democratization, albeit for different reasons. Before the 1990s, the ROK's authoritarian rulers operated under the principle of "guilty by association" (*yeonjwaje*), suspecting anyone whose relatives were in North Korea (whether abducted or not) of being a communist sympathizer.¹⁷ Abductees' family members were, therefore, officially barred from the civil and military service, foreign travel, and many educational opportunities. Many abductee families and repatriated abductees also faced questioning, beatings, or torture by ROK officials.¹⁸ Since most abductees were fishermen, the ROK government's policy of denying seamen's licenses to abductees or their families left many without income.

Democratization in South Korea in 1987 brought enhanced political and social rights to citizens, including abductees and their families, but policymakers of all political stripes still avoided the abductions issue. South Korea's growing numbers of progressive activist groups worked to rehabilitate individuals formerly branded as North Korean sympathizers (as abductees and their families had been) and resolve the persistent

problem of national division. But these activists and progressive politicians also feared that raising the abductions might derail dialogue with the DPRK. In theory, the abductions issue provided conservative forces in South Korea a chance to criticize the DPRK. But taking up the issue also had the potential to draw unwanted attention to their conservative authoritarian forbearers' abuses of citizens.

In addition to blaming the DPRK, therefore, Japanese and Korean abductees' families have accused their own governments of having failed to perform a basic duty of a sovereign state—to protect its citizens. South Korean abductees' families have also held the ROK government accountable for persecuting and discriminating against abductees and their families after the actual abductions. Abductee families in both countries faulted their governments for not putting enough pressure on the DPRK, not investigating abductees' whereabouts, and not demanding that the DPRK repatriate the victims.

The Organizational Composition of Two Movements

To hold their governments accountable, suspected abductees' families began mobilizing in both Japan and South Korea in the late 1990s. New information induced the families to organize. Conservative Japanese lawmaker Nishimura Shingo raised questions in the Diet in January 1997 about new reports that thirteen-year-old Yokota Megumi had been abducted in 1977 by North Korean agents in Niigata on her way home from badminton practice. In October 1996, hawkish Korea expert Satō Katsumi reported in his journal, *Gendai Koria (Modern Korea)*, that a North Korean spy who defected had met ten Japanese abductees, including Megumi, in Pyongyang. Amid widespread coverage of Megumi's story, the Association of Families of Victims Kidnapped by North Korea (AFVKN or *Kazokukai*) was formed with help from Satō and other issue entrepreneurs in March 1997.

The families gradually amassed support from concerned citizens, activists with right-wing ties, repentant former North Korea sympathizers, and a diverse group of politicians. Concerned citizens formed local "rescue associations" to help the families raise awareness. Although thirty-nine such supporter groups formally affiliated to found the National Association for the Rescue of Japanese Kidnapped by North Korea (NARKN, or *Sukūkai*) in 1998, most retained their volunteer character, and some rescue associations have eschewed affiliation with NARKN.¹⁹ In addition, a multi-partisan group of lawmakers founded the

Diet members' League to Help Japanese Allegedly Abducted by North Korea (abbreviated *Rachi Giren*) in April 1997 to provide political support to the AFVKN. Similar legislators' leagues soon appeared in many prefectural assemblies. A repentant former socialist within NARKN also founded the Investigation Commission on Missing Japanese Probably Related to North Korea (COMJAN, or *Chōsakai*) in 2003 to investigate suspected abductions cases. Thus, NARKN, a bevy of sympathetic citizens' groups, the *Rachi Giren*, local legislators' leagues, and COMJAN support the families' organization (AFVKN) in Japan.

Meanwhile, Choi U-yeong—the daughter of an abducted South Korean fisherman—began mobilizing abductee families in South Korea after the ROK government published its first official list of abductees in 1999. The list included nearly 4,000 suspected abductees, including 454 who were still missing. Along with seven other abductees' families, Choi U-yeong launched the Abductee Families' Union (AFU) in February 2000. The Japanese AFVKN had invited Choi to a rally in Tokyo in 1998, and she modeled the Korean AFU on the Japanese families' organization.²⁰ Initially, the AFU struggled to mobilize other abductee families. Then, news of the North-South summit scheduled for June 2000 gave abductee families hope that they might at least gain information about whether their relatives were still alive. By May 2000, therefore, the AFU included about twenty families.

Yet, due to the greater number of Korean abductees and the variety of circumstances among them, Korea's abductee families became more divided than the Japanese families. The AFU split in October 2000 due to disagreements over tactics and leadership. Choi U-yeong formed the Families of the Abducted and Detained in North Korea (*Napbukja Kajok Hyeopeuihoi*, FADN), and Choi Seong-yong (no relation) was chosen to lead the reconstituted Abductee Families' Union (*Napbukja Kajok Moim*, AFU). Despite this split, the AFU and FADN continued to work—sometimes even in tandem—to raise awareness about the abductions. Some families participated in both AFU and FADN activities, but the AFU became most active. Aside from the Korean War Abductee Families' Union (KWAFU), the AFU and especially FADN cooperated with other advocacy groups mostly on an *ad hoc* basis. In 2012, the Federation of Postwar Abductions Victims' Families (*Jeonhu Napbuk Pihae Gajok Yeonhaphoi*) was formed to supplant the AFU and FADN and present a more united front in negotiations with the ROK

government.

Seeking Sympathy through the News Media

Like other grievance groups, the Japanese and Korean abductee families relied on the news media to leverage their personal stories of suffering and to gain sympathy from the public and recruit political allies. The media shaped the form families' claims took in public discourse—through their selection and placement of stories, inclusion or exclusion of facts and sources, emphasis within a story, and duration of coverage.²¹ As such, the news media can facilitate or frustrate grievance groups' efforts to raise awareness of their cause and pressure policymakers to respond to their demands. To understand the conditions abductee families have faced in Japan and Korea's media environments, this section compares the organizational structures and norms of each country's main newspapers, TV, and Internet news outlets.

The Japanese and Korean news media differ on three key dimensions: their barriers to entry, the diversity of news content across outlets, and the degree of audience segmentation. Concentrated cross-media ownership in Japan's mainstream media and reporting practices pose high initial entry barriers for grievance groups seeking media coverage. But once a group gains coverage, it can sustain media interest (and thus public and political attention) more easily than a Korean grievance group can because of Japanese news outlets' penchant for content isomorphism and the populace's relatively uniform news consumption habits. By comparison, Korean mainstream media outlets are more diverse and politically polarized, producing varied content to cater to more segmented audiences. Outsider groups thus face lower initial entry barriers in Korea, but have a harder time remaining in the spotlight, as news outlets compete by being different. As a result, the Japanese media sector created conditions that facilitated the sustained political prominence of the abductions issue and abductee families.

Whereas Japan's news media have enjoyed freedom of the press and a reputation for accuracy and thoroughness for more than half a century, government censorship and media controls only eased in Korea with democratization in 1987. Nevertheless, many Korean journalists became political dissidents during the 1970s.²² And Japanese reporting practices fostered cozy relations between the mainstream media and the state, which have reinforced the LDP-dominated political establishment. Today, both countries have vibrant, but distinctive media environments.

Compared to South Korea, outsider groups like the abductee families in Japan face higher barriers to entry when seeking initial media coverage. Historically, ownership concentration and reporting practices have tended to homogenize news and opinion, sideline alternative media outlets, and encourage reporters to rely on government sources for facts.²³ Despite regulations prohibiting concentrated media ownership, Japan's five national newspapers—the *Asahi Shimbun*, *Mainichi Shimbun*, *Nikkei Shimbun*, *Yomiuri Shimbun*, and *Sankei Shimbun*—preside over powerful business groups (*keiretsu*). Each has ownership stakes in the country's main commercial TV and radio stations, weekly magazines, publishing houses, and sports teams. Until the 1990s, Japan's large and respected public broadcaster, NHK, competed with the five commercial broadcasters affiliated with Japan's national newspapers under regulations that essentially prevented new networks from entering the broadcasting market.²⁴

Additionally, the reporters' (*kisha*) clubs, which are attached to most government agencies and major corporations and excluded weekly magazine and foreign reporters until the mid-1990s, served as journalists' primary reporting venues. Officials gave exclusive information to these clubs, and, in return, club reporters refrain from divulging all to protect their ties to officials.²⁵ Most club members saw themselves as conveying unbiased and detailed facts. But critics derided Japanese reporting practices as “pack journalism” and “saturation coverage” that promotes uniformity and unanalyzed minutiae in news stories.²⁶ These tendencies amplified abductee families' voices after 2002, but the dominance of the reporters' clubs also instilled professional norms that privilege credentialed sources of information. Consequently, Japanese officials' efforts to downplay rumors about the abductions trumped abductee families' claims to the media until 2002. Facing high entry barriers to the national news, Japan's abductee families initially sought coverage from local news outlets and weekly magazines, a strategy which the localized structure of Japanese activist sphere (discussed below) reinforced.

In contrast, the ownership structures and journalistic practices of Korean news outlets created lower barriers to entry for abductee families seeking media coverage. South Korea has eleven national dailies, owned by families or *chaebol*. The largest newspapers—*Chosun Ilbo*, *JoongAng Ilbo*, and *DongA Ilbo* (collectively nicknamed *Cho-Joong-Dong*)—still control 64 percent of the market as a result of past

authoritarian governments' preferential treatment of loyal news outlets. Yet *Hankyoreh Shinmun* (founded by progressive journalists in 1988) and *Kyunghyang Shinmun* strive to offset these alleged bastions of conservatism. As in Japan, public broadcasters (KBS and MBC) dominate Korean TV news, and, along with the commercial broadcaster SBS, command the largest audiences. But the deregulation of the cable market in 2002 significantly broadened the range of channel options in Korea. Unlike in Japan, cross-media ownership was prohibited until President Lee Myung-bak relaxed restrictions. Only in late 2011 could the *Cho-Joong-Dong* and *Maeil Kyeongjae* newspapers launch new cable channels. Although these conservative newspapers argued that restrictions against media companies operating in multiple platforms had allowed past dictators to control the media, progressive media outlets and Korea's increasingly vociferous media workers' unions decried the newspapers' foray into TV as "the end of a healthy media structure in our society."²⁷ Still, media ownership is less concentrated in Korea than in Japan, leading to a wider array of outlets.

Since the late 1980s, Korean reporters' rooms (*gijashil*)—first established under Japanese colonial auspices—have become a relatively minor part of reporting because they were associated with authoritarian-era media controls. President Roh Moo-hyun closed most reporters' rooms in 2007 to encourage more transparent relations between the government and the media, but also because they excluded the progressive and online news outlets that supported him. Korean journalists have thus been more likely than their Japanese counterparts to go out and pursue a story, often adding their own analysis to reporting. As a result, challenger groups in Korea can often find a news outlet eager for a scoop or a story that embarrasses the current ruling establishment.

Reporting practices and ownership structures in each country's media sector also affect the diversity of news content across media outlets, which influence the reach and coherence of a grievance group's claims. Concentrated ownership and journalists' professional norms encourage content isomorphism across Japanese news outlets, whereas ideological polarization among Korean news outlets has led to content diversification. Although Japan's main newspapers and broadcasters have discernibly different ideological slants, they have long practiced "competitive matching" in format, content, and sources and are less polarized than Korea's main media.²⁸ Japanese news consumers are gaining access to a wider range of TV channels and online news sources,

but they continue to trust the traditional outlets most. For instance, 43 percent of Japanese viewers polled trusted the information content of NHK, while just 10 percent said the same of other TV content.²⁹ Although it may be difficult to break into the national news, Japanese grievance groups that do are likely to receive coverage from all major news outlets, which look to each other for clues about what to report. Japan's abductee families capitalized on this characteristic of the media environment in 2002 to convey a consistent message and amass public sympathy.

Korean news outlets, on the other hand, practice "competitive diversity," which renders each outlet less likely to cover the same topics as its competitors and frustrates grievance groups' efforts to reach multiple audiences. A 2008 survey found that two-thirds of Koreans agreed that newspapers and broadcasters supplied "politically partial" news.³⁰ Ideological polarization in the media stems partly from the 1980s, when pro-democracy activists developed an abiding distrust toward the pro-establishment *Cho-Joong-Dong*. Korean presidents have also favored media outlets that match their ideological leanings and cite democratic objectives to justify indirect attacks on opposing media. Kim Dae-jung's administration, for example, launched a tax-probe against *Cho-Joong-Dong*, leading to the arrest of several of its owners. Conservative President Lee Myung-bak took on progressive news outlets when he revised the Media Law in 2009 to allow cross-media ownership. Changes in government, therefore, spur dramatic power realignments in the media environment.³¹ The especially polarized realm of Internet news has become "an extension of the street politics that has characterized Korean politics for decades."³² In this diverse media environment, challenger groups like the abductee families may gain attention from some media outlets, but rarely from a wide range of outlets, making it hard to reach large audiences.

The degree of audience segmentation in each country's media market has also affected the number of people abductee families have been able to reach through media coverage. Changing consumption patterns across media platforms—movement from older media to new media—have created greater audience fragmentation in Korea than in Japan. Internet news portals, online forums, and social networking media are more highly developed and trusted in Korea than in Japan. Only 34 percent of Japanese named the Internet as an "essential source of information" in 2011, compared to 56 percent for newspapers and 50 percent for

television.³³ When Koreans were asked where they got their news, however, 62 percent said from TV, 25 percent from the Internet, and only 7 percent from newspapers.³⁴ Especially in Korea, people prefer news outlets that fit their political leanings.³⁵ The competitive diversity of Korea's news media has also contributed to and been caused by such audience segmentation. Even though Japan has many blogs and bulletin boards, they have small audiences and usually cover nonpolitical, quotidian topics.³⁶ The lower level of audience segmentation in Japan helped abductee families reach wide swaths of the public.

In sum, the Japanese media's organizational structure and norms make it difficult for grievance groups to gain coverage initially. But if a group breaks into the Japanese national news, then news outlets' content isomorphism and journalists' norms of objectivity help victims to spread a consistent message. Furthermore, Japan's comparatively uniform news consumption patterns ensure that the families' message reaches many people. As for Korea, obtaining initial media attention is comparatively easier. Sustaining a coherent message, however, has become more difficult due to the ideological bent of news outlets and audience fragmentation. These features of the Korean media dilute abductee families' appeals for grassroots support and encourage elite-oriented activism.

Mobilizing Supporters within the Activist Sphere

When compared with Korea's activist sector, Japan's activist sphere created more conducive conditions for abductee families' activism. Activist groups—or those formal or informal citizens' and advocacy groups that do not aim to earn money, win elections, or advance specific economic or professional interests—can also reduce the challenges of collective action by spreading public awareness of particular grievances, mobilizing experts, and pressuring governmental actors. They can also point grievance groups to issue framings that have attracted public and political attention in the past.³⁷ At the same time, many activist groups prioritize their own organizational agendas, which can drown or reframe grievance groups' claims. Hence, the organizational structures and norms of a society's activist sphere may facilitate or frustrate grievance groups' efforts to publicize their cause and pressure policymakers.

Civic activism takes many forms in Japan and Korea, but several cross-national differences stand out. Japan's activist groups tend to be local, volunteer-based, and ill-equipped for political advocacy. In Korea,

most activist groups are larger national, partisan, and professionalized organizations that have arguably become more institutionalized than the country's political parties in the past fifteen years. Pekkanen characterizes Japanese civil society as consisting of "members without advocates."³⁸ Japanese civic activism reemerged after World War II among localized citizen networks that formed a plethora of local single-issue, self-help, and service-oriented associations, many of which cooperated with the state.³⁹ In the 1960s, for example, environmental pollution victims and their supporters focused more on clarifying responsibility for victims' suffering than on promoting broader environmental protection policies.⁴⁰ Yet Japan's strong and development-minded central government also created a regulatory environment that discouraged the formation of adversarial civic groups with professional staff or a national scope.⁴¹ Even after the number of non-profit organizations (NPOs) ballooned in response to the Hanshin earthquake of 1995 and after the regulatory environment improved with the passage of the NPO Law in 1998, the dominant pattern of activism in Japan has remained focused more on single issues and local activities than on national advocacy. This proved felicitous for abductee families.

In Korea, the combination of a "strong state and contentious society" had its origins in the late nineteenth century and solidified under Japanese colonial rule.⁴² After the Korean War, national division justified the government's use of ideology and coercion to curtail citizens' freedoms of association and expression. Gradually, however, economic development and expanded access to education spawned a middle-class and labor unions, which fuelled the activism that brought about democratization in 1987.⁴³ Thereafter, many of the intellectuals and lawyers who had fought for democracy became professional activists with few ties to the grassroots, as they distanced themselves from the radical *minjung* (people's) activism of the 1980s.⁴⁴ Rather than being "movements of the grassroots masses," Korea's activist sphere became comprised of organizations of professional activists "for the grassroots masses."⁴⁵

As a legacy of these distinctive activism traditions, each country's activist sphere is primarily composed of different types of organizations. The number of civil society groups grew in both countries in the 1990s, but especially in newly democratic Korea. Compared to Japan, however, a greater proportion of Korean activist groups are based in the capital, because they usually focus on national policy questions.⁴⁶ Korean

activist groups have also become increasingly professional operations since the 1990s. Activist groups have an average of nine employees, and over 20 percent of civic groups have more than ten employees.⁴⁷ One of Korea's most influential activist groups is the Citizens' Coalition for Economic Justice (CCEJ, *kyeongshilyeon*), founded by five hundred professionals in 1989. Run by a full-time staff, CCEJ has a publishing house, an in-house magazine, and several research institutes covering numerous issues. The prevalence of lawyers in activist groups also exacerbated this tendency for professionals rather than ordinary citizens to dominate activism.

Japanese activist groups, on the other hand, have tended to be smaller organizations that depend more on ordinary citizens than on paid staff. Avenell contends that Japan's 1998 NPO law actually privileged such "citizen participation-style civil society" over the contentious type of professionalized advocacy common in Korea's activist sphere.⁴⁸ To avoid domestication by the state and because the process of applying for NPO status remains arduous, many Japanese activist groups eschew the legal status that makes it easier to hire staff. Statistics about both registered and non-registered activist groups are therefore rare. Yet a 2007 survey of registered NPOs revealed that 56 percent had fewer than 50 members, and more than half had fewer than five paid staff.⁴⁹

Partly due to their distinctive organizational structures, activist groups in Japan and South Korea also adopt divergent approaches to political activism. Japanese groups generally focus more on service provision, local issues, and grassroots activism. For example, grievance groups often attract supporter groups (*shien dantai*), which usually consist of a dozen ordinary citizens who volunteer to provide solidarity, organize and attend public rallies, and distribute fliers.⁵⁰ Such supporters sometimes supply organizational resources, such as ties to other local organizations, and help spread local awareness. The Japanese national media's high hurdles to entry encourage grievance groups to build such local bases of support as a first step, which has worked well with the grassroots character of the activist sphere in Japan.

In contrast, Korean activist groups usually favor more elite-oriented activism. Initially legitimized by their moral authority as former dissidents, Korean activists have sustained their importance in the context of democratic consolidation through high-visibility tactics at the national level and attention to the concerns of the country's majority. Korean activist groups have thus monitored public officials, campaigned

for reforms related to the environment and women, launched a movement to scrutinize the national budget, improved consumer safety, promoted shareholder rights and corporate transparency, called for *chaebol* reform, exposed political corruption, and blacklisted unsuitable candidates for office.⁵¹ Such campaigns are often covered by the media—especially progressive news outlets—and sometimes spark bursts of temporary mass participation in demonstrations or boycotts. But observers criticize activist groups for ignoring marginalized populations and instead cultivating dense inter-personal ties with political elites.⁵² Moon contends that, “rather than being an open marketplace for political interests and ideas, . . . the Korean activist sector has great power to decide who belongs and who does not, whose grievances and pains are worthy of collective attention.”⁵³ More than Japan’s abductee families, therefore, Korean abductee families had to dilute their claims in order to appeal to other NGOs.

Filtering Abductee Families’ Voices in the Public Sphere

Thus, Japan’s news media and activist sphere created conditions that were conducive to the abductions issue becoming highly salient. At the same time, Korea’s news media and activist sphere encouraged broader debate that placed the abductions in the context of other North-South issues. For space reasons, this section does not trace both abductions movements in detail, but rather focuses on the movements’ interactions with each society’s media and activist sectors in their early and later activism.

Japanese Abductee Families’ Early Activism

For the first several years after Japanese abductee families organized, high barriers to entry to the national news media and the receptiveness of local citizens toward the families’ activism pushed the AFVKN to cultivate grassroots support. Although just seven abductee families launched the AFVKN, they had a compelling stories as they posed with large photos of their missing relatives. Groups of concerned citizens coalesced around them. The first local “[abductee] rescue association” was established in Niigata by twenty residents who wanted to do something to help the Yokotas.⁵⁴ The families and their earliest supporters raised local awareness by organizing rallies, and passing out fliers. In Fukui—where Chimura Yasushi and Fukie were kidnapped in 1978—relatives of these abductees also developed a network of

supporters through high school alumni ties.⁵⁵ The initial hubs of the abductions movement were thus in Niigata and Fukui. The national media's high barriers to entry also pushed the AFVKN to build such grassroots support. Sustaining sympathetic media coverage in 1998 and 1999 was difficult, because the mainstream media tended to privilege the government's official version of events—that there was still no firm evidence of DPRK involvement in the abductions. In fact, during an AFVKN petition drive, one abductees' relative collected only one signature per hour, despite standing amid hordes of people on the Ginza (Tokyo's main shopping district) in 1999.⁵⁶

Although AFVKN effectively cultivated local support, the families also sought meetings with key Diet members and bureaucrats. In April 1998, therefore, local rescue associations formed NARKN in order to present a more united national front. In addition to lobbying politicians, NARKN helped organize public events, maintain a website, gather insider political tips, manage donations, and produce publicity materials. Prime Ministers Obuchi and Mori finally met with the families in 1999 and 2000, respectively. More than producing any concrete outcomes, both meetings with the prime minister gave AFVKN national media coverage. By summer 2000, therefore, an AFVKN-NARKN rally in Tokyo attracted 2,000 attendees. Without firm evidence of North Korean involvement in the abductions, however, the families still struggled to sustain media coverage in 2001.

In early 2002, new abductions-related evidence unexpectedly bolstered the families' cause. The wife of one of the Red Army hijackers confessed in March 2002 that she had lured Arimoto Keiko, who had disappeared in Europe, to North Korea in 1983. As a result of the Japanese media's penchant for competitive matching, all news outlets covered this confession. Moreover, sympathetic lawmakers formed a new Diet members' league (*Rachi Giren*), which foreswore compromise on the abductions issue, called for investigations into credit unions with ties to North Korea and an end to all cash transfers to the DPRK, and proposed legislation to prohibit ethnic Korean residents of Japan from visiting North Korea.⁵⁷ By leveraging conditions created by the media and activist sphere, the AFVKN thus won support from a large network of ordinary citizens and a set of politicians who saw much to gain from backing the abductee families by mid-2002. This positioned the families to capitalize on the public indignation caused by Kim Jong-il's admission in September 2002.

South Korean Abductee Families' Early Activism

In South Korea, the media's accessibility and the prevalence of progressive groups in the activist sphere pushed abductee families primarily toward top-down tactics in their early activism, which coincided with the heyday of conciliation toward the DPRK. For example, Choi Seong-yong—the future leader of the AFU and son of an abducted fisherman—orchestrated media coverage of the first longtime abductee's escape by inviting a journalist to accompany him to China to cover the ROK consulate's lukewarm response to the abductee's request for asylum, in the hopes of embarrassing the ROK government.⁵⁸ Not all media outlets reported the embarrassing episode in the equal detail, but most reported the man's historic return to the ROK. Still, the approaching North-South summit soon displaced media interest in the escaped abductee.

On April 10, 2000—just three days before the National Assembly elections—President Kim Dae-jung had announced that he would meet with Kim Jong-il in Pyongyang in June. Amid the resulting public debates about potential reconciliation on the Korean peninsula, abductee families found support from Grand National Party (GNP) lawmakers. The President's more progressive party ended up winning fewer seats than the GNP in the April elections, after which the emboldened GNP formed a Special Committee on POW and Abductee Policy and began drafting the country's first bill related to abductees. This bill, however, was spurred more by GNP lawmakers' political calculations than by any broad public concern for the abductee families. By proposing the bill, GNP lawmakers hoped to signal their criticism of Kim Dae-jung's overly conciliatory approach to North Korea. The bill ultimately proposed in November received little media attention and was never put to a vote, because it became void when its chief author's term ended. Abductee families, meanwhile, protested the government's decision to send humanitarian aid to the North and release 63 unrepentant North Korean prisoners after the summit without securing the return of any abductees.⁵⁹ But unfavorable conditions in the public sphere and disagreements within the abductee families' association limited the efficacy of families' activism in late 2000.

Once the AFU and FADN split, their political activism—albeit with divergent tactics—regained momentum. FADN leader Choi U-yeong arranged interviews with domestic and foreign media. She also lobbied

Amnesty International and the UN alongside the Japanese abductee families. Few Korean news outlets covered these efforts or the ultimately unsuccessful lawsuit that twenty-six FADN members filed against the ROK government. AFU leader Choi Seong-yong, on the other hand, used more confrontational tactics to court media attention and pressure the ROK government. AFU members marched on the President's Blue House, launched balloons filled with leaflets into the DPRK, and helped broker abductees' escapes from North Korea.

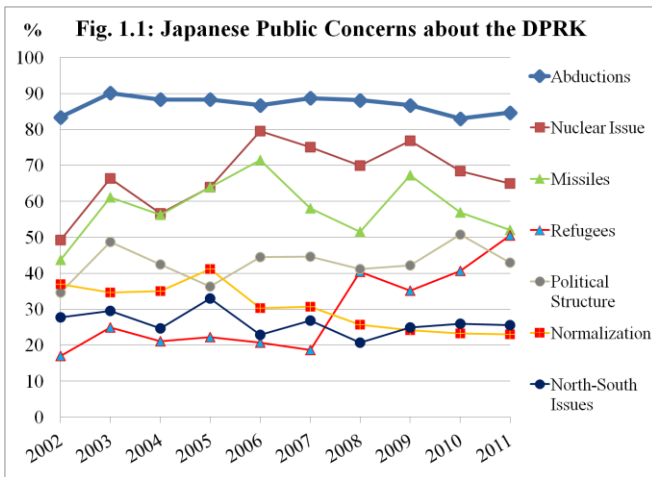
Despite the AFU and FADN's varied approaches to political activism, the diversity and fragmentation of Korea's media environment frustrated the families' efforts to reach many audiences with a consistent message. Although South Korea's plethora of traditional and online news outlets provided a wide range of venues in which abductee families could appeal for public sympathy, most news outlets devoted more attention to stories about refugees or the human rights of North Koreans living secretly in northeastern China than to the abductions. Abductee families also had tense relations with Korea's initially progressive activist sector. In 2000, the leader of one NGO demanded to know how Choi U-yeong knew that her father was an abductee and not a defector.⁶⁰ The gradual growth of more conservative NGOs in the 2000s ameliorated this situation. But some abductee families remained wary of being associated with hard liners on the right because it might endanger their relatives still detained in North Korea.⁶¹ Thus, the AFU and FADN's pursued *ad hoc* and top-down coalitions with other NGOs—as is common in Korea's activist sphere—rather than grassroots support bases.

The Later Stages of Japanese Families' Activism

Abductee families' activism transformed when Kim Jong-il admitted DPRK involvement in the abduction of thirteen Japanese citizens in September 2002.⁶² The network of local supporter groups that AFVKN had amassed interacted in powerful ways with the Japanese media's penchant for competitive matching to magnify the Japanese public's outrage over this surprise confession. The AFVKN became the ultimate authority on the abductions. As soon as Koizumi returned from Pyongyang, the media broadcast the families' criticisms that the Japanese delegation had unquestioningly accepted the DPRK's claims that eight of the thirteen abductees had died in the DPRK. Japan's news media competed to be most sympathetic toward the abductee families, resulting

in emotionalized, uncritical coverage that saturated the public sphere. Koizumi's second trip to Pyongyang in 2004 to orchestrate the release of the surviving abductees' children received more than three times as many hours of Japanese TV coverage than did the September 11th terrorist attacks on the United States.⁶³ In addition, questions about the AFVKN's motives and activities became virtually taboo in Japanese government and media circles.

Fuelled by saturation media coverage and widespread public concern, the abductions became a key issue in Japan's general elections of November 2003. Both the ruling LDP and the primary opposition party, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), declared their support for the abductee families. As the elections approached, more than one hundred politicians joined the *Rachi Giren*. NARKN functioned as "a combination support group and political action committee" that exposed candidates' positions on the abductions.⁶⁴ Socialist powerhouse Doi Takako, whose party had denied the abductions, was defeated by a staunch supporter of the Arimotos, an abductee family who lived in her electoral district. And the hawkish DPJ politician, Nishimura Shingo, won overwhelmingly due to his support of the abductee families, even though he had only narrowly won the previous election. Although the abductions had been an issue that attracted multi-partisan interest, it attracted politicians with more hawkish agendas and took on more partisan overtones after 2003. Nevertheless, since 2002, the abductions issue has remained highly salient, relative to other potential concerns about the DPRK (see Figure 1.1).



Abductee families and their supporters continued to campaign domestically and transnationally for policies that would put pressure on the DPRK. The AFVKN and NARKN had collected five million citizens' signatures by 2005, urging the Japanese government enact sanctions against North Korea. The families also led a nationwide boycott of North Korean clams, the highest value item in bilateral trade. As a result of the boycott and stricter insurance requirements for ships importing clams, the volume of the clam fell by half from 2004 to 2005.⁶⁵ Lawmakers from the LDP and DPJ also advocated revising Japan's Foreign Exchange and Trade Control Law (FETCL) to shut off remittances to the DPRK.⁶⁶ The weakness of the political left in Japan after the early 1990s and sustained public concern about the abductions facilitated such unprecedented discussions about unilateral sanctions. North Korea's launch of seven missiles in 2006 led Japan to impose more sanctions. Meanwhile, the U.S. Congress' passage of the North Korea Human Rights Act (H.R. 4011) in 2004, UN General Assembly resolutions condemning North Korea's human rights record in 2005 and 2006, and Mrs. Yokota's visit with President Bush in 2006 helped the families pressure the Diet into passing a law that required the Japanese government to raise awareness of the abductions and other North Korean human rights violations and to cultivate international pressure on North Korea.⁶⁷ When Abe Shinzō became prime minister in 2006, he strengthened the Cabinet Headquarters for the Abductions Issue. Its public education campaign reinforced continued media coverage and the families' activism.

Despite becoming entangled in broader debates about Japan's national security posture, abductee families have been able to retain surprising levels of grassroots interest, given the felicitous organizational structure and norms of the activist sphere and news media. Established as a key source of news among Japan's relatively homogeneous mainstream media, the AFVKN continues to receive coverage. For example, when Barak Obama won the U.S. presidency in 2008, NHK's extended prime-time news coverage included reactions from only one citizens' group—the AFVKN.⁶⁸ A November 2008 rally for abductee families also attracted nearly a thousand attendees. Supported by COMJAN, the families of the dozens of unrecognized abductees have strong incentives to sustain such grassroots public interest in the abductions so as to keep pressuring the Japanese government to recognize and investigate their cases. The AFVKN watched the DPJ's

rise after 2007 with trepidation, because some DPJ leaders had been involved in conciliation toward the DPRK in the 1990s.⁶⁹ Yet the LDP and the families' ally, Abe Shinzō, regained power in 2012. The felicitous conditions created in the public sphere by Japan's media and activist sector helped the abductee families remain visible.

The Later Stages of South Korean Families' Activism

Kim Jong-il's admission of the North Korean abductions of Japanese nationals similarly gave South Korean abductee families a period of visibility in the Korean media, even though he admitted nothing about South Korean abductees. Based on interviews with abductee families, for example, the *Yonhap* wire service published a series of seven articles in January 2003, which concluded by detailing the ROK government's past mistreatment of abductee families and calling for a special law like the GNP's failed 2000 bill.⁷⁰ The AFU and FADN set aside their differences to raise domestic and international public awareness and pressure their own government to do more. Yet FADN's Choi U-yeong recalled finding more public sympathy abroad than in Korea.⁷¹

After filing a formal complaint with the National Human Rights Commission of Korea (NHRCK) in November 2002, AFU leader Choi Seong-yong led twelve wives of fishermen, who had been detained in North Korea for decades, in a four-day hunger strike and sit-in at the NHRCK offices in late 2003. The bitter cold, the women's advanced age, and the disruption caused at the NHRCK offices attracted sympathetic coverage from the conservative dailies (*Cho-Joong-Dong*). Despite their concern for human rights, the progressive *Hankyoreh* and *Kyunghyang* did not cover the hunger strike, demonstrating the diversity of content and polarization among Korean media outlets. Nevertheless, the NHRCK issued a formal recommendation (*gweongo*) in April 2004, calling for a special law to aid abductees and their families. Even though the NHRCK recommendation received little media attention, it put pressure on the ROK government to do something for the families.⁷²

Yet without a consistent network of supporters or sustained media coverage, the AFU and FADN failed to prevent the subsequent inter-ministerial disagreements that stymied any progress toward such a special law in 2004 and 2005. The Ministry of Unification (MOU) argued that the Ministry of Public Administration and Safety (MOPAS) bore responsibility for implementing abductee families' assistance programs, because they would be domestic programs and because law

enforcement officials had mistreated abductees and their families in the past.⁷³ MOPAS officials countered that rescuing and confirming whether abductees were alive was MOU's purview. Several GNP politicians—who proved more attentive than the general public to the families' activism—drafted two separate bills that would aid abductee families. Indicative of the ongoing dispute over which ministry should be responsible for abductee policy, however, both bills were submitted to the National Assembly's Foreign Affairs, Trade, and Unification Committee in 2005, but then sent along to the Public Administration and Security Committee months later. With such delays, neither bill was ever put to a vote in the full Assembly.

Pressure from the families, a small group of sympathetic scholars, and the appointment of Lee Jong-seok as Minister of Unification in February 2006 ultimately ended this buck-passing. Although Minister Lee was considered a left-leaning North Korea expert before his political appointment, he saw redressing the ROK's past mistreatment of abductees and their families as a part of the progressive Roh Moo-hyun administration's commitment to resolving issues from the authoritarian era.⁷⁴ A MOU task force, therefore, collected documents related to the abductions from various government agencies and assessed different policy options in 2006. The Japanese government also announced in April that Yokota Megumi had married a South Korean abductee named Kim Yeong-nam in the DPRK. More than arouse sustained public attention or mobilize a more consistent network of political allies, this new evidence added impetus to government elites' efforts to enact a law to provide assistance to abductees and their families.

Thus, in September 2006 the Roh Moo-hyun administration announced a bill concerning victims of North Korea's post-1953 abductions, albeit with very little publicity.⁷⁵ The National Assembly passed the government's bill in April 2007. It required the ROK government to help repatriate abductees, stipulated levels of financial relief for abductee families and assistance for escaped abductees, and set a three-year timeframe during which abductees and their families could apply for recognition and financial relief or compensation from the ROK.⁷⁶ Yet, because this law limited the definition of abductions victims to those detained in North Korea for more than three years, 80 to 90 percent of South Korean abductees were ineligible for benefits. Disappointed with the amount for financial aid, the AFU accused the MOU of ignoring their demands, argued that Minister Lee had just

hammered out a law for which he could claim credit, and started pursuing revisions to the law through sympathetic GNP legislators.⁷⁷

Yet public interest and media coverage of the abductions was limited. According to a poll conducted before Roh Moo-hyun's visit to Pyongyang in August 2007 for the second North-South summit, only 6.7 percent of South Koreans rated resolving the POW and abductions issues as the most important topic for the summit agenda.⁷⁸ About 30 percent each selected nuclear weapons and easing military tensions, while 16 percent chose economic cooperation and 10 percent each chose separated families' reunions and reunification. Nevertheless, the MOU-led committee established by the 2007 law uncovered nearly fifty additional cases of abductions as it assessed families' applications for recognition as abductions victims. Elected in 2007, conservative President Lee Myung-bak took a harder line toward the DPRK than his predecessor. And sympathetic legislators introduced several more abductions-related bills to the National Assembly. One bill passed in 2011, providing financial and logistical support to a new association of recognized abductions victims' families, which was launched in June 2012. Even though new President Park Geun-hye met with abductee families while a legislator, the abductions issue is likely to remain a low priority among the host of DPRK-related challenges the ROK faces. The low salience of the abductions stems in large part from South Korea's diverse and fragmented media environment interacting with the elite and professionalized character of Korea's activist sector.

Conclusion

This article has argued that the divergent character of the abductions issue and related activism in Japan and South Korea has not only been a function of abductee families' and their allies' efforts or their relation to nationalist discourses, but also a function of the structural environment created by each society's news media and activist sector. Rather than assign credit or blame (depending on one's perspective) to the news media and activist sphere for the course of the abductions-related activism in either country, this article focused on how Japan's public sphere was conducive to abductee families' emergence and sustained prominence—even political capture. Korea's media and activist sphere, on the other hand, encouraged a greater diversity of perspectives and issues in public debates about the country's North Korea policy. Understanding the ways in which reporters and activists serve as

gatekeepers and mediators in the public sphere elucidates how and why some issues and groups are excluded from politics, while others are included. As a result, policy-makers should be attuned to the ways in which the organizational structure and norms of a society's news media and activist sector shape the emergence and development of policy debates in the public sphere.

Notes:

¹ This article draws on chapters three and six of my book manuscript, entitled *Accidental Activists: Victim Redress Movements in Japan and South Korea*. While writing this article, I was the Ginny and Robert Loughlin Founders' Circle Member in the School of Social Sciences at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, NJ and a member of the Mansfield Foundation's U.S.-Japan Network for the Future—opportunities for which I am grateful. I would also like to thank participants in the 27th annual CUSKOS conference for their feedback.

² “Pyongyang Declaration” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan, September 17, 2002), http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asiapaci/n_korea/pm0209/pyongyang.html.

³ “Seifu Hyouka Ni Anshin-Kan [Government Relief over Public Approval],” *Asahi Shimbun*, September 19, 202.

⁴ Yoichi Funabashi, *The Peninsula Question: A Chronicle of the Second Korean Nuclear Crisis* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2007), 36–37.

⁵ Cabinet Office, *Gaikou Ni Kansuru Yoron Chousa [Public Opinion Survey on Diplomacy]* (Tokyo: Government of Japan, October 2003), <http://www8.cao.go.jp/survey/h15/h15-gaikou/index.html>.

⁶ Gallup Korea, nationwide telephone survey n=1,049 (June 16, 2000). “At the North-South Summit, the ROK tried to resolve the issue of reuniting separated families by linking it to the question of long-term unrepentant DPRK prisoners, but made no reference to the abductees or POWs. How do you feel about this?” See panel.gallup.co.kr.

⁷ Richard J. Samuels, “Kidnapping Politics in East Asia,” *Journal of East Asian Studies* 10, no. 3 (December 2010): 363–395.

⁸ Brad Williams and Erik Mobrand, “Explaining Divergent Responses to the North Korean Abductions Issue in Japan and South Korea,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 69, no. 02 (May 2010): 507–536.

⁹ Hyung Gu Lynn, “Vicarious Traumas: Television and Public Opinion in Japan's North Korea Policy,” *Pacific Affairs* 79, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 483–508.

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¹¹ Sook Jong Lee and Celeste Arrington, “The Politics of NGOs and Democratic Governance in South Korea and Japan,” *Pacific Focus* 23, no. 1 (2008): 75–96.

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¹³ Japan questions the death certificates and remains North Korea produced for the eight allegedly deceased abductees. See Headquarters for the Abductions Issue, “Points of Contention with the North Korean Position” (Government of Japan, n.d.), www.rachi.go.jp/en/mondaiten/index.html.

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¹⁸ Interview with Hwang In-cheol, leader of the KAL families (Aug. 4, 2009).

¹⁹ Interview with Shimada Yoichi, NARKN chairman, Tokyo (Nov. 20, 2008).

²⁰ Interview with Choi U-yeong, former leader of the FADN, Seoul (July 11, 2007).

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