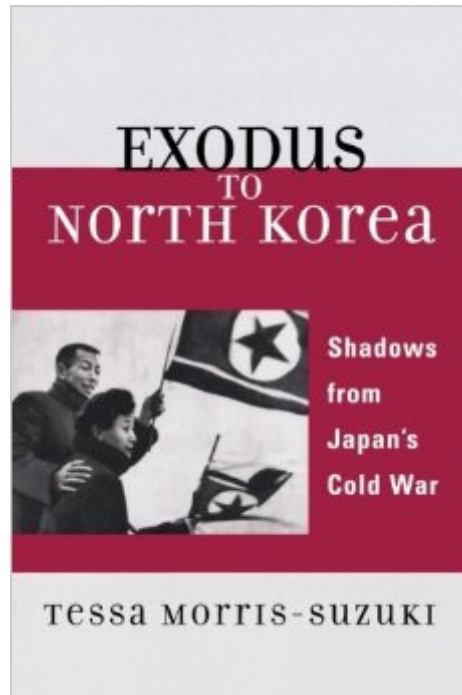


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Exodus To North Korea: Shadows From Japan's Cold War (Asian Voices)



Synopsis

Through travels that range from Geneva to Pyongyang, this remarkable book takes readers on an odyssey through one of the most extraordinary forgotten tragedies of the Cold War: the "return" of over 90,000 people, most of them ethnic Koreans, from Japan to North Korea from 1959 onward. For most, their new home proved a place of poverty and hardship; for thousands, it was a place of persecution and death. In rediscovering their extraordinary personal stories, this book also casts new light on the politics of the Cold War, and on present-day tensions between North Korea and the rest of the world.

Book Information

Series: Asian Voices

Paperback: 302 pages

Publisher: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers (March 15, 2007)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0742554422

ISBN-13: 978-0742554429

Product Dimensions: 6.1 x 0.9 x 9.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (3 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #523,560 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #90 in [Books > History > Asia > Korea > North](#) #486 in [Books > History > Historical Study & Educational Resources > Reference](#) #551 in [Books > Reference > Encyclopedias & Subject Guides > History](#)

Customer Reviews

Tessa Morris-Suzuki has written a remarkable account of the various forces behind the emigration of as many as 90,000 Koreans from Japan to North Korea in the late 1950's into the 1960's. By dint of thorough research, she has shone a light on the unexpected origins of that exodus. Perhaps most Westerners who are aware of that migration know that the vast majority of the Korean "returnees" were not of northern Korean origin but from southeastern Korea or from Cheju Island. However, far fewer probably realize the tangled origins of their departure from Japan. I have worked on Korean affairs fairly steadily for much of the past thirty years and was generally familiar with the emigration story. However, I thought the movement started as a result of North Korean propagandizing among the sad and badly treated Koreans in Japan, who numbered perhaps 600,000 in 1952 when Japan regained its sovereignty through the San Francisco Treaty. "Exodus to North Korea" shows that the

impetus for emigration came not from Kim Il-Sung or from the Chosen Soren, the North Korean front organization in Japan, but from Japanese officials. Only several years later and for his own purposes did Kim Il-Sung buy into the migration idea. The author points out that one of Kim's motives was a need for laborers, including in North Korea's mines, after the 1958 withdrawal of the last Chinese People's Volunteer units. For five years after the armistice those soldiers did a lot of reconstruction work in the North. Professor Morris-Suzuki points out the irony that many of the Koreans who went to the North had been taken to Japan in the first place as conscripted miners; they would wind up being used by the North Koreans for the same kind of dangerous labor.

Sometimes people make bad choices. Take migration for instance. The decision to leave your own country and to settle in another place is a life-changing decision. It will have consequences, not only for you, but also for your children and grand-children. With the benefit of hindsight, and at the risk of generalizing a bit, we can say that Italians who decided to migrate to the US made a better decision than those who chose to settle in Argentina. The two countries were broadly on par in the early decades of the twentieth century, but now one vastly outperforms the other. Descendants of Italian immigrants to the US are on average more well-off than their distant cousins in Argentina. For that matter, those who stayed in Italy ended up on a better track. Zainichi Koreans who decided to leave Japan and move to North Korea beginning in 1959 certainly made a bad choice. They and their offsprings would have been better off if they had decided to stay in Japan or, if the opportunity had presented itself, to move to South Korea. They would have had better living conditions and life chances, better health and education, and although they would have had to endure authoritarianism in the South or discrimination in Japan, in the end they would have had better political freedom and respect for basic rights. Most returnees to North Korea indeed came to regret their choice, often as soon as they landed in a country that they had never seen before. But for them and for their children, there was no coming back or moving out. They were trapped permanently in North Korea. Why did they make that choice to repatriate in North Korea? This was a question a North Korean trader asked Tessa Morris-Suzuki on the Korean-Chinese border. There is no simple answer to that question.

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