

## 19 Repatriation and the *enka* ballad *Ganpeki no haha*

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*Ganpeki no haha* (Mother on the quay) was a hit song in the 1950s and 1970s about the Siberia internment.<sup>1</sup> The lyrics are based on the actual story of a mother of an unrepatriated soldier, Ise Hashino, who commuted from Tokyo to Maizuru port in Kyoto prefecture to wait for the repatriation of her only son Shinji after the Second World War. Ise believed him to be alive, even after receiving notification of his death in action in 1954. She kept searching for him until she died aged 81 in 1981. In 2000, Shinji was found alive. He had a family with his Chinese wife in Shanghai. Ise's wish was half granted: her son was alive. But Shinji decided not to return to Japan because he did not want to damage people's admiration for his mother (Osada 2015: 753–4).

Six days before Japan's surrender, on 9 August 1945, the Soviet army invaded Manchuria, and thereafter Karafuto and the Kurile Islands, too. They captured approximately 575,000 Japanese soldiers and civilians, who were sent to concentration camps and forced to work in Siberia and other parts of central Asia for several years (Maizuru Repatriation Memorial Museum n.d.). Approximately 473,000 were eventually repatriated, but 55,000 died of forced labour, cold, and hunger during their internment (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare 2009). Maizuru port was one of eighteen ports for repatriation in Japan set up in 1945. The first repatriation ship from Nakhodka arrived in Maizuru in 1950. Maizuru was also the final repatriation port open until 1958.

Having heard that Shinji was captured by the Soviet army in Manchuria and sent to Siberia, Ise went to Maizuru from Tokyo every time a repatriation ship arrived. When Shinji did not disembark, she stood on the quay in despair for a long time. Her story was reported on NHK radio news in 1954, which inspired poet Fujita Masato to write lyrics about her. Hirakawa Namiryu set the lyrics to music. *Ganpeki no haha* was so touching that *enka* singer Kikuchi Akiko welled up in tears when she recorded the song at Teichiku Record Co. Ltd. (Osada 2015: 753–4).

Nevertheless, her rendition of *Ganpeki no haha* with three verses was an instant success in 1954.

Even before *Ganpeki no haha*, another song about the Siberia internment, *Ikoku no oka* (Hills in a foreign country), had already been a hit in 1948. This song was originally composed by Yoshida Tadashi, a soldier in Manchuria in 1943, as propaganda music for military exercises. It was called *Daikōanrei toppa enshū no uta* (Training to charge the Daxinganling mountains). Masuda Kōji, a soldier interned in Vladivostok, put lyrics to Yoshida's music to cheer up his fellow internees. It was often sung among Japanese internees in Soviet camps because it depicted male friendship between war comrades trying to overcome hardship during their internment. The song became well known to the Japanese public when Nakamura Kōzō, a soldier repatriated from Siberia, sang it on the NHK radio programme *Nodo jiman* (an amateur singing contest) in 1948 (Wajima 2010: 88). After he finished singing, he said that there were still so many Japanese prisoners of war left behind in Siberia (Tsubotani 2005). The song was renamed *Ikoku no oka* and sung by Nakamura and a professional singer, Takeyama Itsurō. It was also adapted into a movie of the same title in 1949. Yoshida and Masuda were repatriated to Japan in 1948 and 1950, respectively, oblivious to how much popularity their song had gained in Japan.

*Ikoku no oka* is a song about the Siberian internment from the viewpoint of prisoners of war. Since it is a song in two beats to rouse and encourage, it is similar to military songs. However, Kikuchi's song *Ganpeki no haha* was a sentimental, anti-war popular song about the tragedy caused by war and a mother's love for her son. At that time, repatriated soldiers and civilians were a familiar presence in Japanese people's lives via news reports. There were many one-legged or one-armed soldiers begging for money on the street. However, as people's war memories faded amidst their embracement of rapid economic growth in the 1960s, the popularity of *Ganpeki no haha* gradually subsided.

But in 1972 *Ganpeki no haha* was revived and became a three-million-sales hit when it was arranged in a *rōkyoku* style. It was sung by Futaba Yuriko, who had a *rōkyoku* career before entering show business. *Rōkyoku*, or *naniwabushi*, is a Japanese traditional style of narrative singing with a shamisen<sup>2</sup> that emerged in the early twentieth century. *Rōkyoku* usually recounts a sad story, so the *rōkyoku* style matched the theme of *Ganpeki no haha*. There were emotional monologues by Muromachi Kyonosuke included within the song, and Futaba sang *Ganpeki no haha* as if she was a mother talking to her missing son.

There are three monologues between the three verses, and the final one pleads to the wind to tell Shinji that her mother has been standing

for a long time on the quayside waiting for him (Osada 2015: 753). Futaba's singing style was later categorized as modern *enka*, namely Japanese sentimental ballad music but with distinctive jazz and rockabilly elements from foreign music (Wajima 2010: 76). Unlike Kikuchi's 1954 rendition, Futaba's *Ganpeki no haha* was no longer seen as an anti-war song. Instead, the mother's love in this song represented idealized traditional motherhood at a time when motherly love was in a perceived crisis. In the 1970s, a crisis of motherhood became a serious social issue, fuelled by sensationalized stories of newborn babies being abandoned in coin lockers in Tokyo (Ohinata 2016: n.p.). In male-centred Japanese society, child-rearing is traditionally regarded as a mother's job. In the 1970s, many young women worked longer and delayed marriage. On one hand, the mass media welcomed the change as the emancipation of women, but on the other hand, they criticized such women as unwomanly. Within this patriarchal social context, *Ganpeki no haha* evoked nostalgia for traditional motherhood ideals (Osada 2015: 754). The story was adapted into a movie in 1976 and a TV drama in the following year, both of the same title. Futaba retired in 2011, but the song has been sung by many popular female *enka* singers since, such as Sakamoto Fuyumi, one of Futaba's apprentices.

In April 1988, the Maizuru Repatriation Memorial Museum was opened. It contains exhibitions of Ise Hashino's letters to her son, the soundtracks of *Ganpeki no haha* by Kikuchi and Futaba and of *Ikoku no oka*, and materials that tell of the harshness of life during the Siberian internment. In October 2015, 570 items out of its extensive collection of materials were registered as part of the UNESCO Memory of the World Programme (Maizuru Repatriation Memorial Museum 2015; Bull and Ivings 2019).

The restored Maizuru pier bridge is approximately a 20-minute walk away from the museum. The museum and the pier bridge are popular destinations for tourists. Inside the museum, visitors can imagine life in the concentration camps by entering a life-size model room. When you enter the small dark room, you can see five mannequins of Japanese prisoners of war in shabby coats talking about how cold it is. You can hear a howling wind and the window is covered with snow because the heater in the centre of the room only has a little fire. In another section, you can see five mannequin prisoners with downcast eyes eating a thin slice of bread with a small amount of watery soup. In the exhibition area, materials that show life in the Siberian camps are presented in glass showcases: repatriated soldiers' bags, boots, clothes, and the 'Birch tree diary', a diary of a prisoner in Siberia written on birch tree bark, which was registered as part of the UNESCO Memory of the World Programme.



Figure 19.1 The restored pier of Maizuru repatriation port. The bell of mourning was donated by Maizuru National Society of Friends Commemorating Repatriation (Hikiage wo kinen suru Maizuru zenkoku tomo no kai). Author's photo.

Behind the museum building on a hill is the Repatriation Memorial Park, where monuments to the songs *Ikoku no oka* and *Ganpeki no haha* stand, along with a cenotaph. There is a cozy roofed rest space, from which you can see beautiful Maizuru Bay. Although the exhibition is depressing, the café and souvenir shop in the museum and the Repatriation Memorial Park seem to be sites for local retirees and the elderly to gather. When I visited in 2020, a large group of elderly people wearing masks were enjoying a chat over lunch in the museum café, despite the COVID-19 pandemic. In the entrance hall, there were some flyers about events for interactions among citizens at the museum. Repatriation has become part of local heritage, and the tourist sites commemorating this history help bring the local community together. As an example of war-related contents tourism, however, Maizuru shows how popular culture enhances the narrative quality of an otherwise bleak site of remembrance and gives it relevance and appeal to subsequent generations, too.

## Notes

- 1 The song and lyrics are available online at: <https://www.uta-net.com/movie/21012/>
- 2 Shamisen is a three-stringed Japanese traditional musical instrument.

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