

What does We to learn from the history of exchanges between Japan and Poland ?

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1. Introduction

When you look at a world map, you can immediately see that Poland is a country located in Eastern Europe, far from Japan.

If you list what most Japanese people know about Poland, the following names usually come up.

- Frederic Chopin, known as the “Poet of the piano” .
- Madame Curie, who pioneered the field of nuclear physics, which became the basic technology of nuclear power plants.
- Copernicus, who proposed the “heliocentric theory” that the Earth revolves around the Sun.

These people are written about in Japanese school textbooks, so I think most Japanese people have some memory of them.

In addition, in recent years, various events were held to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Japan and Poland’s official diplomatic relations, but Poland is one of the countries that many people are unaware of, as it has been overshadowed by the pandemic of “The New Coronavirus Disease” that has been ongoing under-ground the world for recent several years.

However, many Polish people know about Japan, and they are the country in Europe that trusts and cherishes Japan the most.

To understand the reason, it is need to turn the clock back about 100 years and learn about a very valuable event that is not written about in Japanese world history textbooks.

In fact, just over 100 years ago, in 1920 (Taisho 9), a very major historical event occurred that connected Japan and Poland.

This article I am about to write is a compilation of relevant historical documents and an outline of an episode of exchange between Japan and Poland that is not well known in Japan.

But that episode inspired the people of Poland to have a special feeling for Japan that continues today.

2. The special relationship between the Poles and Russia's Siberian region

First, We need to know why the Polish people were in Siberia. Here, We will look at old records about this.

In 1920 (Taisho 9), Poles in the Far East of Siberia, which occupies a vast area of the territory of the Russian Empire in northern Asia east of the Ural Mountains, were living in a situation that was like "a living hell".

At that time, it is estimated that there were approximately 150,000 to 200,000 Poles in the Siberian region.

Poland is a country located in Eastern Europe. Why were there so many people from such a country in Siberia, a bitterly cold place in northern Asia?

It was because Siberia was a "land of exile."

3. Subordination to the Russian Empire and the exile of the Poles

Since its founding in AD 966, Poland is a nation that has had a very harsh history.

Constantly subject to repeated invasions by beside larger countries, in 1795 all of Poland's territory was seized by the Russian Empire, the Austrian Empire, and the Kingdom of Prussia, and the nation of Poland ceased to exist.

In world history, this event is known as the "Partition of Poland."

In 1918 (Taisho 7), Poland formally became an independent country again, but its monarch was made the Russian Tsar and it was forced to be subordinate to the Russian Empire.

In response, the Poles rebelled against the Russian Empire many times, but they were all suppressed.

The Russian Empire expelled rebellious Poles one after another from Poland and punished them with exile, and then made them do hard work in their exile destinations.

The place they were exiled to was Siberia.

4. Poles in Siberia exposed to harsh conditions

Siberia, near the Far East, is a bitterly cold region, with temperatures reaching 70 degrees below zero in mid-winter, approximately 7,500 kilometres east of Poland's capital, Warsaw.

When the "Russian Revolution" broke out in 1917, domestic warfare brought chaos even to Siberia. The Soviet Revolutionary Army (Red Army) and the counter-revolutionary Army (White Army) fought across Siberia, and Poles on the side of the counter-revolutionary forces in the region were persecuted and oppressed.

As a result, many Poles, estimated at around 150,000 or 200,000, lost their homes and property and were forced to wander the frozen wilderness as refugees, without food or medicine. As a result, many people died of starvation, disease or freezing to death.

5. The tragedies faced by Polish refugees

According to records from that time, the Polish refugees burned everything they could to stay warm, even railroad ties, which were supposed to be their lifeline when escaping Siberia, and when they ran out of these, they froze to death one after another.

In one tragic incident, a train carrying 600 Polish women and children trying to escape got stuck due to a lack of fuel, and all of them froze to death.

There is also the following record:

"In an abandoned train, several young children were found frozen to death, draped over the cold corpse of their mother.

The mother had covered her children with her own clothes to keep them warm, and had likely given them all the food she had left before dying.

Some of the young children clung to their mothers' chests and appeared to still be alive, with tears frozen to their pale cheeks."

6. Appeals for relief from other countries go unanswered

Unable to bear witness to this dire situation, Poles living in Vladivostok, Russian Empire, rose up and established the "Committee to Relieve the Children of the Polish Far East" (hereafter referred to as the Relief Committee) in 1919 (Taisho 8). Ms. Anna Bielkiewicz (42 years old) was appointed as the chairperson of the Relief Committee, and Medical Doctor Józef Jakubkiewicz (27 years old) was appointed as the vice-chairperson.

At the time, America, Britain, France, Italy, and Japan had all sent troops to Siberia.

This was because they were extremely wary of the Soviet government, which had arbitrarily defaulted on the enormous debts it had incurred from these foreign countries during the Russian Empire era and claimed to be aiming to become a new socialist state.

In world history, this military conflict is known as the "Siberian Intervention."

Ms. Anna Bielkiewicz and others appealed to the United States, which had sent troops to Siberia, as well as other European countries and the Chinese Red Cross in Shanghai, pleading with them to help the orphans out of their plight.

However, as the defeat of the counter-revolutionary forces supported by the West became increasingly likely, the benefits of Western countries sending troops began to disappear.

The pleas of Ms. Anna Bielkiewicz and the Relief Committee were in vain, and Western countries' troops one after another withdrew to their home countries.

Eventually, the only country left that had troops stationed there was Japan, which was close to the Russian Empire, which was in the midst of a Civil War and would later become the Soviet Union.

7. Japan was her only hope

With nowhere to appeal to, Ms. Anna Bielkiewicz decided to appeal to Japan with only a little hope.

Until then, Poland and Japan had little connection or exchange, and there was an old record of a Polish priest being martyred in Japan during the Edo era, which led to the opinion that "Japan is a barbaric country that oppresses Christians."

On the other hand, there was a record that during the "Russo-Japanese War", Japan, in accordance with the Geneva Convention of "International Law in War", treated Polish "Prisoners of War" who had no choice but to join the Russian Imperial Army well.

Either way, Japan was now her only hope. Ms. Anna Bielkiewicz went to Japan solo. She visited several Catholic Christian organizations to ask for help, but was turned down by all of them.

Then, Ms. Anna Bielkiewicz took a train to a French religious convent in Hakodate, Hokkaido, to plead, but was turned down there too, and had no choice but to return to Yokohama on an overnight train.

The next day, on June 18th, 1920 (Taisho 9), Ms. Anna Bielkiewicz visited the Japanese government's Ministry of Army in Tokyo.

The military officer who greeted her said in fluent French, "It would be better for you to go to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. If you don't know anyone there, I can show you around," and accompanied her to the Ministry.

Following the advice of Mushanokoji Kintomo, a diplomat she met at the Ministry, Ms. Anna Bielkiewicz typed two documents in French overnight and submitted them to the Ministry at 9 AM the next morning.

First, in the "Petition," she appealed to the Japanese government, saying, "Please help even orphans, even innocent children."

The situation report providing further details stated,

"Right now, on the Trans-Siberian Railway, military personnel from various countries trying to return to their home countries before the arrival of the Soviet troops are fighting over seats, and refugees who manage to board the train are being thrown out of the windows into the snow by the soldiers, where they are freezing to death one after another."

The Japanese government's Ministry of Foreign Affairs was deeply sympathetic to Ms. Anna Bielkiewicz's heartbreaking appeal, but due to national budget constraints, the Japanese government did not have the financial resources to do so.

Then they immediately requested the Japanese Red Cross Society to carry out orphan relief work.

8. The decision to provide relief was made with unusual speed.

Upon receiving the request, the Japanese Red Cross Society immediately held a board meeting and held repeated discussions.

Of course, this would be dangerous relief work in an area where a civil war was ongoing, so the cooperation of the Japanese military, which had been dispatched to Vladivostok, was essential, and at the same time, it was a project that would require a large number of manpower and huge expenses.

As a result of the discussions, the Japanese Red Cross Society decided to carry out relief work for the orphans on July 5th of that year.

Then, with the approval of Army Minister Tanaka Giichi and Navy Minister Kato Tomosaburo, Japanese Red Cross Society president Ishiguro Tadanori conveyed the following to Foreign Minister Uchida Yasuya:

"This is a very important incident in terms of diplomatic relations and humanitarianism, and as We recognize the need for relief, and We will take in and provide for the children at our headquarters."

This was an acceptance of Japan's relief efforts. It was an unusually quick decision, coming just 17 days after Ms. Anna Bielkiewicz of the Relief Committee had arrived in Japan alone.

Ms. Anna Bielkiewicz was overjoyed and immediately brought this good news back to Vladivostok.

And then Japan's relief efforts for orphans began.

9. The first orphan rescue mission

The first rescue mission took place from July 1920 to the following year.

On July 22, 1920, the army transport ship "Chikuzen Maru" arrived at Tsuruga- Port in Fukui Prefecture from the port of Vladivostok with the first group of 57 orphans and five accompanying Polish people on board.

The orphans ranged in age from 16 to 4, and the older children were said to have acted as parents and looked after the younger ones.

All of them were weak, with thin, pale faces and shabby clothing, and some of them made the sign of the cross to express their gratitude when they saw the flag of the Red Cross, as is the custom for Catholic Christians.

Transportation from Vladivostok continued after that, and over a total of five voyages using the "Chikuzen Maru," "Taipei Maru," "Akashi Maru," and "Karafuto Maru," 375 orphans and 65 accompanying Polish adults were welcomed to Japan.

The orphans who landed in Tsuruga-port went by train to Tokyo with the cooperation of relevant organizations, including Tsuruga Town Office, Tsuruga Police Station, Army Transportation Department Tsuruga Branch Office, Tsuruga Customs Branch Office, and Japan National Railways Tsuruga Station and Maibara Station.

And were taken in at the "Fukuden-Kai" Nursery School in Shibuya Town, Toyotama County, Tokyo Prefecture (now Shibuya Ward, Tokyo).

The "Fukuden-Kai" was a Buddhist nursery school that helped the orphans out in their difficult situations, providing them with free accommodation.

As a nursery school, it was well-equipped, with a large playground, lush gardens and many trees on the premises.

The facility was also adjacent to the Japanese Red Cross Society's head office hospital, making it convenient for treating and caring for the orphans.

10. The second rescue mission to protect orphans left behind in various parts of Siberia

However, many orphans were still left behind in various parts of Siberia.

Ms. Anna Bielkiewicz of the rescue committee appealed to the Japanese Red Cross Society that there were many orphans waiting to be rescued in the Amur region, Transbaikal region, and Primorsky Krai, and appealed for a second rescue mission.

In response, the Japanese Red Cross Society decided to carry out another rescue mission.

The date for the withdrawal of Japanese troops from Siberia had already been decided, so rescue missions needed to be expedited, and so the second rescue mission was carried out in 1922 (Taisho 11).

388 orphans who were in the most urgent need were rescued. Two more were later added, bringing the total number of orphans rescued to 390.

Between August 5th and August 27th, 1922 (Taisho 11), the orphans were transported in three trips from Vladivostok to Tsuruga-Port on the transport ships "Akashi Maru" and "Taipei Maru," and then went by train to Osaka with the cooperation of the aforementioned related institutions and organizations.

The oldest orphan rescued in the second operation was 15 years old, and the youngest was 1 year old.

Just like in the first rescue operation, the orphans' clothes were shabby and many of them were shoeless, so when they arrived at their lodgings, they were given "Yukatas" with lots of sweets in the sleeves and shoes.

Their lodgings were the nurses' dormitory of Osaka Municipal Public Hospital (now Osaka Municipal Hospital), provided free of charge by the city of Osaka, a newly built two-story Western-style building. The building was spacious and the front yard was a playground, making it ideal for housing orphans.

Thus, 375 of the orphans rescued in the first trip were housed in Tokyo, and 390 of the orphans rescued in the second trip were housed in Osaka.

Due to various circumstances, the orphans spent the longest in Japan, about one year, until shipping to their home country of Poland was ready.

11. The people of Tokyo who welcomed the orphans

The 375 orphans taken in by the "Fukuden-Kai" in Tokyo included 205 boys and 170 girls, with the oldest being one 16-year-old boy and two girls. The youngest were two two-year-old girls.

First, all the orphans were given brand new clothes, underwear, socks, shoes, and hats.

This was because their appearance was in very poor condition due to their long life of wandering.

The day after the orphans arrived at the "Fukuden-Kai", people from various related organizations came to visit them, bringing toys and sweets.

Among them were the Geisha Girl from Yoshi-Cho, Nihonbashi, and it is said that the souvenirs of the "Tenugui" hand towels they brought with them were very useful to the children in their daily lives.

Also, the next day, the Geisha Girl from Nihonbashi Hama-Cho came to visit the children and were reportedly moved to tears when they saw the orphans' attendant, Ms. Busyska (28 years old), and the oldest child, a young girl named Kociczka (16 years old), taking good care of the younger children.

12. Let's write a good newspaper article

After hearing about this incident, Japanese newspaper reporters flocked to cover the orphans.

They pointed their cameras at them, took pictures, and asked them a variety of questions.

The children answered politely through an interpreter, but when asked, "Where are your moms and dads?" the younger ones tilted their heads and fell silent, while the older ones burst into tears.

The reporters looked disappointed and bowed their heads, saying, "We're sorry." Some reporters were moved to tears by the sight of the children's innocence and purity, and it is said that the reporters encouraged each other, saying, "Let's write a good article! A good article that will let the whole world know about these children."

And with the support of the newspaper articles that detailed the relief efforts, many Japanese people sent gifts and donations in droves.

Records show that donations included money for haircuts by barbers who styled the children's hair, money for clothing to be tailored by a clothing manufacturer, and money for treatment by dentists.

13. To restore the orphans' health

Many of the orphans who were taken in were physically weak due to malnutrition, and some suffered from skin diseases and whooping cough, due to the extreme conditions they faced in Siberia.

In response, Japanese doctors and nurses provided them with attentive care.

The orphans' daily routine was regular, except on days when they were touring the city or when recreational parties were held.

In the summer, they would wake up at 6AM (7AM in the winter). After washing, they all gathered in one room, where they would say their morning prayers and then have breakfast.

In the morning, they would read and study arithmetic under the guidance of their Polish companions.

The younger children would play with toys, have lunch at 1PM, and then read or study again. After dinner at 6PM, they would say their evening prayers again and go to bed at 8PM.

Their meals were prepared by Polish attendants, taking into consideration the children's nutritional needs and preferences, and donated snacks were distributed once a day.

Through this regular lifestyle, the children gradually regained their health.

Long after this episode, Professor Biesław Táis of the Polish National University of Special Education, who conducted an academic study of the orphan relief efforts carried out by Japan at the time, said the following:

"Memories of Japan played the role of mental care (psychotherapy) for the orphans. In other words, the memory of 'I am an orphan, but I was in Japan' was a symbol of their pride."

14. The firm convictions of the nurses who cared for the sick orphans

However, in May 1921, a typhoid epidemic broke out in Tokyo, and at its peak, 32 orphans were infected.

At that time, doctors and nurses stayed by the orphans' side, day and night, to care for them.

And the following words remain:

"When a child or a brother or sister falls ill, everyone wants to help them even at the cost of their own life. But these children have no parents or brothers or sisters. Someone else must take their place. In that case, I will take their place."

This was the firm conviction of the nurses who dedicated themselves to caring for them.

True to these words, thanks to their tireless nursing, all the children recovered in about two weeks.

However, one of the nurses, Fumi Matsuzawa (23 years old), contracted typhoid fever and died in the line of duty on July 11, 1921 (Taisho 10).

The death of the kind-hearted Matsuzawa was kept secret from the children, but it is recorded that when they found out about her death, they were deeply saddened and cried bitterly.

Long after the series of relief efforts had been completed, the only photograph of Matsuzawa taken at that time was discovered in the Polish National Library.

Matsuzawa's name, which is almost unknown in Japan, remains deeply in the hearts of the Polish people who know this historical fact.

15. Visit and speech by Empress Teimei

On April 6, 1921 (Taisho 10), Empress Teimei, wife of Emperor Taisho, visited the Japanese Red Cross Hospital adjacent to the "Fukuden-Kai".

Empress Teimei was deeply saddened by the plight of the orphans and had donated a large lot of sweets to them.

She called the children over and repeatedly stroked the hair of Gyenovefa Bogdanovich, a three-year-old girl at the time.

Gyenovefa's father was a Polish nobleman who had been captured by the Red Army in Siberia. Her mother, seeing this, wrote a suicide note on the spot and committed suicide.

The young Gyenovefa had been wandering around eating nuts for four days when she was taken in by the Relief Committee.

She had been hospitalized at the Japanese Red Cross Hospital due to poor health and had only been discharged a few days earlier.

When Empress Teimei heard about Gyenovefa's situation, she shed tears and said to her:

"Gyenovefa, you are not alone. You came here because your father and mother sacrificed themselves to protect you.

Then live your life to the fullest. Cherish your life and grow up healthy. That is the wish of your family who protected you and the hospital staff."

News of this visit was reported in Poland, and there are records that it moved many people's mind.

16. The orphans' desire to live in Japan

When a shipping route to Poland via America was eventually secured, the orphans one by one left Japan at Yokohama Port. The separation from Japan was very difficult, as many of the children cried and pleaded, "I want to stay in Japan, I want to live in Japan."

However, due to an agreement with Poland, this was not allowed.

On September 28, 1920 (Taisho 9), many people came to Yokohama Port to see the first group of orphans off, including Ms. Anna Bielkiewicz of the Relief Committee, people from the "Fukuden-Kai" and the Japanese Red Cross Headquarters Hospital, staff of the Polish Embassy, and the Polish Consul.

The children shed tears as they saddened to say goodbye, and when they boarded the Nippon Yusen Kaisha "Fushimi Maru," they shouted "Thank you" and "Goodbye" from the deck, and sang "Kimigayo" and the "Polish national anthem," which they had learned in Japan.

Incidentally, although "Kimigayo" was already treated as Japan's national anthem by a public notice in 1893 (Meiji 26), it was not until 1999 (Heisei 11) that it was officially designated as the national anthem.

Similarly, the "Polish National Anthem (Dabrowski's Mazurka)" also became established in Poland after the end of World War I in 1918 (Taisho 7), and was officially designated as the national anthem by the Polish government in 1926 (Showa 1).

The "Fushimi Maru" with the children on board headed for Seattle, USA. After that, the children passed through the USA and then England before returning to their home country of Poland.

The Polish government's Secretary of Health at the time expressed deep gratitude for Japan's "courageous action to rescue the vulnerable" of the orphans, saying, "The tears of farewell and gratitude shed by the children as they departed Yokohama are the best proof of how invaluable the rescue of the children was."

17. The people of Osaka give the orphans a warm welcome

Meanwhile, in Osaka, 390 orphans were living a regular life in the newly built Osaka Municipal Public Hospital nurses' dormitory in Tennoji Village, Higashinari County (present-day Asahi-Cho, Abeno-Ku, Osaka City), just like the orphans housed in Tokyo.

Doctors and nurses were sent from the Osaka Branch Hospital of the Japanese Red Cross Society, and the children, who had been malnourished and pale, gradually became healthier and more radiant.

Donations and financial contributions were sent to Osaka from all over the Japanese country. Empress Teimei also donated a large lot of sweets to the orphans in Osaka.

The children were also warmly welcomed in Osaka, and were entertained everywhere, including visits by girls' school students, screenings of what were then called moving pictures, church services, and tours of Osaka Castle.

The children had the most fun at Tennoji Zoo. Thanks to the director's kindness, the elephant was taken out of its cage, and many of the orphans, including Henryk Sadowski, were allowed to ride on its back. Of course, it was the first time for all of them to do so.

On their way back from the zoo, the children ran up to the director and thanked him, saying "Arigato" in the Japanese they had just learned. The director was overwhelmed by the sight of the young children speaking haltingly with big smiles on their faces, and burst into tears.

The director must have been moved to tears by the children's bravery, who had lost their families in Siberia and were now all alone, yet still smiled and thanked him.

18. Orphaned children are like family

There was also this record:

As the children were passing by a factory, a staff member from the Japanese Red Cross Society who was accompanying them was called out to by someone from the factory.

Wondering what it was all about, I followed him, and a man who seemed to be the owner of the factory came out and said, "It's a very small amount, but I'd like you to use this to buy some sandals for the children," and handed over ¥ 50 in cash.

Prices have changed since then, so it's difficult to know exactly how much this amount was, but for example, if converted into the price of pure gold, ¥ 50 in cash at that time was equivalent to the buying and selling price of 20 grams of pure gold, so if converted into the current pure gold trading price in the fall of 2024, it would be equivalent to about ¥ 200,000.

In addition, a young girl who came to visit the children with her parents suddenly took off her clothes and tried to give them to the children.

She had found out that the children had no change of clothes, so she took off not only her clothes, but also the ribbons and combs she had wrapped around her hair, brooches, belts, and even rings, and tried to give them all as gifts.

It is recorded that this was not a one-time event, but occurred multiple times.

In addition, two young girls who came to visit offered to help with the laundry. The Polish chaperones declined, but the girls insisted, "If the girls living in this dormitory are okay with doing the laundry, then surely We can help," and from that day onwards, they came at a set time every day until the day the orphans left Osaka, to help with the laundry.

This shows that the people of Osaka went beyond sympathy and welcomed the children as members of their family.

19. Farewell from Japan at Kobe Port Eventually, the day came for the children in Osaka to depart for their home country.

They were to leave Kobe Port and travel to their homeland Poland via London.

The first group left on August 25, 1922 (Taisho 11) on the "Katori Maru", and the second group left Kobe Port on September 6 of the same year on the "Atsuta Maru".

At this time, the Japanese Red Cross Society provided each child with a new set of clothes. As it was a long voyage and it would be very cold on the way, they also gave them wool vests.

Many people gathered at Umeda Station (JR Osaka Station) and Kobe Port to see the children off.

Here, as at Yokohama Port, the children reportedly cried for a while, saying, "I want to stay in Japan."

When boarding began, the children and their companions crowded the deck of the passenger ship and sang "Kimigayo" and the "Polish national anthem."

They shouted "Thank you" and "Goodbye" while waving the Red Cross flag and the national flags of both countries.

Records show that the Japanese people who were seeing them off also wished the children safety and waved their hands until the ship was out of sight.

20. Return to their dream homeland

The children left Kobe on the Japanese-prepared ships "Katori Maru" and "Atsuta Maru", and went to London via Singapore, Colombo, Port Said, Marseille, and Lisbon.

On board the ship, prayers were said and hymns were sung in the morning and evening.

On the "Atsuta Maru", the captain, Yuusaburo Kato, and all the crew were Japanese, but every night when the children fell asleep, Captain Kato would make his rounds in the bedrooms, drape blankets over the children's necks, and place his hand on their foreheads to check if they had a fever.

Henryk Sadowski testified that he still cannot forget the warmth of his hand.

After arriving in London, the orphans transferred to the British ship the “Baltanic” , and finally headed for their homeland, Poland.

Eventually, in a rainy November day in 1922 (Taisho 11), the orphans arrived at the port of Gdansk (Danzig) in their native Poland.

Henryk Sadowski, who was 11 years old at the time, describes what happened:

“It was a chilly day. We all went out on deck. We gazed at the red and white Polish flag fluttering in the quay.

The younger children were running around excitedly, but the older children just stood there in silence, crying.

Even though We were young at heart, We were overcome with emotion at the realization that this was the homeland we had dreamed of, and our bodies trembled.

The people and buildings of our homeland were blurred with tears and we couldn't see anything.”

21. The growth of the orphans and the second War that struck Poland

In March 1921 (Taisho 10), Poland won its War against the Soviet Union and achieved its long-cherished independence. It was around this time that the orphans returned to their homeland.

However, the orphans had no relatives and some children could not speak their native Polish well, so Anna Bielkiewicz, chairperson of the relief committee, placed many of them in the “Wejherowo Orphanage” on the outskirts of Gdansk on the Baltic Sea coast.

There, they learned Polish and continued to sing songs they had learned in Japan, with the motto “Don't forget to be grateful to Japan.”

However, in 1928 (Showa 3), the “Wejherowo Orphanage” was closed and the orphans who had been there were moved to a boarding house prepared for them in Warsaw.

After Japan's two rescue missions for Polish orphans were completed, Ms. Anna Bielkiewicz of the Relief Committee visited the Soviet Union's military mission in Beijing, People's Republic of China, and arranged for the Soviet children left in Czechoslovakia to return home via Poland.

As part of this exchange program, 117 Polish orphans in Vladivostok returned to Poland on the Trans-Siberian Railway.

The third rescue mission was the last one carried out by Ms. Anna Bielkiewicz of the Relief Committee to rescue Polish orphans.

As time passed, the orphans grew older and established an organization called the "Far East Youth Association". The first chairman was former orphan Jerzy Strzałkowski (aged 17).

Jerzy Strzałkowski was one of the Polish orphans who were able to return to their home country thanks to the second rescue mission carried out by Ms. Anna Bielkiewicz of the Relief Committee.

At first there were only a dozen or so members, but by the late 1930s the Far East Youth Association's membership had grown to over 640.

In addition to engaging in mutual aid and friendship activities, the members of the Far East Youth Association established an orphanage based on their own experiences.

They also interacted with the Japanese Embassy, deepening friendly relations with Japan.

At the same time, they reportedly saved a portion of their salary and dreamed of "traveling to Japan someday."

However, 17 years after the orphans' return home, War struck them again. In 1939 (Showa 14), Nazi German troops invaded Poland.

This was the beginning of World War II.

22. Playing Japanese songs for the Nazi German Army

While the Polish Army resisted the invasion of the Nazi German Army, the Soviet Union Army also invaded Poland two weeks later.

Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union had made a secret pact to divide Poland.

Poland could not defend itself, and its capital, Warsaw, fell.

The Polish government fled the country, and the orphans who had grown up had to witness the tragedy of a nation disappearing once again.

Meanwhile, Japanese embassy staff worked hard to protect an orphanage opened by the Far East Youth Association in Warsaw.

Whenever the Nazi German secret police raided the orphanage, Japanese embassy staff would rush over and say,

"We are looking after these children and we can guarantee their identities," and say, "Come on, everyone, let's play Japanese songs for the German people," leading the children to sing "Kimigayo" and other songs.

It is recorded that the Nazi German secret police had no say in singing the song of an allied country and retreated.

At this time, it was very helpful that former orphans from the Far East Youth Association, who had been teaching Japanese songs to the children at the orphanage on a daily basis, proved to be very helpful.

However, the Japanese Embassy in Warsaw was closed in 1941 (Showa 16).

23. Japan and Poland temporarily became enemies

During World War II, some of the grown-up orphans fought as soldiers to protect Poland, while others protected the children at the orphanage.

At the heart of all these were their desire to never let the children experience the suffering they had experienced in Siberia again.

And during the war, the Polish government in exile gave Japan a "Gift." During World War II,

Poland was on the side of the Allied Powers, which was against Nazi Germany, while Japan was on the side of the Axis Powers, which was allied with Nazi Germany, and so, although it was only nominally a temporary period of about six years, the two nations became enemies.

However, the Polish people had no ill will towards Japan, and the same was true in Japan, and Onodera Makoto, an army military attach stationed in Stockholm, Sweden, gave Polish intelligence officer Michal Rybikowski a Japanese passport and hid him in his military attach office to protect him from Nazi Germany.

In 1944 (Showa 19), at the order of the Swedish government, which had succumbed to pressure from Nazi Germany,

Rybikowski was forced to flee to the Polish government in exile in London.

24. To prevent Japan from suffering the same tragedy as We did

In Mid-February of the following year, 1945, Onodera, who was then military attach in Sweden, received a top-secret letter from the Polish government in exile.

The contents were shocking, containing detailed information about the summit meeting between the US, Britain and the Soviet Union that had taken place in Yalta on the Crimean Peninsula in early February of that year.

The information stated that "a secret agreement had been made with Japan at Yalta, under which the Soviet Union would enter the War against Japan three months after the surrender of Nazi Germany, and in return, the Japanese territories of Southern Sakhalin (Karafuto) and the Kuril Islands would be handed over to the Soviet Union."

If the Soviet Union had joined the War in violation of the Japan-Soviet Neutrality Pact in addition to the Allied forces, Japan's defeat would be decisive, and there would have been an imminent danger of losing its homeland, just like Poland.

Why did the Polish government in exile inform Onodera of this top-secret information that was supposed to be top secret from the Allied forces?

The message was, "This time, it is our turn, Poland, to save Japan."

"We hope that Japan, our friend, who once saved the Siberian orphans and protected Rybikovsky, will not suffer the same tragedy as We have. Please do something about it using this information."

Onodera immediately passed this top-secret information to Japan, but unfortunately it was suppressed by the higher-ups of the Japanese military and not put to use.

However, Japanese people should be aware of the historical fact that the Polish people went beyond friend and foe and shared top-secret information out of friendship and trust.

25. The orphans who wanted to say thank you in person

After 44 years of socialism under the influence of the Soviet Union after the Second World War, Poland achieved independence as a democratic nation in 1989 (Heisei 1).

While Poland was still under the influence of the Soviet Union, Jerzy Strzałkowski, who founded the Far East Youth Association, visited Japan again in 1983 (Showa 58) at the age of 76 to express his gratitude for the orphan rescue efforts, and described Japan as his "second homeland."

In the midst of this, the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake occurred on January 17, 1995 (Heisei 7), a major disaster that is still well remembered by Japanese people, and in the following year, 30 children who had lost their parents in the disaster were invited to Poland twice, for about three weeks each, free of charge.

Four former orphans also attended the invitation and offered warm words to the Japanese children.

This invitation project was organized with the desire to convey the warm feelings that We received from the Japanese people long ago to the Japanese children who are now suffering from the disaster.

In October 1995, eight former orphans were invited to the Japanese ambassador's residence in Warsaw. All of them were over 80 years old.

When the Japanese ambassador at the time, Hyodo Nagao, greeted them by saying, "Under International Law, the embassy and the ambassador's residence are small parts of Japanese territory," the former orphans were so deeply moved that they knelt down and broke down in tears, saying, "Ah, We have returned to Japan."

One of the former orphans then said the following: "It has been my lifelong dream to visit Japan once more while I am still alive. And I wanted to thank the Japanese people in person. But that will no longer be possible.

However, today I was invited to the ambassador's residence and heard that this land is a small part of Japanese territory.

If that is so, then if I can express my long-standing gratitude to the Japanese people here, I will have no regrets even after I die."

On that day, the former orphans vividly recounted their happy memories of Japan, and there are records that those who heard them were deeply moved, as if they were vividly witnessing the kind gazes and expressions of the Japanese people at that time.

26. Conversation between the Emperor and Empress of Japan and the former orphans

On July 12, 2002 (Heisei 14), a reception was held at the residence of the Japanese ambassador in Warsaw.

It was a return ceremony in response to the welcome extended by the then Emperor and Empress of Japan (now the Emperor Emeritus and Empress Emerita), who were on an official visit to Poland.

The Japanese ambassador's residence was attended by several hundred guests, including the Polish President Kwaśniewski and his wife, and the guests were greeted by a strange sight.

When Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress entered the great hall, before greeting the important guests, the Polish President and his wife, they walked straight up to three old people.

The three old people were former orphans who had been rescued from Siberia.

One of them, Mr. Wacław Danilevic (91 years old), was one of those who had been taken in by Osaka and enjoyed visiting Tennoji Zoo.

Also, Ms. Halina Nowicka (92 years old) was one of those who had met Empress Teimei at the Japanese Red Cross Headquarters Hospital in Tokyo.

And Ms. Antonina Lilo (86 years old) well remembered how she had been treated very fondly by the nurses in Tokyo while her head was wrapped in bandages due to a skin disease.

The Emperor and Empress asked the three disabled children to sit down, then bent over and took hold of their hands, speaking to them with a gentle voice.

"How have you been?"

They conversed carefully with the former orphans, cheek by cheek.

The former orphans were deeply moved, and each tried to express their gratitude to Japan, but they were overwhelmed with emotion and at a loss for words.

It is said that Antonina Lilo was particularly moved, and refused to let go of the Empress's hand.

Nevertheless, it is recorded that the three children spoke with deep emotion, saying "Thank you so much," on behalf of the orphans who had died, and the Emperor and Empress received them with a deeply moving look on their faces.

Following the unstoppable workings of time, these three former orphans also passed away and went to heaven within the next few years.

27. Poland once again invites children who suffered in the Japanese earthquake

On July 24, 2011, 30 junior and senior high school students from Iwate and Miyagi prefectures who were affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake that occurred on March 11 of that year and found themselves in difficult situations, such as losing their parents, and three accompanying teachers were invited to Poland and stayed there for about two weeks.

Of course, this invitation, like the previous invitation described in Chapter 25, was aimed at further developing relations between Poland and Japan, and the children were warmly welcomed.

The welcome program included Polish language classes, which were the first experience for all of them, interactions with local children, and short trips to various parts of Poland, allowing the children to spend a fun and valuable time.

Educational considerations were given to help the children overcome invisible difficulties such as national barriers and ethnic differences.

And it goes without saying that the Japanese children brought back the same heartwarming kindness that the Japanese showed to Polish orphans about a hundred years ago.

28. What Japanese people should to learn from this episode

Unfortunately, most Japanese people today do not have the knowledge, insight, or views on the details of the friendly relations between Japan and Poland that began with the episode of the orphans rescued from Siberia.

However, Japanese people can learn something very important from this episode.

It is the universal principle that “goodwill begets goodwill, and trust begets trust,” which realizes better public order and morals.

In addition, just like the principle mentioned above, it is of great significance for us to know that in Poland, this episode from about 100 years ago has been cherished and passed down to the present day by the descendants of the former orphans.

As of 2024 (Reiwa 6), there are many countries and regions around the world that are friendly to Japan and have a relationship of mutual help based on goodwill and trust, but as I wrote in Chapter 1 of this article, Poland is a country that stands out, especially in Europe, where many of its citizens have pro-Japanese feelings.

The people of Poland, the majority of whom are Roman Catholic Christians, cherish and pass on this episode from about a hundred years ago, and they are well aware that when someone falls into a very difficult situation, they must never spare any effort to help that person, even at the expense of their own self-sacrifice.

For this reason, it is very important for Japan and Poland to continue to cherish and preserve the “precious asset” of mutual goodwill and trust.

We are constantly being asked what We should do to accurately know the historical episodes that have taken place since 1920 (Taisho 9) and up to the present day in 2024 (Reiwa 6), and to develop the friendly relations between Japan and Poland in a sustainable and positive direction.

In particular, it is very important for not only Japanese and Polish people, but everyone around the world, to think carefully about what actions they should take in the future in order to learn important things from events that happened in the past and make use of them in order to obtain a more desirable future.

At the same time, however, We can learn from this historical episode that if We constantly check that our actions are not falling into self-righteousness – in other words, that We are convinced that only We are right – and choose the path that will bring us the most desirable results, the “precious assets” of goodwill and trust will naturally follow.

In other words, as the editor of this article, I believe that no one can carve out a desirable future without making the effort to properly understand the history of the past.

29. Main reference books, historical materials, and literature

- Yamada Kuninori, "Polish Orphans: 765 Lives Connected by the 'Country of Cherry Blossoms'": Gendaishokan
- Web version of "Rekishi Kaido" magazine [March 2014 issue]: PHP Institute
- Teshima Yusuke, et al., "Thank you for your kindness, everyone in Japan": Kodansha
- Other related historical materials and literature available to the public on the Internet

30. Notes (regarding the omission of drawings and photographs)

In this article, in order to avoid various copyright issues, I have deliberately omitted the use of drawings and photographs related to the content of the article.

For this simple reason, due to my convenience as the editor, I must say "sorry" for the inconvenience to readers who read the article only in text, but I hope you will understand.

Furthermore, if you use the Internet, as I do as the editor, to research the old records and related literature written about here, you can learn about the books and literature that have been accumulated from the past to the present in cyberspace, commonly known as the Internet society, as well as the opinions and insights of many people.

Therefore, I strongly encourage readers to make use of their familiar information devices such as smartphones and PCs as much as possible to view various historical materials and literature on this episode on the Internet, including drawings and photographs related to the content of the article.

(Here is The End of this article)

31. "Appendix 1": What is "War"?

The following "Appendix 1", "Appendix 2" and "Appendix 3" are complete digressions based on the "personal opinion" of the editor of this article, but here I will try to put into words as much as possible how we should understand "War".

Of course, humans have a hundred different ways of thinking, so I do not intend to forcefully narrow down the answer to one, but I will try to describe my "opinion" in the hope that it will be of some help to readers.

First of all, as you can see by reading the "Old Testament" as a "historical document," We humans have not been able to escape from the "stupidity" of endlessly repeating the "violent use of force" called "War" for at least the past four thousand years.

Unfortunately, even at the time of editing this article, the flames of War in Ukraine in Eastern Europe and Israel and Palestine in the Middle East are not going out, but are tending to expand.

Now I must define the meaning of the word "War," so we will start with what the editors think "War" is.

In order to protect the interests and safety of various nations and regions in human society, or groups with certain social systems, the people who make up these groups need to interact with each other in the form of "diplomacy."

Of course, in "diplomacy," not everything can be resolved through peaceful "exchange of opinions," "dialogue," or "treaties and other business agreements."

One of the ultimate means of unilaterally resolving issues related to "diplomacy" is the "use of violent force" to protect the interests and safety of a nation, region, or certain group, and this is the definition of "War." In other words, "Defence for using force" is also included in "War."

However, here I will not question whether "War" itself is right or wrong.

The reason for this is that in order to preserve the interests and safety of one social group, it is necessary to completely deny the interests and safety of other social groups, and in some cases to completely eliminate the hostile social group from the face of the earth, and this is a "vicious trait" that only human beings possess, resorting to the final diplomatic measure of "violent use of force," or "War."

Also, any "War" requires a reason to justify it, that is, "social justice," but this can never become "absolute justice."

All humans can possess is the "relative justice" that is unique to the social group that wages "War."

The reason for this is that humans cannot be "permanently indispensable." As "history" has proven, it is a reasonable answer to conclude that humans without "flaws" have never existed in the past or will exist in the future.

For example, if there were no social group A, whose logic is the exact opposite of the logic advocated by social group B, there would be no room for War in the first place.

However, when we look at real human society, nations, regions, and certain social groups that do not have the means or ability to end diplomatic negotiations peacefully have no choice but to start a war against social groups that are hostile to them, in order to realize their own relative justice.

There are many people in the world who believe that war should not exist, but unfortunately, to completely deny the reality of "Wars" that are currently occurring would mean not acknowledging the history of mankind itself, and is unrealistic.

Therefore, a more correct way of thinking would be to view the existence of wars that have been recorded in historical records and those that are currently occurring all over the world as the lowest, worst diplomatic measure.

This is where the need for the "Rules of War", known as "International Law in War", comes in. Without this rule, hostile nations, regions, and social groups would have to be completely wiped out and eliminated from the face of the earth, without a single soul.

However, no matter what, if we were to completely deny the right to live peacefully to all people, from newborn babies to the elderly, and approve the so-called "annihilation of our enemies," it would be a denial of the right to survival of all humanity, and all human beings would end up killing each other.

For this reason, all human beings cannot positively approve of the "folly" of using the act of "War" as a "means of human extermination."

This is where the "Rules of War" known as "International Law of War" become necessary. Without these rules, hostile nations, regions, and social groups would have to be completely wiped out and eliminated from the face of the earth, without leaving a single person behind.

However, no matter what, if we completely deny the right of people, from newborn infants to the elderly, to live peacefully and approve the so-called "annihilation of our enemies," this would be a denial of the right to life for all of humanity, and all humans would end up killing each other.

Therefore, I cannot positively acknowledge the "foolishness" of all human beings to use the act of "War" as "A means of exterminating humanity."

32. "Appendix 2": The Importance of "International Law of War"

Next, let us look at what "International Law of War" is, which must be strictly observed even in "War-Time". As mentioned above, there is "International Law of War" that was established to avoid the foolish tragedy of the complete annihilation of nations, regions, and social groups.

Currently, there are two main "International Laws of War."

The Hague Convention on Land Warfare contains "provisions on the definition of belligerents, declaration of war, definition of combatants and non-combatants, treatment of prisoners of war and wounded persons, tactics that must not be used, surrender and armistice, etc."

In addition, the Geneva Convention contains "provisions to reduce damage caused by acts of war as much as possible by protecting the wounded, sick, shipwrecked, and prisoners of war, medical and religious personnel who provide relief to these persons, and civilians."

I will not go into the details of each treaty here, but as stated in Chapter 31, all of these treaties require that nations, regions, and social groups "use force in a fair and just manner to the minimum extent necessary" and "ensure the maximum safety of people not involved in the use of violent force" in accordance with the "International Laws of War."

In other words, to actually carry out the worst and most extreme diplomatic measure known as "War," it is essential to use force to the minimum extent necessary and to exercise the utmost consideration for humanity, in accordance with the proper rules of the "International Laws of War"

"The use of violent force" that ignores these treaties and related laws and regulations can no longer be called a "legitimate and formal War," which is one of the final means of "diplomacy," but is nothing more than a "War Crime" committed by those who engage in the "use of violent force." Naturally, this also includes "Terrorism."

Therefore, regardless of the form of their acts, all those who commit "War Crimes" must be tried in a fair and impartial "trial" and receive appropriate punishment.

For example, in Germany, even now, "War Criminals" who once belonged to or cooperated with the "Nazi party" are being arrested and detained, and are being tried in court.

Naturally, there is no "statute of limitations" for "war crimes," so no matter how elderly a "war criminal" is, he or she cannot escape this trial.

33. "Appendix 3": The Responsibility of Japanese People Who Have Abandoned "War"

I write here is merely my "idealism," as the editor of this article, but in terms of the theme for which this article was compiled, "What we should learn from the relief efforts for Polish orphans in Siberia,"

If the Russian Empire, the Revolutionary Government of the Soviet Union (Red Army), and the nations and armies that sent troops to Siberia strictly adhere to "International Law in War" and do not participate in "War Crimes," the great misfortune suffered by the Polish refugees in Siberia and their orphans will never happen again.

In particular, Japan has renounced "War" as a "diplomatic means of conflict resolution" in accordance with the provisions of the Japanese Constitution, but it should send out stronger protests and criticisms through official diplomatic channels against the "Wars" and "War Crimes" that are currently occurring all over the world that violate "International Law in War,"

And at the same time, it should act without delay to provide relief to as many victims of war as possible, including those who have unfortunately become war refugees.

In other words, Japanese people, who have voluntarily renounced "War," continue to be required to study the "International Laws of War" more accurately and proactively, and to provide as much necessary humanitarian support and assistance as possible to the people of countries and regions where conflict is occurring.

As the editor of this article, I would never claim that my opinion is the "absolute correct answer," but shouldn't We think that this is what "Japanese-style peace diplomacy" should be, imposed on all Japanese people, and at the same time, that we have a responsibility to proactively and boldly put this diplomatic means into practice.

(Here is The End of All)