

Memory of My Youth

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In 1941, when I was 14 years old and had graduated from senior primary school, I went to Manchuria (northeastern China) as a pioneer worker in accordance with the government policy. I lived in a desolate dormitory with little or no remuneration, and my meals consisted of only one soup and one bowl of rice with some vegetables added occasionally as a treat. Looking back, I was accustomed to a life in which inconvenience was not considered inconvenience and I was able to endure it, perhaps because I was a pure-hearted boy from a local farming village in a mountainous area. I entered military service in May 1945, but the army already did not have even one rifle for each man. After the war ended, we were disarmed by the Soviet army and became prisoners of war. The freight train carrying us left Mukden (i.e. today's Shenyang City) and moved for about a month, arriving at a detention camp in Karaganda, Republic of Kazakhstan, around mid-October of the same year. I was engaged in coal mining work. At that time, coal was called "black diamond," and coal mine labor was treated rather favorably. Compared to working on the ground in bitter cold and heat, it was cooler in summer and warmer in winter working underground and I could say that I was blessed to work in the coal mines. When I talked about it with former internees, they became even envious of me. Still, some of my colleagues and friends died in cave-in accidents and those who were physically weak were transferred to other light-work camps. But I don't know whether they survived or died there. I was the youngest among them and working in the mines and living in the inconvenient and comfortless camps did not cause me too much pain. There were also sports festivals and performances, so the atmosphere there was not so gloomy or desperate. I thought that good health was a prerequisite for survival wherever you were in the world. In October 1949, I returned home from Nakhodka by way of Maizuru after four years of captivity.

◆Siberian internment...In Manchuria which was invaded and occupied by the Soviet Union during World War II, Japanese POWs and civilians who surrendered and were disarmed after the war ended were transferred mainly to Siberia and Mongolia and forced to work in isolation. About 55,000 people died there.