

**JAPAN'S WARTIME USE OF COLONIAL LABOR: TAIWAN AND  
KOREA (1937-1945)**

**by**

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**(ABSTRACT)**

The wartime Japanese empire used various types of foreign labor in order to fuel its war machine. In many of its areas of wartime control, Japan carried out what can be described as a policy of outright slave labor. However, in its formal colonies (Korea and Taiwan), the Japanese wartime empire mobilized its colonial labor within the “same” legal framework that was applied to the Japanese, and it mobilized the colonial subjects with an explicitly assimilationist slogan of serving the empire as self-sacrificing subjects.

This paper attempts to present an overall, if fragmentary, picture of Japan’s wartime utilization of colonial labor in Korea and Taiwan. It argues that despite Japan’s use of assimilationist rhetoric, the nature of Japan’s labor mobilization was very coercive and brutal. As a result, there was a substantial level of resistance from the colonial population, which intensified toward the war’s end; and Japan’s mobilization of colonial labor met constant frustration throughout the war.

The paper first discusses how empire-wide legal and administrative frameworks for mobilization were developed and applied for labor mobilization within Korea and Taiwan. As a part of its empire-wide mobilization, Japan mobilized colonial labor outside the colonies. The paper discusses this dimension with a particular focus on Japan’s use of Korean labor in Japan.

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## Introduction

The Japanese wartime empire mobilized various types of foreign labor in its areas of military control, colonies and Japan proper. This paper attempts to present a broad, if fragmentary, picture of Japan's wartime utilization of colonial labor of its formal empire, Taiwan and Korea. Whereas the Japanese military mostly employed outright slave labor in its occupied areas in China and Southeast Asia, the mobilization of Taiwanese and Korean labor was carried out in the same legal framework that was employed within Japan. Therefore, the Taiwanese and Koreans were supposedly fulfilling their duties as the empire's subjects on the same basis as the Japanese, and the Taiwanese and Koreans were mobilized with an explicitly assimilationist slogan of serving the empire as its "industrial warriors (*sangyo senshi*)". In fact, to this day, the Japanese government has refused to compensate former Korean and Taiwanese conscript laborers by arguing that the wartime policy of mobilization and conscription was "legal" since it was backed up by legislation which was applied "equally" to both the Japanese and Japan's colonial subjects.<sup>1</sup> However, as this paper attempts to suggest, the assimilationist rhetoric was never substantiated. The reality of mobilization defies such an argument about the "legality" of conscription. Many colonial subjects in the Japanese empire were forced to work as unwilling semi-slave laborers instead of selfless and voluntary subjects of the empire. This was particularly true for the Koreans even though Taiwan's case may present a rather different picture. As a result, Japan's

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<sup>1</sup> Mizuno Naoki, "Chosenjin e no hoshō: mo hitotsu no shiten," *Asahi shinbun* (February 25, 1992), 7; Mizuno, a Kyoto University historian of modern Korea, refutes the Japanese government's justification by pointing out that the "legislation" came about after Japan's forceful annexation of Korea in 1910 and questioning the "equality" of legal status between the Japanese and Koreans in the Japanese empire.

mobilization effort was rarely effective and was often frustrated by resistance from colonial workers. Quite arguably, well before the war's end, Japan's mobilization effort was gradually breaking down.

This paper first discusses larger empire-wide "legal" and administrative frameworks of mobilization and then Japan's mobilization effort within the colonies. As a part of its empire-wide mobilization, Japan "transferred out (*ishutsu*)" colonial labor from Korea and Taiwan to be utilized in Japan proper and other parts of Asia. In this regard, Japan's forceful wartime relocation of Koreans to Japan proper will be examined in great detail.

### **Japan's Labor Mobilization in Taiwan and Korea (1938-1945)**

#### **Policy Development**

In response to the escalation of the war in China, the Japanese government enacted the National Mobilization Law (*kokka sodoin ho*) in April 1938 to put the Japanese economy and society on a wartime footing. The law aimed at enabling the government to conscript workers, regulate employment and labor management, intervene in labor disputes, create a data base of professional skills of the population, and facilitate training of skilled workers.<sup>2</sup> The law acted as a legal foundation for subsequent labor-related ordinances and regulations. Based on this law, the entire population was to be subjected to the government's call for "total mobilization (*sodoin*).” The National Mobilization Law was extended to both Taiwan

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<sup>2</sup> Jerome B. Cohen, *Japan's Economy in War and Reconstruction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1949).

and Korea in May 1938. The subsequent mobilization of labor in the colonies was based on the enactment of the National Mobilization Law.<sup>3</sup>

Though the same law was applied to Taiwan and Korea, due to their differently assigned roles in the empire, labor mobilization policies in the two colonies may have taken slightly different courses. Due to its geographic position, Korea had been assigned a role that was closely connected to Japan's continental expansion after 1931. Since the early 1930's, Korea had been undergoing rapid industrialization on a semi-war footing with a focus on strategic industries. In arguing for a much closer linkage and economic coordination among Japan, Korea and Manchuria, Governor General Minami Jiro used an analogy of human anatomy in 1936: Japan (the torso), Korea (the arm) and Manchuria (the fist). After the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937, the process of developing military-related industries in Korea was accelerated. The Governor General's slogan in 1938 was to transform Korea into an "advance military supply base" (*zenshin heitan kichi*) for Japan's aggressive expansion on the continent.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, from an early stage, Korea's labor mobilization policy was closely linked with Japan's military expansion on the continent. Before the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War, the central objective of labor policy in Korea was to facilitate the development of an industrial complex in the northern provinces with surplus labor from the southern provinces. After 1937, quite certainly after 1941, the ever-increasing

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<sup>3</sup> Jo Teruhiko, *Nihon teikokushugi ka no taiwan* (Tokyo: Ochanomizu shobo, 1972), 145; Kobayashi Hideo, "*Daito-a kyoeiken*" *no keisei to hokai* (Tokyo: Ochanomizu shobo, 1970), 275; 361.

<sup>4</sup> Sang-Chul Suh, *Growth and Structural Changes in the Korean Economy: 1910-1940* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978), 12-3; Carter J. Eckert, "Total War, Industrialization and Social Change in Late Colonial Korea," Peter Duus, Ramon Myers and Mark Peattie eds., *The Japanese Wartime Empire, 1931-1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 7-13.



demand for labor from Japan proper added further strain on Korea which had to mobilize the population for its own industrial projects and food production as well.<sup>5</sup>

Taiwan, on the other hand, had not been assigned a significant role in Japan's continental expansion until 1941. Finally in October 1941, a concrete economic and industrial policy was formulated so that Taiwan would be able to serve as a "base for the southern advance (*nanshin chukei kichi*)" in the coming Japanese expansion into Southeast Asia.<sup>6</sup> By 1941, the number of industrial workers in Taiwan had doubled the figure for the year 1931, reaching 137,000.<sup>7</sup> Yet, in contrast to Korea, Taiwan did not have any significant labor policy prior to 1938. Taiwan in the 1930's, even after the 1930's for that matter, was an agricultural society, and its workers were at best semi-industrial. The lack of significant industrial work force did not necessitate labor policies and regulations until the late 1930's.<sup>8</sup> In general, due to its strategic position, geographic proximity to Japan and larger population, Korea had to meet much more intense and larger demand for labor than Taiwan, and, as far as available evidence can tell, there was a substantial level of resistance to Japan's mobilization effort in Korea while the Taiwanese, on the whole, seemed relatively more cooperative.

### Stages of Mobilization

Based on the National Mobilization Law, various measures and regulations necessary for labor mobilization were implemented in the colonies. Initially, the Japanese government and colonial governments were somewhat hesitant about resorting to outright labor

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<sup>5</sup> *Chosen ni okeru nihonjin no katsudo ni kansuru chosa* (Tokyo: Kohokusha [reprint], 1977), 70.

<sup>6</sup> Kobayashi, 281-3; 381-4.

<sup>7</sup> Taiwan sotokufu, *Taiwan tochi gaiyo* (Taipei, 1945), 73.

<sup>8</sup> *Taiwan tochi gaiyo*, 73-4; Kobayashi, 292-4.

conscription in the colonies. However, toward the war's end, more forceful measures were implemented to extract labor from the colonies. Eventually, Koreans and Taiwanese were mobilized as conscript workers.

In Korea, the labor conscription ordinance (*choyo rei*) was issued in 1939 but not invoked immediately. As discussed in some detail later, until 1944, recruitment of Korean labor both for Japan and within Korea was conducted through private recruitment under government supervision [the “private recruitment (*boshu*)” method] and recruitment through government mediation [the “official mediation (*kan assen*)” method] without resorting to labor conscription by the government.<sup>9</sup> The Government General was initially reluctant to use the labor conscription ordinance on a full scale largely because of its concern over the potential for resistance from the Koreans. Yet, after 1941, the labor conscription ordinance began to be applied in a piecemeal fashion. In 1941, the ordinance was partially used to procure labor for important military projects. In 1943, it was applied to students who were not conscripted for military service. In February 1944, 153,580 workers at major mines and factories in Korea were conscripted and fixed to their current positions [the so-called “on-the-spot conscription (*genin choyo*)”]. The labor conscription ordinance was fully applied to the general population after August 1944.<sup>10</sup>

In Taiwan, a labor conscription ordinance was also enacted in 1939. In the same year, the ordinance was used for mobilizing workers for the construction of a naval station at

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<sup>9</sup> Maeda Hajime, *Tokushu romusha no romu kanri* (Tokyo: Sankaido, 1943), 37-43; 52-3; 71.

<sup>10</sup> *Chosen ni okeru nihonjin no katsudo ni kansuru chosa*, 67-9; Chosen sotokufu, *Dai 86 kai teikoku gikai setsumei shiryō* (1944) in Kondo Jinichi ed., *Taiheiyo senka no chosen*, Vol.5 (Tokyo: Chosenshi hensankai, 1961), 173.

Kaohsiung, yet the ordinance was fully invoked only in 1944 for conscripting workers for the mining, manufacturing, construction, and transportation industries.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to these mobilization measures, many decrees concerning various aspects of labor control were implemented in the colonies as well as in Japan. In both Taiwan and Korea, the Regulation on the Use of School Graduates (1938), the Regulations on Hiring (1939), and the Regulations on the Employment of the Youth (1940) were introduced essentially for allocating and fixing skilled workers to important sectors. However, these skilled workers continued to have a very high turnover. Additional decrees were in line. In 1941, the Anti-Job Switching Regulation was introduced, and furthermore, the Labor Control Law was introduced to control employment and firing of skilled workers. The latter law made even job-switching within the military industries illegal. In order to put a brake on the spiraling wage level, the Wage Control Law was introduced in August 1939. In October, a freeze on wages at the level of September 18 was put into effect. Despite these measures, the turnover in the colonies apparently remained high.<sup>12</sup> The shortage of skilled labor in the colonies was a chronic problem. The Ordinance Regarding Training of Skilled Workers in Factories (1939) obliged large factories to train their workers. Though the colonies tried to procure skilled labor on their own, the competition for skilled labor and high turnover persisted. The “training” tended to focus more on indoctrination aspects than actual skill-training. Thus the colonies continued to rely on the “import” of skilled labor from Japan.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>*Taiwan tochi gaiyo*, 75.

<sup>12</sup> Kobayashi, 294-5; 454-5; 475-7; Taiwan sotokufu, *Taiwan jijyo* (Taipei: 1943), 215-6; 218; 392; *Dai 86 kai teikoku gikai setsumei shiryō*, 168.

<sup>13</sup> Kobayashi, 276-8; 295-6; *Taiwan tochi gaiyo*, 74.

### Scale of Mobilization

It is almost impossible, even in a narrowly numerical sense, to determine the true scale of Japan's wartime mobilization of colonial labor. An accurate estimate is very difficult because of, first, the inadequacy and inaccuracy of the existing statistical data and, second, multiple "categories" in the colonial labor mobilization. In the case of Korea, from available statistical figures, it appears that a total of approximately 3,679,400 were mobilized within Korea between 1942 and 1944 (see Table 1).<sup>14</sup> Between 1939 and 1944, 634,080

**[Table 1]** Koreans Mobilized within Korea (1942-1944)

	1942	1943	1944
By "Official Mediation"	49,030	58,924	76,617
By Conscription	90	646	19,655
Mobilization within Provinces	333,976	685,733	2,453,724
Total	383,096	745,308	2,550,996

Source: *Chosen ni okeru nihonjin no katsudo ni kansuru chosa* (1977), p.72.

**[Table 2]** Koreans "Transferred Out (*ishutsu*)" to Japan (1939-1944)

	Mobilization Target	Actual Figure
1939	85,000	49,812
1940	88,800	55,979
1941	81,000	63,866
1942	120,000	111,823
1943	150,000	124,286
1944	290,000	228,320

Source: *Dai 86 kai teikoku gikai setsumei shiryō* (1944).

Koreans were sent to Japan as workers (see Table 2)<sup>15</sup>. In addition, based on the government labor mobilization plan, between 1939 and 1943, 16,113 were sent to Sakhalin, and 5,931

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>15</sup> *Dai 86 kai teikoku gikai setsumei shiryō*, 167-8.

were sent to Japan's possessions in the South Pacific (*nanyo*).<sup>16</sup> The labor mobilization was carried out within the framework of the government's labor mobilization plan, but outside of the government's mobilization plan, many Koreans were conscripted as military personnel (*gunzoku* or *gun yoin*) to engage in construction work and logistical labor for the military. According to one estimate, between 1939 and 1945, approximately 145,000 Koreans were mobilized by the military.<sup>17</sup> One existing figure shows that between 1941 and 1944, a total of 87,350 Koreans were used in Japan, Korea, Manchuria, China, and the southern front as military personnel (see Table 3).<sup>18</sup> One scholar has estimated that between 1939 and 1945, a total of 3,190,000 Koreans were mobilized within Korea and that from 810,000 to 940,000

**[Table 3]** Koreans Mobilized by the Military (1941-1944)

	1941	1942	1943	1944
Japan	5,396	4,171	4,691	18,820
Korea	1,085	1,813	1,976	10,060
Manchuria	284	293	390	1,617
China	13	50	16	260
The Southern Front	9,249	16,159	5,242	5,765
Total	16,027	22,486	12,315	36,522

Source: *Dai 86 kai teikoku gikai setsumei shiryō* (1944).

Koreans were "transferred out (*ishutsu*)" from Korea. A total number of Koreans mobilized would be, according to his calculation, between 4,000,000 and 4,130,000 though his estimate excludes military conscripts, "comfort women", patriotic labor service units, and

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>17</sup> Osaka jinken rekishi shiryōkan ed., *Chosen shinryaku to kyōsei renko* (Osaka: Kaiho shuppansha), 85-6.

<sup>18</sup> *Dai 86 kai teikoku gikai setsumei shiryō*, 170.

mobilization of students.<sup>19</sup> Another estimate has suggested a total figure including military conscripts and “comfort women” to be somewhere between 6 to 8 million.<sup>20</sup>

Taiwan’s statistics are not available, but it appears that by 1944, from 270,000 to 300,000 Taiwanese were mobilized daily on the island. In 1944, 71,909 out of 1,755,448 workers in the mining, manufacturing , and transportation were conscripted. With regard to workers “transferred out” from Taiwan, the Taiwan Special Labor Service Unit (*taiwan tokusetsu romu hoko dan*) was formed in 1941 to send Taiwanese as military laborers to the southern front. As of 1945, there were 92,748 Taiwanese in the southern front as military laborers and 8,419 at military factories in Japan.<sup>21</sup>

#### Ideological Mobilization and Resistance

As Wang-yao Chou has pointed out, Japan’s wartime imperialization (*kominka*) movement in the colonies was closely linked with its mobilization effort of colonial resources and manpower.<sup>22</sup> In Korea, under the slogan of “Korea-Japan Unity (*nai-sen ittai*),” the Chosen League for Concerted National Power (*kokumin soryoku chosen renmei*), which was a Korean copy of the Imperial Rule Assistance Association (*taisei yokusankai*) in Japan, was instituted to spearhead the patriotic mass mobilization in the colony.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Un-no Fukuju, “Chosen no romu doin,” *Kindai nihon to shokuminchi* Vol.5 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1992), 118-22.

<sup>20</sup> Chosenjin kyosei renko shinso shosadan ed., *Chosenjin kyosei renko kyosei rodo no kiroku* (Tokyo: Gendaishi shippankai, 1974), 86-92.

<sup>21</sup> *Taiwan tochi gaiyo*, 74-6;215-7.

<sup>22</sup> Wan-yao Chou, “The *Kominka* Movement in Taiwan and Korea: Comparisons and Interpretations,” in *the Japanese Wartime Empire*, 41-5.

In Taiwan, too, its version of the mass mobilization organ, the Imperial Subjects Service Association (*komin hoko kai*) was established in 1941. Under its wing, the Industrial Service Association (*sangyo hokokai*) was created to incorporate colonial workers into the *kominka* movement. The Industrial Service Association was later taken over by the Taiwan Patriotic Labor Service Unit (*taiwan gokoku kinro dan*). In the last year of the war, 50,000 Taiwanese lived together in barracks and worked as members of the labor service unit.<sup>24</sup>

The Japanese attempt to control and mobilize colonial labor faced constant frustrations. How effective these colonial versions of patriotic mass movements were for more efficient labor mobilization is far from clear. For example, did the rhetoric of “imperial work ethic (*kokoku kinrokan*)”<sup>25</sup> resonate well among Korean and Taiwanese conscript workers? What is clear is that the colonial governments offered little material incentives and relied heavily on ideology and forceful measures for mobilizing colonial labor.

By 1944, the mobilization effort reached a point in which it had to rely on forceful conscription of the colonial population. However, the full invocation of the conscription ordinance apparently generated hostile reaction from the colonial population. Though there is no documentation for Taiwan, fragmentary episodes of popular reaction in Korea were recorded. As pointed out, the Government General of Korea was initially hesitant about full-scale use of the conscription ordinance for its concern over potential Korean resistance.

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<sup>23</sup> *Chosen ni okeru nihonjin no katsudo ni kansuru chosa*, 118-23; Carter J Eckert, *Offspring of Empire: The Koch'ang Kims and the Colonial Origins of Korean Capitalism, 1876-1945* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1991), 238; 244.

<sup>24</sup> *Taiwan tochi gaiyo*, 75-7.

<sup>25</sup> *Chosen sotokufu, Dai 85 kai teikoku gikai setsumei shiryō* (1944) in Kondo Jinichi ed., *Taiheiyo senka shumatsuki chosen no chisei* (Tokyo: Chosenshi hensankai, 1961), 158-9.

When the Government General finally invoked the ordinance fully in September 1944, it faced strong resistance from the population, as it had feared. During the first ten days of October alone, the Government General police reported 12,000 violations of the conscription ordinance.<sup>26</sup> The 1944 Government General report to the Imperial Diet commented on the deteriorating morale and public order: in rural areas, anti-government sentiment ran high, and there were “countless cases” of incidents involving draft-dodging, escapes en route during conscription, and threats and assaults against police officers and labor officials. In South Ch’ungch’ong, a police officer who was responsible for labor procurement was murdered. In North Kyongsang, the local police arrested 27 men for planning to dodge labor conscription by hiding in the mountains with foods and weapons. Some resorted to more passive measures for dodging conscription by constantly changing their addresses; seeking employment in occupations exempt from labor conscription; feigning sickness; and even intentionally maiming their limbs.<sup>27</sup> The colonial government tried to respond by ideological campaigns to “instill the patriotic spirit through labor service (*kinro ni yoru jyunkoku seishin no chyuniyu*)” and by use of punitive measures at the same time. Initially, the colonial government had expected voluntary response to conscription without needing to resort to punitive measures. As it turned out, it became almost impossible to procure workers without an explicit threat of punishment. Between 1944 and 1945, only 79% of the target for labor conscription to Japan was achieved.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *Chosenjin kyosei renko kyosei rodo no kiroku*, 86.

<sup>27</sup> *Dai 85 kai teikokugikai setsume shiryō*, 54; 87-9.

<sup>28</sup> *Dai 85 kai teikokugikai setusmei shiryō*, 87-9; *Chosen ni okeru nihonjin no katsudo ni kansuru chosa*, 74-5.



The resistance was perhaps indicative of general decline in Japan's colonial control in Korea, but apparently, the resistance was specifically against conscription to Japan. In 1944, the colonial government outlined measures for combating the difficulty in procuring workers to Japan: extensive use of the conscription ordinance; economic compensation for the family of conscript worker; permission for the conscript worker to bring his family; clear indication of the location of conscription and contract period; clear indication that there will be no extension of contract; and severe punishment for draft-dodging. However, it is doubtful that "incentive" measures in this outline were really carried out before the war's end.<sup>29</sup>

### **Use of Colonial Labor outside the Colonies (1937-1945)**

#### **Taiwanese Military Laborers (*gunpu*)**

As pointed out, the Japanese military conscripted and utilized colonial labor in various combat theaters and its occupied territories. These colonial workers who were hired or conscripted by the military were generally called *gunpu* (military laborers). *Gunpu* normally engaged in logistical labor and military construction, and their status in the military hierarchy was deemed very low, though they often risked their lives to the same extent as combatants by working near or in combat zones. In the Japanese army, the status of personnel attached to the military (*gunzoku*), such as interpreters or POW prison guards, was said to be

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 72-5.

below that of army dogs and horses. The status of *gunpu* was even below that of *gunzoku*.<sup>30</sup> In Korea's case, between 1941 and 1944, 39,338 were mobilized by the army and navy to work in China, Manchuria, and the southern front (see Table 3). However, the figure is not strictly for *gunpu* and may include Koreans with *gunzoku* status.

Taiwanese too were mobilized as *gunpu* on the Asian continent and in the Pacific region. The mobilization of Taiwanese *gunpu* started right after the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War. When the Taiwan Army was dispatched to central China, it brought 850 Taiwanese as *gunpu* for logistical labor. The Taiwan Army apparently conscripted them in the Tainan region in a very forceful and indiscriminate fashion in which even men in their late 40's were conscripted, and this created a small panic in the region. Local residents tried to resist the conscription by draft-dodging, escaping, bribing local conscript officials, feigning sickness, and protesting.<sup>31</sup>

In response to the resistance, the Army switched from the indiscriminate conscription to a volunteer system and carried out propaganda campaigns. Newspapers were filled with reports of loyal Taiwanese *gunpu* in China.<sup>32</sup> *Jihen to taiwanjin*, a book written by a Japanese war correspondent, is filled with "bidan (heroic tales)"<sup>33</sup> of Taiwanese *gunpu* in the Sino-Japanese War. The *bidan* typically portrays half-fictional bravery, loyalty and self-sacrifice of

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<sup>30</sup> Kondo Masami, *Soryokusen to taiwan: nihon shokuminchi hokai no kenkyu*, (Tokyo: Katanamizu shobo, 1996), 352.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 353-5.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 352-3.

<sup>33</sup> I refer to Louise Young's discussion of the Japanese war fever in the wake of the Manchurian Incident for the translation of the Japanese word *bidan* as "heroic tales"; see Louise Young, *Japan's Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1996), 106-13.

Taiwanese *gunpu* in China. The book tells one of the best-known *bidan* of a Taiwanese father and son who both had volunteered as *gunpu*. As the father dies of illness on the battle front, he admonishes his son to work twice as hard in order to keep rendering the same level of loyal service to the empire for his dying father.<sup>34</sup> Even a propaganda song called “Honorable *Gunpu*” (*Homare No Gunpu*) was created to be matched up with its female version, “Wife of *Gunpu*” (*Gunpu No Tsuma*).<sup>35</sup> While there were only 103 volunteers in September, the number of applicants jumped to 1,953 in the next month. There were even 86 volunteers with *kessho* (pleas written with applicants’ own blood) between September and December.<sup>36</sup> To what extent the government propaganda was instrumental in the Taiwanese reaction is not entirely clear; yet the relatively cooperative Taiwanese response to Japan’s call for mobilization in contrast to the Korean resistance needs to be recognized.

After Japan initiated the policy of *nanshin* (southward advance), the demand for Taiwanese military laborers intensified. Various expeditionary forces of the Imperial Army in Southeast Asia made requests for Taiwanese *gunpu* after 1941. Taiwan’s 1942 national mobilization plan projected to mobilize 1,077,400 Taiwanese, out of which 26,800 were to be mobilized outside the island. In response to the demand, the Government General recruited and organized Taiwanese *gunpu* under the Taiwan Special Patriotic Labor Service Unit (*Taiwan tokusetsu romu hokodan*) to be dispatched mainly to Southeast Asia for logistical labor, military construction, and production of food crops for the military. From 1941 to 1942, at least six of such special labor service units were dispatched from Taiwan. The first

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<sup>34</sup> Takeuchi Kyoshi, *Jihen to taiwanjin*, (Tokyo: Nichiman shinko bunka kyokai, 1940), 69-71.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 91-2.

<sup>36</sup> Kondo, 353-5; Takeuchi, 66.

unit was dispatched to Malaya and French Indochina in October 1941. The second, third, and fourth units were all dispatched to the Philippines in 1942. The fifth unit was sent to Malaya, and the sixth to Rabaul. In this manner, a total of 6,065 Taiwanese *gunpu* were dispatched in 1941 and 1942 alone. These *gunpu* sustained a high death rate comparable to that of combatants.<sup>37</sup> Though it is not clear how many Taiwanese *gunpu* were dispatched before the war's end, in 1945 there were at least 92,748 Taiwanese working for the military in Southeast Asia and the Pacific region (5,870 were conscripted).<sup>38</sup>

### Forceful Relocation (*Kyosei Renko*) of Korean Workers to Japan

#### Policy Development

The forceful relocation of Korean workers was an important part of Japan's gigantic labor mobilization effort in the empire. Prior to the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War, the Japanese government's policy was to prevent Koreans from emigrating to Japan and direct the flow of Korean emigration toward northern Korea and Manchuria for fear of exacerbating already bad social and economic situations within Japan. In 1928, the Government General of Korea applied a policy of de facto restriction of Korean emigration to Japan. In 1934, the Okada Cabinet made a formal cabinet decision to restrict Korean emigration.<sup>39</sup> However,

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<sup>37</sup> Kondo, 370-1; 385-6; *Taiwan jijyo*, 216-7.

<sup>38</sup> *Taiwan tochi gaiyo*, 75.

<sup>39</sup> Maeda, 17-8; *Chosenjin kyosei renko kyosei rodo no kiroku*, 57-8.

after 1939, the policy of restricting entry of Koreans was gradually reversed, and in 1942, the cabinet formally reversed the 1934 restriction on emigration.<sup>40</sup>

The forceful relocation (*kyosei renko*) of Koreans for labor purposes was planned and carried out according to the Labor Mobilization Plan (*romu doin keikaku*) which was made annually by the Cabinet Planning Board. The relocation as a government policy first started in July 1939 when the cabinet approved the Year 1939 Outline for Labor Mobilization Plan which planned to “transfer out (*ishutsu*)” 85,000 Koreans to Japan for that year.<sup>41</sup> As mentioned already, there were different methods or procedures for mobilizing colonial labor. The method used first was the “recruitment (*boshu*)” method which was put into practice in 1939. It was, in short, recruitment by private companies under government supervision. Firms were to follow guidelines made by the Home Ministry and Welfare Ministry regarding recruitment and transportation of workers. The Welfare Ministry and the Government General of Korea licensed employers mainly in the mining and construction industries and designated provinces and villages for recruitment.<sup>42</sup> The “recruitment” was supposed to be voluntary employment opportunities for Koreans. However, there is a claim that even during the private “recruitment” period, there were cases in which Korean villagers were kidnapped and forcefully brought to Japan.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Naimusho keihokyoku, *Shakai undo no jyokyo* (1942) in Park Kyong-sik ed., *Zainichi chosenjin kankei shiryō shusei*, Vol.4 (Tokyo: Sanichi shobo, 1975), 759-63.

<sup>41</sup> Un-no, 104.

<sup>42</sup> Un-no, 105-7; *Chosen shinryaku to kyosei renko*, 84-5.

<sup>43</sup> *Chosenjin kyosei renko kyosei rodo no kiroku*, 143-4.

After the outbreak of the Pacific War, there was an ever-increasing need for labor, and with the approval of the Policy on Use of Korean Workers (*hantojin romusha katsuyo ni kansuru hosaku*) by the Tojo Cabinet in 1942, the so-called “official mediation (*kan assen*)” method was introduced. The “official mediation” method differed from the private “recruitment” method by its more direct government involvement in the process. In this method, officially designated companies made their requests for workers to the Welfare Ministry. The requests were transmitted to the Government General of Korea which allocated the desired number of workers to municipalities. The semi-official organ called the Korea Labor Association (*chosen romu kyokai*) was chiefly responsible for procurement and transportation of workers in Korea in the “official mediation” method. Municipalities were obliged to work closely with the association and essentially expected to meet quotas assigned by the central colonial government.<sup>44</sup> As mentioned already, the outright conscription (*choyo*) of workers started only in 1944, yet the real difference between the “official mediation” method and conscription was perhaps only technical and semantic. The two methods were same in their forceful nature, and apparently all three methods were used simultaneously even after the full scale conscription started. In the “official mediation” method, the government “mediated” contracts between workers and companies through its administrative mechanism in the colony. The conscription was basically an administrative measure whereby Koreans were legally placed under the command of the government and then allocated to companies and contractors.<sup>45</sup> In the case of conscription, a penalty for violation was explicitly stipulated:

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 76-80; Un-no, 105-7.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 108-11.

confinement for less than a year or a fine of less than 1000 yen.<sup>46</sup> It is apparent that in both the “official mediation” method and conscription, local officials and police were involved in procurement and that they used their civil authority to send Korean villagers forcefully to Japan.

The number of Koreans to be brought into Japan was annually determined by the Labor Mobilization Plan, yet normally the annual target was never fulfilled. Between 1939 and 1944, a total of 634,086 were brought to Japan (see Table 2). In terms of geographical destinations of the Koreans, the majority perhaps were sent to coal and other mines in Hokkaido and Kyushu. The rest were scattered all over Japan. Outside Hokkaido and Kyushu, the “best-known” location for Korean forced labor today would be Matsushiro in Nagano prefecture where in October 1944, the construction of underground imperial headquarters was carried out secretly. A 13 kilometer-long underground tunnel was dug in order to house the imperial palace, government facilities, and military and communication facilities in the event of a final battle on the Japanese mainland. Here under the supervision of the Imperial Army, the Nishimatsu and Kajima contracting companies used approximately 7,000 Koreans. It is not clear whether all of these Koreans were forcefully imported from Korea or contracted in Japan. The Koreans were forced to work under horrendous and extremely dangerous conditions, and the rushed construction caused many accidents. There were approximately 100 Korean deaths at the construction site. Furthermore, there has

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<sup>46</sup> Kitakawa Kenzo, *Kokumin sodoin no jidai* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1989), 49-51.

been an allegation that from 40 to 100 Koreans were murdered for maintenance of secrecy.<sup>47</sup>

As Jerome Cohen has pointed out, though “Koreans brought in constituted only a small percentage of the male civilian labor, they filled a particular need for able-bodied males in coal mining and construction”.<sup>48</sup> One labor manager at a Hokkaido mine spoke of Korean workers’ “merit”: “though the Koreans are inferior to the Japanese in terms of diligence, they have a merit of not minding working under extremely hard, dirty and unpleasant conditions.”<sup>49</sup> The wartime coal mining industry constantly felt an acute labor shortage, as male miners were being conscripted for military service. However, the military conscription alone may not explain the wartime labor shortage. Due to its harsh working conditions and exploitative labor management, the mining industry had been generally shunned by workers. Miners were given a very low social status, and the industry traditionally sought miners among former tenants and, in some cases, Korean immigrants and *burakumin* (outcast people). Even during the war years, Japanese workers preferred to work at munitions factories rather than in mines if they could choose. In a sense, it can be said that the mining industry lost out to other wartime industries in recruiting necessary labor.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, after the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War, the industry made repeated appeals to the government for importation of Koreans and deregulation of use of female miners to

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<sup>47</sup> Park Kyong-sik, *Tennosei kokka to zainichi chosenshin* (Tokyo: Shakai hyoronsha, 1976), 136-147; Ohigata Etso, “Matsushiro daihonei mondai,” *Rekishi hyoron* 460, (August, 1988), 65-70; see also Gavan McCormack, *The Emptiness of Japanese Affluence* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1996), 253-5.

<sup>48</sup> Cohen, 326.

<sup>49</sup> Maeda, 22.

<sup>50</sup> Yamada Shoji, “Chosenshin kyoseirodo no rekishiteki zentei: chikuhō tanden o omona jirei to shite,” *Zainichi chosenshinshi kenkyū* 17, (September 1987), 23-5; 39-40.



[Table 4] Foreign Workers in Japanese Coal Mines (1939-1945)

	Japanese	Temps	Koreans	POWs
1939	264,000		22,000	
1940	293,000		45,000	
1941	271,000	8,000	60,000	
1942	260,000	13,000	102,000	
1943	242,000	22,000	124,000	4,000
1944	244,000		135,000	15,000
1945	270,000	220,000		

Source: Nihon tanko rodo kumiai ed., *Tanro jyunenshi*, Chart 3 (p. 24).

mitigate its acute labor shortage.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, the majority of Koreans forcefully relocated were absorbed by the coal mining industry. According to a figure from 1944, 50% of Korean conscripts were sent to coal mines; 21% to construction; 9% to the metal mining industry; and 20% worked in factories and other places.<sup>52</sup> In another figure, 60% of Korean conscripts were sent to coal mines between 1940 and 1942.<sup>53</sup> Among labor managers in the coal mining industry, it was thought best to keep the ratio between Japanese miners and Korean miners at 7:3 for security and productivity reasons. However, by 1944, Korean workers came to constitute 50% of the entire work force in the industry (see Table 4).<sup>54</sup>

Furthermore, even the introduction of Koreans could not mitigate the severe labor shortage in the coal mining industry. The shortage was such that industry lobbied for introduction of Chinese labor as well, and after some hesitation, the Tojo Cabinet decided

<sup>51</sup> Nihon keizai kenkyujo, *Sekitan kokka toseishi* (Tokyo: 1958), 167.

<sup>52</sup> *Dai 86 kai teikoku gikai setsumei shiryō*, 169.

<sup>53</sup> Nanajyunenshi hensan iinkai, *Hokkaido tanko kisen kabushiki gaisha nanajyunenshi* (Hokkaido, 1958), 174.

<sup>54</sup> Maeda, 3; *Sekitan kokka toseishi*, 396; Nihon tanko rodo kumiai ed., *Tanro jyunenshi* (Tokyo: Rodo shumposha, 1963), 49.

upon introduction of Chinese labor in 1942. Between 1943 and 1945, 38,935 Chinese civilians and POWs captured in China were brought to Japan to work mainly in mines and at construction sites. In the coal industry, there were 9,201 Chinese in 1945.<sup>55</sup>

### Management of Korean Labor

Korean workers would be typically shipped off from Pusan to Shimonoseki and then transported to their destinations by train. In the case of the mining and steel industries, there was apparently a designated company called the East Asia Travel Company (*Toa ryokosha*)<sup>56</sup> which carried out shipping of Koreans from Pusan to Japan.<sup>57</sup> The 1942 cabinet policy outline for the use of Korean workers claimed that one of the basic objectives for bringing Koreans into Japan was to train them to be “excellent workers of the emperor”. And they were eventually to be “returned (*kangen*)” to Korea in order to reinforce Korea’s development as Japan’s military advance base.<sup>58</sup> According to the Home Ministry and Welfare Ministry’s Guidelines for Training and Management of Imported Workers (1942), companies were obliged to give Korean workers a 6-month training program involving regimental, skill, physical, and language training and the so-called “training for imperial

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<sup>55</sup> NHK shuzaihan ed., *Maboroshi no gaimusho hokokusho: chugokujin kyosei renko no kiroku*, (Tokyo: NHK shuppan, 1994), 67-73; *Hokkaido tanko kisen kabushiki kaisha nanajyunenshi*, 203-5; *Sekitan kokka toseishi*, 435 and 622.

<sup>56</sup> *Toa ryokosha* was the wartime reorganization of the JTB (“Japan Tourist Bureau”); on *Toa ryokosha*’s role in Japanese expansionism in Manchuria, see Young, 262.

<sup>57</sup> *Sekitan kokka toseishi*, 418.

<sup>58</sup> Park Kyong-sik, *Zainichi chosenjin kankei shiryo shusei*, Vol.5, 24.

subjects (*komin kunren*)”.<sup>59</sup> To what degree the outline was followed is far from clear. The factory of *Nihon seitestu* (the Japan Steel Company) in Muroran, Hokkaido brought in 3,000 Koreans as “trainees” between 1942 and 1944. There a military-style training program was carried out by former military officers. However, one third of the “trainees” escaped from the factory. Though the ostensible purpose of the training program was to allow Koreans to learn skills, one former “trainee” at the factory later recalled that all he could remember about the “training” was carrying sands.<sup>60</sup> In the later stages of the war, as discussed below, largely due to the forced nature of labor, the overall productivity of Korean workers continued to deteriorate. In order to cope with this, the *Kyowakai*, the semi-official control organ of Koreans in Japan, formulated a training program in order to increase productivity and prevent the escape of Korean workers. The *Kyowakai*’s training manual prescribed a detailed training program and suggestions on food, recreational facilities, and physical training. It instructed employers to implement language training, regimental training and imperial indoctrination.<sup>61</sup>

Maeda Hajime, who was the chief labor manager at *Hokutan* (the Hokkaido Coal Mining and Steamship Company) during the wartime period and later became a director of the Japan Federation of Employers’ Association (*Nikkeiren*) in the postwar years, published a handbook called *Management of Special Laborers* in 1943. In this book, Maeda urged managers and labor managers of mines to accept the wartime reality of their reliance on Korean labor. Since this was inevitable, Maeda argued, they should try to understand certain

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<sup>59</sup> Koseisho and Naimusho, “*Inyuromusha kunren oyobi toriatsukai yoko*,”(1942) in Park Kyong-sik ed., *Zainichi chosenjin kankei shiryo shusei*, Vol.4, 1260-66.

<sup>60</sup> *Chosenjin kyosei renko kyosei rodo no kiroku*, 305-7.

<sup>61</sup> *Zainichi chosenjin kankei shiryo shusei*, Vol.4, 719-28.

traits of Korean workers to maximize their potential.<sup>62</sup> Maeda argued that vigorous training would bring out potential of Korean workers, and he outlined a detailed training program for this purpose. His training program was not so different from the *Kyowakai* recommendation, and the focus was on indoctrination based on the assimilationist imperial ideology. In Maeda's training program, the very first thing which Koreans had to learn was how to recite the "Oaths of Imperial Subjects" properly. Korean workers were to go through the "training for imperial subjects (*komin kunren*)," learning about such themes as "the Emperor, the Great Japanese Empire, loyalty and patriotism, camaraderie, simple life, work ethic, responsibility" and so on. Maeda warned: "considering the Korean character, it goes without saying that it will be very challenging to turn them into good imperial subjects." And yet, he argued that sincere and hard training could still transform Korean workers into loyal subjects of the empire.<sup>63</sup> According to an internal report by the Japan Mining Association which surveyed labor management policies for Korean labor at mines all over Japan, the training and management measures recommended by Maeda appeared to be implemented at most mines.<sup>64</sup> However, it is rather doubtful that much of Maeda's training and management manual reflected wartime realities. Considering the wartime immediate need just to produce coals, in all likelihood, training at most mines was largely limited to pragmatic aspects of mining operation, and Koreans were thrown into pits without adequate work training.<sup>65</sup> And as discussed later, it is doubtful that the ideological indoctrination could have made much difference in encouraging Koreans to be loyal and self-sacrificing workers of the empire.

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<sup>62</sup> Maeda Hajime, *Tokushu romusha no romu kanri* (1943).

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 65-123.

<sup>64</sup> Nihon kozan kyokai ed., *Hantojin romusha ni kansuru chosa hokoku* (Tokyo: Nihon kozan kyokai, 1940).

<sup>65</sup> *Chosenjin kyosei renko kyosei rodo no kiroku*, 162-7.

Korean workers were forced to endure horrible working conditions (especially at mines and construction sites), toiling for between 10 and 11 hours, in some cases as long as 16 hours a day. Their wages were roughly a half of what Japanese miners and construction workers received to start with, but oftentimes, foremen and contractors would subtract food and equipment costs out of their wages. Thus, by the end of the day, Koreans often found themselves receiving nothing or even being in debt.<sup>66</sup> Foods were very poor; yet furthermore, contractors and foremen often embezzled food rations for Koreans and fed them seaweed and bean grounds.<sup>67</sup> In fact, food was perhaps one of the most immediate sources of their discontent. They were also subjected to constant beating and occasional lynching by foremen. One Korean survivor from a construction project in Hokkaido recollected that one day he counted how many times he was beaten by his foremen: 72 times.<sup>68</sup>

Work in mines by nature involved many physical dangers and health hazards, and in addition, Korean workers suffered constant malnutrition and sickness. This probably compounded the risk of accidents for Korean workers.<sup>69</sup> There is no accurate data on how many Koreans brought to Japan died or were killed. In the Home Ministry report of 1940, 42 deaths out of 38,171 were recorded for that year.<sup>70</sup> According to one scholar's estimate, the total number of deaths among these Koreans was 2,300.<sup>71</sup> Other historians have much higher

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 168-82.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 286.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 222-3.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 183-5.

<sup>70</sup> Naimusho keihokyoku, *Shakai undo no jyokyo* (1940), 1273, in Park Kyong-sik ed., *Zainichi chosenshin kankei shiryo shusei*, Vol.4.

<sup>71</sup> *Chosen shinryaku to kyosei renko*, 116.

figures for the estimated number of deaths: 60,000-64,000.<sup>72</sup> If the largest estimate is acceptable, the death rate of Koreans brought to Japan would be between 4.2 and 7%.

When we examine the exploitation of Korean workers in the mining and construction industries, it is perhaps important to note that these industries historically had had very inhumane and exploitative forms of labor management practices. It is known that the Meiji government used convict labor extensively for development of mines and railroads in Hokkaido. After the convict labor was abolished, the so-called “jail house system (*kangoku beya*)” emerged in the late Meiji period to meet labor demands in the mining and construction industries in Hokkaido. This was a labor contracting system in which workers from the mainland were tricked, threatened, or even kidnapped by labor contractors and then forced to work as semi-slave workers. Once a worker found himself in the “jail house system”, it was extremely difficult to get out. The “jail house” system was also known by another name: the “octopus room (*tako beya*)”.<sup>73</sup> In Kyushu too, there was a similar traditional system called “*naya seido*” (the origin of the *naya* system could be traced back to Mitsubishi’s Takashima mine in Nagasaki). These labor contracting and management systems were characterized by their inhumane and exploitative features such as confinement of workers into segregated living quarters, “squeezing” of wages, lynching of escapees, and hazardous and horrendous working conditions.<sup>74</sup> It is not clear to what extent these labor practices were in use when Koreans were brought in during the war. At least at *zaibatsu*-

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<sup>72</sup> Park Kyong-sik, *Tennosei kokka to zainichi chosenjin*, 136; Kitagawa, 54.

<sup>73</sup> Both terms imply the nature of this particular labor system. The first one is quite obvious: it refers to the prison-like nature and conditions of the system. The second term can be linked to the octopus trap, and therefore it refers to the trap-like nature of the system which was, once trapped, extremely hard to get out of.

<sup>74</sup> Ueno Hideo ed., *Kindai minshu no kiroku 2: kofu* (Tokyo: Shin jinbutsu oraisha, 1971), 571-617.

affiliated mines, these traditional labor contract systems were abolished and replaced by more direct labor management systems around the turn of century. In the case of Mitsubishi's Takashima mine, a journalistic exposé of exploitation of miners at the mine in 1886 led to a minor national political debate involving well-known political activists such as Ueki Emori and Inukai Tsuyoshi. The indictment of the Takashima mine's labor practice and its infamous *naya* system by journalists and political activists put a certain level of pressure on Mitsubishi. In the aftermath of a series of strikes by miners at Takashima in 1897, Mitsubishi finally decided to abolish the *naya* system.<sup>75</sup> Yet it is highly likely that these systems were continued to be used among smaller mines and construction companies, and even at large-scale companies, some features of these traditional systems were probably still surviving. The crucial point here is that Koreans were thrown almost exclusively into these particularly hard and exploitative industrial sectors.

When the program of importing Korean labor started, the basic understanding was probably that Koreans were to be eventually returned after a period of time. This was perhaps crucial from the perspective of the Government General of Korea which needed workers for its own industrial mobilization. As the wartime labor shortage became much more acute in Japan, such a tacit understanding had to be circumvented. As Cohen has pointed out, Korean workers as well as Chinese and other foreign workers were brought in with 2-year contracts; yet they were often "advised" or forced to renew their contracts after the expiration of contract.<sup>76</sup> In 1941 when the expiration of contracts of Koreans brought in during 1939 was

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<sup>75</sup> Mitsubishi kogyo semento kaisha takashima tankoshi hensan iinkai ed., *Takashima tankoshi*, (Tokyo: Mitsubishi kogyo semento kaisha, 1989), 129-71.

<sup>76</sup> Cohen, 326.

expected, the Welfare Ministry and *Kyowakai* spearheaded a formation of “settlement inducement units” in order to encourage Korean workers to renew their contracts.<sup>77</sup> The wartime Coal Control Association (*Sekitan toseikai*) adopted an all-out and industry-wide policy to encourage renewal of contracts in 1942. For example, at *Hokutan*, “all possible measures” including bonuses, gifts, admonishment by managers, and PR campaigns were taken to make Koreans renew their contracts. As a result, the company managed to make 96% of Koreans to renew their contracts.<sup>78</sup> In 1944, the government took administrative measures for contract renewal. In February, the Tojo Cabinet issued a directive to allow Koreans who had worked more than 2 years to invite their families. This was obviously an attempt to encourage Korean workers to work in Japan for longer periods of time.<sup>79</sup> In the same year, furthermore, the Welfare, Home, and War ministries decided to enforce one-year extension of contracts of Korean workers brought in 1942 through “official mediation”.<sup>80</sup>

### Mentality of Exploitation

It is difficult to examine the mentality of those who exploited Koreans. Both the government and companies glossed over the reality of semi-slave labor with their paternalistic and assimilationist rhetoric. A local newspaper in Hokkaido (October 6, 1939) heralded the advent of “4,000 Korean Industrial Soldiers (*hanto rodo senshi*)” to work in mines. A comment allegedly made by one of the Koreans was quoted: “We will work hard. Some of us may not be fluent in Japanese, but I believe we can overcome the language

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<sup>77</sup> *Sekitan kokka toseishi*, 415.

<sup>78</sup> *Hokkaido tanko kisen kabushiki gaisha nanajyunenshi*, 203.

<sup>79</sup> Park Kyong-sik, *Zainichi chosenjin kankei shiryō shusei*, Vol.5, 19.

<sup>80</sup> *Chosenjin kyosei renko kyosei rodo no kiroku*, 82.



barrier. We will work as hard as conscripted soldiers.”<sup>81</sup> A “petition” form for contract renewal at one mine included the following sentences: “We too are loyal imperial subjects. We believe that continuing our service at our current workplace is the way to fulfill our loyal duty as nationals of the leading nation of Asia, Japan.”<sup>82</sup> Koreans at this mine supposedly signed this document to work in dark pits for another two years.

Many government directives and policy outlines emphasized that Koreans should be treated equally with Japanese workers and harmonious relations between them should be encouraged.<sup>83</sup> The *Kyowakai*’s training manual recommended: “Since Koreans are extremely sensitive about the issue of discrimination, do not use ‘Koreans’ and ‘Japanese’ in a contrasting and discriminatory manner. Abstain from derogatory references to Koreans such as *senjin* or *chosen*. Rather call them *naichi no kata* (people from the mainland), *chosen no kata* (people from Korea), or *hanto doho* (comrades from the Korean Peninsula).”<sup>84</sup> In the light of the slave-like conditions under which Koreans were forced to work, it is hard to accept that officials and managers made any effort to substantiate their rhetoric of “harmony” and “equality”. It was obvious that they viewed Koreans merely as an expendable work force. A Government General report suggested that Korean workers could be as productive as Japanese workers in physical labor; yet it also argued, “the shortcomings of Korean workers are that due to their cultural character, they are irresponsible, lazy and transient.” A Home

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 94-5.

<sup>82</sup> Maeda, 129-30.

<sup>83</sup> Maeda, 39; 54-61.

<sup>84</sup> Park Kyong-sik, *Zainichi chosenjin kankei shiryō shusei*, Vol.5, 718.

Ministry report asserted, “Korean workers are very wild, criminal, unclean , easily agitated, ethnically prejudiced...”<sup>85</sup>

The paternalistic rhetoric of treating Korean workers as the empire’s “industrial soldiers (*sangyo senshi*)” and “Korean comrades (*hanto doho*)” was not substantiated at least from the perspective of Korean workers. Recollection of one Korean former conscript worker who worked at the construction of an airfield in Kunashiri, Hokkaido rather dramatically illustrates this point. In 1943, he and his Korean co-workers beat up their foremen and escaped. However, they were eventually caught, and he was interrogated by the military police. He allegedly confronted his interrogator by saying, “our foreman are eating white rice and feeding leftovers to dogs. They are even making rice wine. You must go and investigate this. On the other hand, we Koreans are starving and haven’t had a bath. We were brought here up north to serve the Great East Asian War as industrial soldiers. We came here believing that we were no different than conscript soldiers. But what is this treatment?”<sup>86</sup>

### Resistance and Escapes

Korean workers in Japan were placed under strict supervision. The main organ for supervision was the *Kyowakai* which was established by the Home Ministry for surveillance and control of Koreans in Japan. One of its main tasks in the wartime period was to prevent escapes of Korean workers. The *Kyowakai* worked closely with the police and employers in preventing escapes. Koreans brought to Japan were obliged to carry the *Kyowakai* ID; and

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<sup>85</sup> *Dai 86 kai teikoku gikai setsumei shiryō*, 181; Naimusho, *Shakai undo no jyōkyō* (1940), 853-4.

<sup>86</sup> *Chosenjin kyōsei renko kyōsei rodō no kiroku*, 394-99.

[Table 5] Disputes and Strikes by Koreans (1939-June1944)

	Disputes/ Strikes	Participants
1939	32	4,140
1940	338	23,383
1941	492	33,526
1942	789	49,523
1943	981	59,190
1944	303	15,230

Sources: Naimusho keihokyoku, *Shakai undo no jyokyo* (1939), (1940), (1941), (1942) and (1943); *Tokko geppo* (November, 1944); Naimusho keihokyoku hoanka, "Chian jyokyo ni tsuite," (January 14, 1944).

employers were prohibited from hiring Koreans without the ID. If caught, Koreans were to be sent back to their original work places.<sup>87</sup> Typically, these apprehended Koreans faced lynching and torture both by the police and their foremen.

Despite these supervision and punitive measures, Korean workers resisted by strikes, rioting and escapes. Especially in later years of the war, the number of both strikes and escapes increased significantly. The number of strikes and disputes between Japanese and Koreans was annually recorded by the Home Ministry (see Table 5). As for reasons for disputes, one dominant pattern was Korean protest over specific working conditions such as food and wages. The other common pattern was hostility between Koreans and Japanese foremen and workers that turned into brawls.<sup>88</sup> Despite the risk of punishment, escapes were also common (see Table 6). In the mining industry, the average escape rate was

<sup>87</sup> Park Kyong-sik, *Zainichi chosenjin kankei shiryō shusei*, Vol.4, 29-31; Park, *Tennosei kokka to zainichi chosenjin*, 148-224.

<sup>88</sup> Naimusho, *Tokko geppo* (April 1940) in *Zainichi chosenjin kankei shiryō shusei*, Vol.4, 539-41; Shihosho keijikyoku, "Romu doin ni motozuku naichi ijyu chosenjin rodosha no doko ni kansuru chosa" (1941) in *Zainichi chosenjin kankei shiryō shusei*, Vol.4, 1233-4; 1236; 1244-5.

[Table 6] Koreans Escaped (1939-1943)

1939	8,042
1940	17,911
1941	43,631
1942	89,840 (10,395 captured)
1943	109,185 (11,759 captured)

Sources: Naimusho keihokyoku, *Shakai undo no jyokyo* (1939), (1940), (1941), and (1942); Naimsho keihokyoku hoanka, "Chian jyokyo ni tsuite," (January 1944).

approximately 35%.<sup>89</sup> Apparently, the majority of Koreans who escaped were not recovered. In 1942, only 10,395 out of 89,840 were captured.<sup>90</sup> But where did these thousands of Koreans go? And how was it that they were able to evade capture in a small police state like wartime Japan? One speculative answer would be that there was a fairly large labor black market, particularly in day labor, which absorbed these Korean escapees. Cohen has noted that despite the government control on wages and employment, workers continued to switch jobs for higher pay; and the real wage rate continued to increase.<sup>91</sup>

The picture of Koreans protesting and escaping en masse in wartime Japan appears rather incredible, but it can be placed in the general context of the gradual breakdown of government control over workers toward the end of the war. Andrew Gordon has drawn a general picture of the breakdown of labor control in heavy industry. Despite the wartime rhetoric of "industrial patriotic service (*sanpo*)," the morale at workplaces deteriorated toward the war's end. There were increasing cases of absenteeism, intentional sloppy work,

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<sup>89</sup> Maeda, 124.

<sup>90</sup> Naimusho keihokyoku, *Shakai undo no jyokyo* (1942), 889-90 in *Zainichi chosenjin kankei shiryō shusei*, Vol.4.

<sup>91</sup> Cohen, 330-40

illegal job-switching, group violence, and labor disputes.<sup>92</sup> Gordon points out that Japanese conscript workers made a reluctant work force which constantly generated problems through group violence, absenteeism and so on. He also describes a violent conflict at the Uraga Dockyard between local workers and conscript workers from northern Japan.<sup>93</sup> This seems to parallel the conflicts between Koreans and Japanese workers recorded in the Home Ministry report.

### Declining Productivity

As suggested, the fact that Korean workers were forcefully brought to Japan to work under such substandard conditions made them, far from loyal “industrial soldiers” of the empire, a reluctant work force. Furthermore, there was a familiar wartime pattern of labor dilution. The shortage of male skilled labor due to military conscription was being covered by unskilled women, students, conscript workers, and Koreans. This naturally created a drop in overall productivity. As Cohen has pointed out, the wartime labor shortage was perhaps more “qualitative” than “quantitative”.<sup>94</sup> This trend of dilution was acutely felt in the mining industry. The shortage of skilled miners was such that between 1944 and 1945, military conscription of miners had to be suspended.<sup>95</sup> The Coal Control Association estimated the relative productivity of Japanese and foreign workers: Japanese (100%); Korean (70%);

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<sup>92</sup> Andrew Gordon, *The Evolution of Labor Relations in Japan: Heavy Industry, 1853-1955* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1985), 310-326.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 318.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 273-4; Cohen, 298-304.

<sup>95</sup> *Sekitan kokka toseishi*, 432-3.

POWs/ Chinese (60%); and Japanese temps (50%).<sup>96</sup> Accuracy of such estimate notwithstanding, the substitution of male skilled miners with unskilled alien workers and women led to a significant drop in productivity.<sup>97</sup> As pointed out already, Korean workers came to constitute 50% of the entire labor force in the industry in the later years of the war; and whether correlated to this or not, toward the war's end, productivity continued to decline, and the accident rate visibly increased (see Table 7).

**[Table 7] Productivity and Accidents in Coal Mines (1940-1944)**

	Productivity	Accident Rate
1940	100 %	100%
1941	98.7	103.6
1942	96.2	106.8
1943	98.6	106.3
1944	87.6	137.8

Source: *Tanrojunenshi* (1963), 21.

### Liberation and Uprisings

As pointed out, toward the war's end, control over Korean labor was gradually breaking down. On August 14, 1945 the Special Higher Police sent a directive to prefectural police chiefs recommending separation of Korean and Japanese workers at workplaces to avoid clashes between them and use of cooperative Korean leaders in order to supervise and control other Koreans.<sup>98</sup> When the defeat came, many Korean and other alien slave laborers in Japan liberated themselves and rose against their former employers. In mines all over Japan, both Chinese and Korean workers caused serious disturbances (see Table 8). At mines

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 442.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 418-9.

<sup>98</sup> Park, *Zainichi chosenjin kankei shiryo shusei*, Vol.5, 57.

**[Table 8]** Uprisings by Koreans and Chinese at Mines (1945)

	No. of Major Mines	No. of Riots and Uprisings
Kyushu	110	21
Hokkaido	43	15
East Honshu	21	4
West Honshu	25	2

Source: *Tanrojyunenshi*, p. 50-1.

in Yubari in Hokkaido, several hundred Chinese slave laborers, now victors, rioted in late September 1945. They went on to destroy police boxes and loot company storage and local shops. Koreans also destroyed company facilities and sought revenge on their foremen and managers even though many of them had already fled for fear of retribution.<sup>99</sup> In early October, the Koreans formed a union and staged a strike, demanding immediate repatriation, improvement of food, and payment of unpaid wages. The U.S. occupation authority apparently intervened in the strike. Reportedly, it even brought a representative of the Korean Provisional Government to mediate the strike.<sup>100</sup> In response to the uprisings and strikes by Korean and Chinese workers at mines, the occupation authority in Hokkaido issued a proclamation in the name of Major General A. D. Bruce:

The United States needs your help now. Winter is approaching, and the U.S. Occupation Forces need coals. I request that able-bodied Chinese and Koreans working in mines increase the coal production until they are repatriated...I repeat, the United States has assisted your countries. It is crucial that now you assist the United States through production of coal. I

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<sup>99</sup> *Sekitan kokka toseishi*, 623-4.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 623; *Tanro jyunenshi*, 56.

will promise special consideration for those who are from the most productive coal mine in the event of your repatriation.

The proclamation essentially pleaded for continued coal production by Korean and Chinese workers by using a promise of earlier repatriation as an incentive. It also warned against threatening Japanese and disturbing order. It declared that the occupation authority had given the Japanese police the power to arrest those who disturbed order.<sup>101</sup> The coal production in Hokkaido after the Japanese surrender was in a desperate condition. Especially in October, the attendance rate hit its lowest point, 52.9%, and the total output was 25% of the July figure.<sup>102</sup>

At the Jyoban mines in Fukushima, the occupation authority similarly intervened in a strike by Korean workers. On September 7, Koreans at the mines formed a union and staged a strike, demanding immediate repatriation and compensation. The company and police threatened them with whips and sabers; yet the Koreans refused to work. In October, the occupation authority intervened and demanded that the Koreans start working. Yet again, they refused, and the company rejected their demands. In November, the Koreans were finally repatriated (but probably without receiving any compensation). However, they had to spend another two months at camps in Niigata and Sasebo before they were finally able to get on ships to return home.<sup>103</sup> One can only speculate whether the delay was a punishment for

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<sup>101</sup> Cited in *Tanro jyunenshi*, 57-9.

<sup>102</sup> *Hokkaido tankokisen kabushiki gaisha nanajyunenshi*, 234.

<sup>103</sup> *Tanro jyunenshi*, 57-61.



their refusal to cooperate with the occupation authority. It is also noted that there were those who were not fortunate enough to make it home after their liberation. On August 24, 1945, the Japanese naval boat *Ukishimamaru*, which was on its way to return former Korean conscript workers to Korea, exploded in the Maizuru port for a unknown reason, causing 524 deaths.<sup>104</sup>

### **Aftermath and Legacies**

The full impact of Japan's wartime mobilization of colonial labor is almost impossible to grasp. However, the most obvious effect was demographic in the case of Korea. Between 1935 and 1945, Korea experienced a net out-migration of 1,406,000 of its population; and three-fourth of this total volume were from the southern provinces. By the end of colonial rule, approximately 12% of Korea's total population found themselves outside of Korea. For the young males between 20 and 25 years of age, the figure probably reached 20 to 25%.<sup>105</sup> Of course, Japan's policy of labor mobilization and forced relocation alone was not responsible for the massive scale of exodus and dislocation, but it still played a crucial role. Bruce Cumings has suggested that the Japanese mobilization "presented Koreans with political choice," implying that the forceful mobilization may have politicized peasants who chose to resist the Japanese mobilization. He has also suggested that when these economically dispossessed and socially displaced Korean peasant-workers were repatriated to

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<sup>104</sup> Kin Eitatsu and Hida Yuichi eds, 1992 *chosenjin chugokujin kyosei renko shiryoshu*, (Kobe: Kobe gakusei seinen senta, 1992), 87 and 104.

<sup>105</sup> Robert Repetto, Tai Hwan Kwon, Son-ung Kim, Dae Young Kim, John E. Solboda, and Peter J. Donaldson, *Economic Development, Population Policy, and Demographic Transition in the Republic of Korea* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1981), 44-6; 48.

their home villages with grievances, they made ready recruits for social and political mobilization. Even though these points are difficult to substantiate with adequate documentation, it is at least likely, as Cumings has suggested, that Japan's divide-and-conquer strategy left a deep scar on Korea's rural life. In many cases, labor procurement had been conducted by Korean police officers and labor officials; if they were unlucky, after the liberation and repatriation, they probably had to answer to villagers whom they had conscripted and shipped off to Japan.<sup>106</sup> The police record between August 16 and 25 in 1945 shows that there were many cases of violent assault against both Korean and Japanese police officers and local officials. There were 66 cases of assault against Japanese police officers while there were 111 of such cases against Korean police officers. There were also 109 cases of attack against Korean local officials. Though a generalization is tenuous here, these attacks were largely caused by grievances for wartime labor conscription and grain confiscation.<sup>107</sup>

It has also been suggested that as a result of the wartime mobilization, many Korean and Taiwanese peasants were thrown into factories, construction sites and mines to experience industrial life for the first time in their lives. The wartime shortage of skilled labor even allowed Koreans and Taiwanese to obtain higher positions which had been inaccessible previously.<sup>108</sup> At least numerically, both colonies experienced a drastic increase of industrial

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<sup>106</sup> Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War: Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes, 1945-1947* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981), 31-2; 53-67; 29-31.

<sup>107</sup> Morita Yoshio and Nagata Kanako, *Chosen shusen no kiroku: shiryō dai ippen*, (Tokyo: Gannando shoten, 1979), 13-5.

<sup>108</sup> Eckert, "Total War, Industrialization and Social Change in Late Colonial Korea," 17-21; Michael Robinson, "Forced Assimilation, Mobilization, and War," Carter J Eckert, Ki-baik Lee, Young Ick Lew, Michael Robinson, and Edward W. Wagner, *Korea Old and New: A History* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard

workers during the war. In Korea, the total number of factory workers in 1932 was 384,951. By 1943, it had increased to 1,321,713. Equally in Taiwan, in 1936, there were 81,589 factory workers; in 1944, there were 133,107.<sup>109</sup>

But a more compelling legacy of the mobilization is perhaps bitterness left among its victims and survivors. To this day, many Koreans and Taiwanese who were mobilized during the war have not received any compensation, and their quest for justice is likely to continue. One example is a case of a South Korean former conscript worker who during the war worked at the Osaka factory of *Nihon seitetsu* (the Japan Steel Company), the predecessor of *Shin nitetsu* (the New Japan Steel Company). He worked there from September 1943 to May 1945. His salary of 495.52 yen (approximately 2 million yen today) was deposited in the Justice Office in Osaka by the company. Apparently he and other Korean workers at the Osaka factory never received their deposited salaries during or after the war. However, later the list of deposited salaries of the Korean workers at the Osaka factory was found in a university library, and the South Korean's name was identified in the list. In 1991, he visited the Justice Office in Osaka in order to demand his deposited salary and disclosure of documents regarding him. The Justice Office replied that his salary had been unclaimed for more than 10 years, and therefore his claim had, legally speaking, been prescribed. The documents about him, the Justice Office claimed, had been probably destroyed.<sup>110</sup> In December 1997, he and one other former Korean *Nihon seitetsu* worker filed a lawsuit at the

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University Press, 1990), 311-2; Lai Tse-Han, Ramon H. Myers and Wei Wou, *A Tragic Beginning: The Taiwan Uprising of February 28, 1947* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1991), 38-41.

<sup>109</sup> Robinson, 311; Mukoyama Hiroo, *Nihon tochika ni okeru taiwan minzoku undo*, (Tokyo: Chuo keizai kenkyusho, 1987), 525-9.

<sup>110</sup> 1992 *chosenjin chugokujin kyosei renko shiryoshu*, 70.

Osaka prefectural court against the Japanese government and *Shin nitetsu* for compensation, unpaid wages and apology.<sup>111</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Japan's wartime mobilization of colonial labor was carried out on a huge scale, involving millions of its colonial residents. Probably no colonies in history have undergone more intense mobilization than Japan's two formal colonies. The closest historical parallel to Japan's use of colonial labor would be Nazi Germany's deployment of foreign labor ("*Fremdarbitereinsatz*"). The German mobilization of foreign labor was as extensive as Japan's. By 1945, there were 7,126,000 foreign workers in Germany, who constituted nearly one quarter of the Reich's work force. As in Japan's case, the German mobilization effort was chronically frustrated by high turnover, draft-dodging, resistance, escapes, and shortage of skilled labor. However, while as far as its colonial populations were concerned, Japan employed the highly assimilationist rhetoric, Nazi Germany's utilization of foreign labor, especially of Soviet and Polish workers ("*Ostarbeiter*"), was based on a Nazi racial theory of the "master race (*Herrenmenschen*)" versus the "worker people (*Arbeitsvolker*)" and therefore was *explicitly* racist and exploitative.<sup>112</sup> Here the word "slave labor" seems most

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<sup>111</sup> *Asahi shinbun* (December 25, 1997), 22

<sup>112</sup> After 1943, however, attempts were made to improve treatments of foreign workers. Goebbels even coined a slogan, "European Workers against Bolshevism" in order to identify foreign labor's interest with that of the Nazi state; for the most comprehensive analysis of the Nazi deployment of foreign labor in English, see Ulrich Herbert, *A History of Foreign Labor in Germany, 1880-1980: Seasonal Workers/Forced Laborers/Guestworkers* (Ann Arbor: the University of Michigan Press, 1980), pp. 121-190.

apt. Unlike the case of Germany, Japan resorted to its assimilationist rhetoric of “harmony”, “patriotic service” and “co-prosperity” in mobilizing its colonial populations. Hungry, sick and exhausted Koreans who were working in Japanese mines and Taiwanese ditch-diggers in Southeast Asia were supposedly rendering their service to Japan’s holy war and fulfilling their duty as loyal subjects of the empire. Yet, realities betrayed such rhetoric. Many Koreans and Taiwanese found themselves in situations similar to those experienced by Russian and Polish prisoners in Nazi slave labor camps. Despite its assimilationist rhetoric of voluntary service to the empire, Japan’s wartime mobilization of colonial labor became increasingly coercive and exploitative toward the war’s end. In response, resistance from colonial populations intensified. Well before the war’s end, the mobilization effort had already reached its limit.

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