

Chapter 15: Koreans came over to Japan of their own accord

A great number of Koreans came looking for jobs

It is clear that so-called “forced abductions” are a fallacy based on the simple fact that a great number of immigrant workers from Korea came to Japan before and during the War.

As previously noted, Koreans immigration to mainland Japan was in fact officially restricted. Nevertheless, after Japan’s Annexation of Korea, the Korean population in mainland Japan grew. Their population was about 3,000 in 1912 and it increased to 39,000 at the end of 1921. Moreover, they dramatically increased after 1921, to 165,000 at the end of 1927 and to 800,000 at the end of 1938.

“Free recruiting” in the Korean Peninsula started in 1939, and at that time, nearly 800,000 Koreans lived in Japan. Although immigration to Japan was restricted, Koreans at that time were Japanese citizens and following due process, immigrant Korean workers were permitted to stay in Japan. To young, prime Korean men living in farming villages in southern Korea in particular, the “Mainland” was a “dream country” that would provide them with opportunities for success and many of them came to Japan pursuing their dream.

Testimonies of those who yearned for Japan

What was in their minds when they came over to Japan? Here are their stories [all from the book *Life Stories of a Million People* published by Toho Publishers].

A girl named Geun Son-he, who was born in Cheju in 1929, recounts:

When I returned home in Cheju, my father’s younger brother had come back from Japan. My uncle had gone to Japan several years before and we heard nothing from him since then. After such a long absence, he came home, looking fine and we were so happy to see him back. What he told us about Japan was totally fascinating. Above all, I was so much impressed with the fact that he ate cooked white rice at every meal every day. To me, it was like a dream. [Omitted] “Take me to Japan with you!” I shouted, excited and beside myself. I begged and begged, clinging to him. [Omitted] I was so insistent that he finally gave in and said, “Oh, well, I will take you with me next time I go to Japan.” I was so overjoyed that I couldn’t sit still, and I ran up to the nearby hill and shouted at the top of my voice, “I’m going to Japan! I’m really going!” [Omitted] Hearing my story, everyone said with envy, “How wonderful! I wish I could go to Japan, too!”

When she turned fifteen, she went to Japan just as she wanted so much and lived with his uncle in Japan.

Next, a young man named Pae U-son from Yangsan, South Gyeongsang Province, states what made him decide to go to Japan:

A friend of mine casually said to me, “Won’t you go to Japan? I hear Japan is a good place,” and I instantly decided to go to Japan. I have long yearned for Japan. If you go to Japan, you can make a lot of money. In just a few months in Japan, you can get a year’s income in Korea.

Another Korean named Lee Doo-hwan from Ulsan, South Gyeongsang Province, who received “official good offices” in October 1942, states:

I was summoned by the city office and told to go to Japan. I could hardly afford to say “No”. To be honest, I was glad to hear this. It is not at all easy to go to Japan, even if you tried. There were few jobs in Korea—just peasant jobs. It was not just me, but there were many Koreans who really wanted to go to Japan.

Readers may now well understand that immigration to Japan was a coveted dream among Koreans throughout the time before and during the War.

Sixty percent of wartime immigrants in Japan were not mobilized workers

Outside of “free recruiting,” “official good offices,” and “mobilization,” a great number of Koreans immigrated in Japan for jobs. During the three years of “free recruiting” from 1939 to 1941, there were 1.07 million Koreans who immigrated to mainland Japan.¹ Of this, the number of Koreans who came to Japan under “free recruiting” was merely 147, 000 (Koreans who went back and forth from Korea to Japan are included in this number), as previously pointed out. As a matter of fact, immigrants arriving through “free recruiting” accounted for only 16% of the total number of immigrants.

This trend was evident throughout the period when “official good offices” and “mobilization” were implemented. The number of mobilized Koreans between January 1942 and May 1945 was 520,000.² On the other hand, the total number of immigrants from the Korean Peninsula during the same period was 1,307,000.³ This means that during the Greater East Asian War, nearly 60% of the immigrants in mainland Japan came to Japan other than through “mobilization.” And most of them came to work in the mainland of their own accord.

Seventy-eight percent of Korean residents in Japan from the Korean Peninsula at the end of War had voluntarily come to Japan

Through these methods of immigration and settlement, it is estimated that roughly two million Koreans lived in mainland Japan. This amounts to an increase of nearly 1.2 million Koreans from 1939 to 1945. At the end

¹ *Figures Tell History of Korean Residents in Japan* by Morita Yoshio (Akahi Shoten).

² *Hyoron*, September 2000 issue, “Fiction of the alleged ‘forced abduction of Koreans’” by Nishioka Tsutomu.

³ *Figures Tell History of Korean Residents in Japan* by Morita Yoshio (Akashi Shoten).

of the War, there were about 323,000 mobilized Koreans working at Japanese companies (statistics from the Ministry of Welfare) and 113,000 military personnel and employees (survey by the Agency to Support Returnees). This would be 436,000 in total, or only 22% of the entire Korean population in Japan at the end of the War. The remaining 78% were those who had come with their families to Japan voluntarily, mobilized workers who left their company midway and those who decided to remain in Japan and earn money after their contract expired.

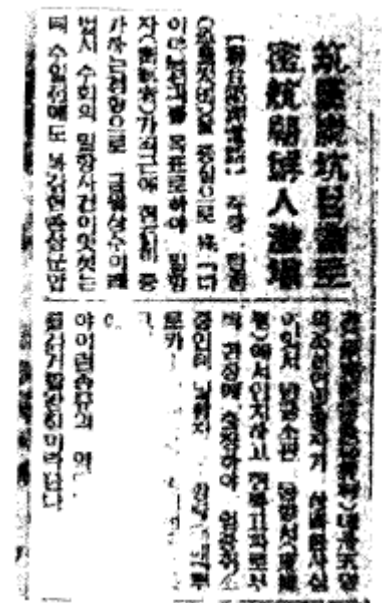
During the War, a great number of Koreans volunteered to immigrate and earned money in mainland Japan, where there was a dire shortage of workers.

These figures clearly indicate the real circumstances of the time, which was far from the false image of “forced abduction,” that claims that reluctant Koreans were forcibly brought to Japan, abducted, and made to engage in hard labor.

A great number of people entered Japan illegally from the Korean Peninsula

Thus, since Japan’s Annexation of Korea, many Koreans longed to emigrate to mainland Japan. And those disqualified for immigration tried to sneak into Japan, thereby violating the law.

Among illegal immigrants, there were many who came to work at coal mines. An article appeared in the *Chosun JoongAng Ilbo* [*Korean Central Daily*] of August 24, 1934, with the headline “Drastic increase of illegal Korean immigrants, targeting the Chikuhō coal mines.” The article described illegal Korean immigration and the authorities’ concerns. (From Mr. Choi S. Young’s Webpage: “So many evidences to indicate that the film *Gunkanjima* is faked.



The Chosun JoongAng Ilbo of August 24, 1934

According to the Ministry of the Interior’s statistics, there were nearly 40,000 illegals. The actual number could have been several times larger.

Moreover, the number of illegal immigrants rapidly increased in 1939, when “free recruiting” started, and thereafter.

If Japanese officials engaged in “forced abduction”, then aboard the same ship, were abductees, lawfully qualified and happy immigrants, and desperate illegals hiding in the ship’s hold. This is too ridiculous to even consider.

What became of the illegals who were caught? Again, if “forced abduction” had occurred, all officials had to

do was arrest them and send them to coal mines, where miners were urgently needed. However, the fact was that some of arrested illegals were lucky enough to have jobs introduced to them by official mediation, but the majority was sent back to the Korean Peninsula in accordance with the law.

Between 1939 and 1942, 19,200 Koreans were forcibly returned to Korea. This was, indeed, “forced abduction.” Incidentally, as for illegals who were lucky enough to evade capture and get job in a Japanese company, they were not sent back to Korea once they started living in Japan, even if the fact that they were illegal immigrants. Koreans were Japanese citizens at the time, and they had the right to reside in mainland Japan.

Koreans stated that there was no discrimination

A Korean named Park Su-ryon, who was born in South Gyeongsang Province in 1904, came to Japan at the age of eighteen and worked at Ishii Iron Factory in Tokyo. Amid the chaos caused by the Great Kanto Earthquake, he temporarily returned home to Korea. A year later, he moved to Japan again. During the War, as a boss of fifteen or so Korean workers, he worked at Mitsubishi Shipbuilder, engaged in riveting and other kinds of work. Being asked whether there was discrimination before and during the War, he answered:⁴

“Discrimination? No. At the time there were no Japanese who could do the kind of work we did. So, there was no discrimination. Our work was very poorly paid, and I don’t think any Japanese wanted to do such low paying work.”

And Pae U-son, previously introduced, stated:⁵

I felt discriminated against one time. That was when they didn’t let me join the town society. At that time, I was the only Korean. They would not accept me. I did not know that there was a special support notebook for the victims of the atomic bombing. After I somehow joined in the town society, a neighbor told me about the notebook and I immediately applied for the notebook. They said to me, “Why didn’t you tell us before?” But I did not know about it before.

How do you interpret their statements? Their statements completely contradict the alleged claim that Koreans living in Japan were discriminated against all the time and that they were abused by the Japanese.

Column (2) It took a lot of effort to dissuade Koreans from immigrating to Japan.

An article appeared in the *Busan Ilbo [Daily]* of March 27, 1929 with the headline, “A lot of effort required to dissuade Koreans who yearn to emigrate to the Mainland.”

⁴ From *Life Stories of a Million People*, by the compiling committee of *Life Stories of a Million People* (Toho Publishers).

⁵ From *Life Stories of a Million People*, by the compiling committee of *Life Stories of a Million People* (Toho Publishers).

The article reported that concerned authorities desperately tried to prevent Koreans from emigrating to Japan, but due to the scarcity of officials, their efforts were often in vain. (From Mr. Che S Young's Webpage: "So many evidences to indicate that the film *Gunkanjima* is faked")



Chapter 16: Korean workers earned a lot of money

Supposedly, all Korean workers did not benefit from the good environment that Mr. Chung Jung-he describes, as we have already seen. There were many Koreans who engaged in hard labor at coal and other kinds of mines and at construction sites. However, they were not forced to work for nothing. On the contrary, many Koreans earned a lot of money.

Monthly salary of ¥ 300 for labor at coal mines

Especially at dangerous work places like coal mines, workers' wages were extremely high. For example, wages paid at coal mines in Kyushu (southwestern part of mainland Japan) were ¥ 150 to ¥ 180 per month, including various allowances and ¥200~¥300 for those with good work records.⁶ A salary of ¥ 300 was comparable to that of a Japanese Army colonel.

The computation of salaries at coal mines at the time was calculated strictly on the basis of work ability and coal output, and there was no differentiation in wages between Japanese and Koreans.⁷ For that matter, it is said that within the same work category, mobilized Korean workers were paid more than their Japanese counterparts.⁸

At the time, mobilized Korean workers were young and robust, while Japanese miners were mostly old-aged. Naturally, physically stronger Korean workers were paid more than older Japanese workers.

Families back home in Korea became *yangban* (member of the wealthy class) due to money regularly sent by Korean workers in Japan

Some of the money earned by workers was sent to Korea. A person in charge of human resources of a coal mining company at the time testifies:

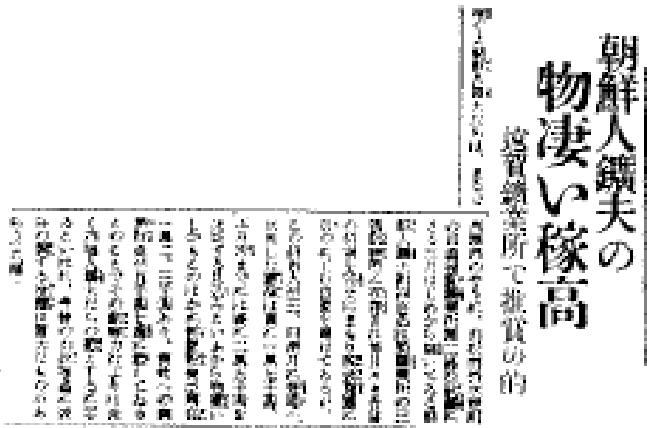
The company forcibly obliged Korean workers to send a part of their earnings to Korea. This amounted to ¥50 to ¥80 at the time. Fifty yen per month could buy a calf every month. Then, calves were rented to poor farmers by the month. Having twenty calves, you can be “yangban,” a rich man.

This person also stated, “The company did not differentiate Koreans from Japanese in terms of wages,” and added, “Amid scarcity of time and everything else, for the sole aim of winning the War, all toiled hard, not just by forcing Koreans to work hard.”

⁶ *Choice Toward Tomorrow*, November 2002 issue, “What is Korean ‘forced abduction’ issue?”

⁷ *Testify Forced Abduction of Koreans*, compiled and written by Kim Chan-jong (Shin Jinbutsu Orai-sha).

⁸ *Choice Toward Tomorrow*, November 2002 issue, “What is Korean ‘forced abduction’ issue?”



The Osaka Asahi Newspaper, South Edition, dated May 28, 1940: Korean coal miners' remarkable earnings—Praised at Onga Coal Factory.



The Osaka Asahi Newspaper, Central Edition, dated April 21, 1940: Special favor for Korean miners, almost like staying at an inn, Korean miners relaxing in a grand bath.

Sources: *The Truth of "Japan's Annexation of Korea" Reported by the Asahi Newspaper* by Mizuma Masanori (Tokuma Shoten).

Generous condolence money for those who died at work

It was certainly tough to be mobilized and work at a coal mine. However, Japanese men fighting in merciless battlefields far away from home, defending their homeland, had far more difficulties. They endured the enemy's overwhelmingly fierce fire and bombardments, shot back to the last bullet, sacrificed themselves as human weapons and fell.

On the other hand, the conscription of Koreans started in 1944, but the War ended while Korean conscripts were still in training. Therefore, as mentioned before, no conscripted Koreans fought on the battlefield. In the preface of to the book, *The Record of Forced Abduction of Koreans*, Park Kyon-sik writes: "Visiting coal mines and civil engineering sites, I found ashes of deceased Koreans deserted everywhere...." But how was it possible to tell Korean ashes from Japanese ones? In the first place, these sites are not battlefields. Ashes would never have been deserted. On the contrary, when Korean workers happened to die at work, funeral services were cordially performed, and generous condolence money was paid as stipulated by the company. The previously mentioned personnel affairs staff stated: For miners who died at work 2500 to 3000 yen was

paid to the bereaved families⁹. At that time, a thousand yen would buy a handsome house in the Korean Peninsula.

As long as they remained in Japan, it was possible to earn bountifully at bunkhouses

Koreans who came to Japan under “free recruiting” and “official good offices,” were freed to change jobs, as I already mentioned. Korean workers who came to Japan under mobilization also quit work and “ran away” if they didn’t like their work. There were many cases of missing Korean workers.

How, then, did these run-away Koreans manage to live in Japan? A report dated September 18, 1945 was submitted by the police chief of Nagano Town, Minami-Kawachi County, Osaka Prefecture, to the Chief of Osaka Prefectural Police, regarding “various patterns of actions of runaways among the group-mobilized workers from the Korean Peninsula.” In the report, there was a statement of a Korean named Kanayama Shoen, of how he lived after he ran away from his job.

He was one of the forty-one mobilized Korean workers who were assigned to Yodoshi Malleable Cast Iron Factory in March 1945. After he had a violent fight with the squad chief named Jinno Dairitsu, he ran away with a companion on July 28. He reportedly possessed ¥250 at the time of running away.

After having obtained a train ticket through an illegal channel, he came to Tachikawa, Tokyo and took refuge at a Korean bunkhouse at Okochi Village, West Tama County. The boss was a Korean named Arai from the South Gyeongsang Province and he immediately hired the runaway, hearing the latter’s explanation that he was in an air-raid and barely escaped. He began working on August 2 and he engaged in simple transportation work until eleven in the morning. He received ¥15 for his work and spent the rest of the day loafing.

On the next day, August 3, he had a small transporting job at a plane factory inside a tunnel and was paid ¥15. On the 4th, he went sightseeing in downtown Tokyo and he happened to get off the train at Bubai-Gawara on his way back. There was another Korean bunkhouse and thinking that he didn’t like his bunkhouse way back in the mountains, he quit the old bunkhouse and moved to this one. On the 7th, he performed easy survey work and received ¥20.

The new bunkhouse had 300 Korean workers. Since there was supposed to be 1,500 in the bunkhouse, as inflated by the owner, they were given ample food. There, he was amazed that cooks diverted distributed rice to the black market, earning ¥100,000 in two months. Moreover, they secretly bought cows, ¥25,000 per head, slaughtered them and sold beef at very expensive prices. Those at the bunkhouse had much money and bought whatever food they wanted at whatever price it might cost and ate it. Thus, cooks made such easy gains. Cowhides sold at ¥1,000.

⁹ *Testimonies of Forced Abduction of Koreans*, compiled and written by Kim Chan-jong (Shin Jinbutsu Oraisha).

At the bunkhouse, gambling was very popular. Kanayama won ¥180 at one time, only to eventually lose against professional gamblers.

The War ended on August 15 and there was no work any longer. So, he visited a man named Kanaya who had run away to Miyazu [Kyoto Prefecture], ahead of him. There, they thought of Mr. Kitai, their former dormitory supervisor at Yodoshi Malleable Cast Iron Factory, who was very nice to them. They decided to go back to the dormitory at Nagano Town and apologize to him.

Kanaya, had also been bullied by Jinno Dairitsu and he had run away on July 13, and fled to a remotely related Kanemura living in Miyazu for shelter. There, he was introduced to a bunkhouse and he earned ¥150 in half a month and then, surprisingly, ¥200 for just a few days' work. But the work was very tough and laborious, and he remembered his days at Nagano Town [Osaka Prefecture]. Then, suddenly, Kanayama arrived from Tokyo. They both missed their dormitory supervisor Kitai and thought that they certainly owed Mr. Kitai an apology. So, they went back to the dormitory on September 9.

Even during the War, Korean workers were able to earn a lot of money, living at bunkhouses. Nevertheless, Koreans Kanayama and Kanaya missed their Japanese dormitory supervisor of the factory where they were first assigned as mobilized workers and came back to apologize to him for their irresponsible deeds. This kind of thing would have never taken place if Koreans had been forcibly abducted and abused by the Japanese. The truth is that Japanese companies treated Korean workers most caringly.

Column (3): Workers continued to earn money after expiration of their contract.

In *Testimonies of Forced Abduction of Koreans*, compiled and written by Kim Chang-Jong (published by Shin Jinbutsu Orai-sha), there is the following of parties concerned about coal mining industry.

Far from forced abduction, they came to earn money:

Even with workers accompanied by their families, when their term of contract expired, a group of twelve to fifteen households went home to Korea, accompanied by a few company staff. Then, it sometimes happened that husbands went missing on the way home, somewhere around Osaka or Kyoto. While the company staff worried about the situation, the missing workers' wives and children seemed the least concerned, saying that it was all a premeditated act and that the company has nothing to worry about. After they received their full travel expense for the trip back to Korea, only the husbands disappeared along the way, as the wives went home to Korea as planned. Sending wives and children back home, husbands remained in Japan and earned more money working around Osaka or elsewhere. It was all prearranged within the family.