

# **Records on the Forced Relocation and Labor of Koreans**

## **Excerpts from “Digging a War”**

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Forced labor started at the end of the Fifteen Years War, at the same time Chinese people had started being forcibly brought to Japan.

The textbook *High School Geography B* shows the following transition statistics of Korean people living in Japan after the Japanese annexation of Korea. According to this table, there were 620,000 Korean people in 1935, but the number surged to 1,190,000 in 1940, 1,880,000 in 1943, and 2,360,000 in 1945, which was the year Japan was defeated in the war. The number of Koreans in Japan dropped dramatically to 650,000 in 1946.

Year	Number of Koreans Living in Japan
1904	229
1915	3,889
1920	30,175
1923	80,617
1930	298,091
1935	625,678
1940	1,190,444
1943	1,882,456
1945	2,365,263
1946	Approx. 650,000

We can assume that the difference of about 1,750,000 people between 1945 and 1946 after the war was the number of Koreans who became forced laborers.

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### **Kumagai Group (Hiraoka)**

Chinese:

1,083 people (62 died) Construction of the dam and electric generation plant

Allied Forces (13 countries):

93 Americans, 215 British (Same labor camp as above)

Koreans:

2,000 to 4,000 (59 died) Same labor camp as above

### **Kumagai Group (Toyama)**

Koreans:

More than 200 (Tunnel excavation)

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1. There are about 20 sites in the prefecture where war crimes happened. It is estimated that the number of Koreans victims was the greatest; 25,000, followed by 4,000 Chinese and 400 soldiers from the Allied Forces.

2. Most of the war crimes were forced labor. However, we have heard cases where foreigners from enemy countries living in Japan were persecuted, or Korean women were abused and forced to serve as comfort women.

3. People were forced into labor in many ways, but Korean people who were put into labor can be broadly categorized into two types. The first type were the ones who traveled to Japan after the Japanese annexation of Korea and then were forced to work. The second type were the ones who were captured in Korea and directly taken to Japan. As for the second category, Japan set a quota for each area or village, and the selected Korean people were taken to Japan against their will in accordance with the assigned headcount.

4. Almost all the foreigners other than Korean and Chinese people were captured on battlefields and brought in.

5. Details of the persecution have not been elucidated, but Japanese people imprisoned the foreigners who were on summer vacation, who owned a vacation home, or who were moving to another area. Christians were especially harassed.

6. The number of the people who were killed because of their race or religious beliefs is believed to be a few hundred, but the actual number is unknown except for those who were Chinese. The number of Chinese victims can be roughly estimated, as one of our contractors has the records. No other records can be found, and it is very likely that most of the documentation was discarded in order to evade the responsibility of the war crimes.

7. There were different ways to dispose of the dead bodies. Most corpses were discarded on the mountain, but there were a few cases where the corpses were treated better and cremated outside. When the bodies were not cremated, they dug a hole in a creek and buried the bodies. When there was a flood, skeletal remains were washed away downstream. There is no way to know if the remains belong to one corpse or more, and it was almost impossible to collect them. In particular, we have not found any belonging to Koreans. Bones collected at Hiraoka and Kisodani were from multiple corpses and were sent to China as “mixed bones” or “spirits in the sand.” They were given these names because there was no way to identify who the bones belonged to or if they were Korean or Chinese.

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### **Daily Life and Labor of Koreans Living in Nagano Prefecture Prior to WWII**

When discussing the daily life and labor of Koreans living in Nagano Prefecture, it is important to note that these were not Koreans who were forcibly taken directly to Japan against their will after Korea was colonized by Japan. Rather, they came to Japan seeking a new life after losing their land and other family members in Korea. They were voluntarily brought to Japan seeking cheap wages even lower than the cheap wages of the Japanese laborers. It is important to keep this in mind, as this is considered a precursor to what would eventually lead to forced labor during WWII.

That being said, most of the materials quoted here are strictly from government records. These records barely scratch the surface, but please understand that we will have to start our analysis from here. In that sense, this is a memorandum.

#### 1. Life and Labor During the Taisho Period

##### (1) Life as a Silk Mill Worker

The Korean workers who came to work in Nagano Prefecture during the Taisho Period were primarily female silk mill workers who were mainly concentrated in the Suwa region. There is still little documentation of the workers who came to Japan during the early Taisho Period, but according to statistical documents from Nagano Prefecture, there were 8 workers in 1921, 250 workers in 1925, and 442 workers by June of 1926. (Partially omitted)

Japan began to hire Korean laborers in 1920, when many small- and medium-sized companies

suffered economic losses after the post-WWI depression and had trouble finding factory workers. Yamazaki Silk Mill in the Suwa District village of Kawagishi-mura was the first factory to hire Korean mill girls, which they did as part of a trial experiment. Stating that, “We’ve heard that with proper guidance, we can make these girls provide surprisingly good results, and we can continue to hire more workers,” second- and lower-class industrialists from Suwa, Higashi-chikuma, and Kamiina districts expressed willingness to hire female workers from Korea.

Moreover, factory owners pointed to other benefits of using Korean labor, stating that, “Even though they leave their homeland to come work in a faraway land, these laborers assimilate very well. While they sometimes may need to return to Korea for one reason or another, we can have them sign contracts that greatly reduce any financial losses, and they can work for relatively longer.”

At first, there was a decline in the quality of silk produced due to language barriers and the learning curve necessary to master the machinery, but it was believed that with practice these Korean workers could become just as skilled as the native Japanese workers.

There were cases when Korean males who could understand Japanese worked as bosses for the female silk workers. Sometimes, these bosses would have disagreements with the factory owners, and they would then take the Korean mill girls with them to work for other factories. As a result, factory owners had to be careful in dealing with these Korean bosses.

As a further note, Korean and Japanese mill girls sometimes lived in separate factory dormitories, but there was little hostility or rivalry between them.

## (2) Koreans Working in Construction

After the Great Kanto Earthquake in September of 1923, the number of Koreans living in Japan decreased due to government-enacted restrictions on Korean immigration to Japan. However, later on Japan got rid of the travel certificate system, and the number of Koreans arriving in Japan increased again. The number of Koreans living in Nagano Prefecture varied dramatically depending on the season. At the end of June in 1925, there were 3,295 Koreans in Nagano Prefecture; however, this number dropped to 1,640 at the end of December of the same year. The reason for this discrepancy between the summer and winter seasons was because there were so many laborers in construction. During the harsh winters, construction of things like power stations and railroad tracks decreased or stopped altogether, so these laborers would move to

warmer regions to work. Also, since silkworm breeders didn't seek labor all year round, some laborers returned to Korea or moved to other prefectures.

In Nagano Prefecture, the largest employer of Korean labor was a power station operated by Daido Electric Power Co. Inc between 1921 and 1923 in the Kiso River basin in Nishi-Tsukuma District, which at its peak employed 5,000 Korean workers. From 1924 to 1925, hydroelectric power construction took off in Minami-Azumi and Kita-Azumi Districts, Minami-saku and Kita-saku Districts, and in various other districts in Shimotakai.

In addition, Korean construction workers thronged to places undergoing railroad track construction, like the Iiyama Railway in Shimominochi District, the Kato Railway in Kamitakai District, and the Nagano Electric Railway that ran between Nagano City and Suzaka. In 1926, there was large-scale construction taking place on the extension of the Maruko Railway in Kamikawa-mura, the extension of the Ina Electric Railway Co., Ltd. train track in Chiisagata District from Kamiminochi-mura to Matsuo-mura, Nagano Electric Railway Co., Ltd. Construction's track in Hirao-mura in Shimotakai District, Chikuma Electric Power Co.'s electric power construction in Sakae-mura in Minamisaku District as well as Takase-mura and Kawabe-mura in Kitasaku District, and Shinano Electric Co., Ltd.'s electric power construction in Shinanojiri-mura in Kamiminochi District. Power generation construction by Keihin Electric Power Co., Ltd. was also large-scale on the islands in Azumi-mura in Minami-azumi District.

When Koreans came from various prefectures to work in construction in shoring up river embankments and road repair in various areas within the prefecture, Japanese industrialists noted that "We must recognize that Korean laborers are everywhere. Their labor is prevalent throughout the prefecture, and they yearn to work in Shinshu [the former name for Nagano Prefecture]."

### (3) Other Laborers

When there were shortages of Japanese laborers, Korean laborers would be supplemented and hired to work in the silk-making industry.

Koreans were also hired to work at sawmills, steel mills, spinning mills, cotton mills, and bathhouses. They would also work as day laborers working for freight shipping, shops, rickshaws, and house-builders. There were also some laborers with special roles, including one police station messenger, two post office collectors, and five automobile drivers.

To summarize, Koreans laborers working in silk mills could master the technology just as well as the Japanese mill girls, and factory owners benefited from being able to supplement the work force with Korean laborers.

Also, male laborers could find work if they were hired to labor in the more dangerous fields of heavy hydroelectric power construction, railroad construction, and riverbed construction, but this work was seasonal and unstable. Other work had to do with previously-mentioned textile work or something closely related to that.

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### **Living Conditions at the Bunkhouses and Construction Sites**

#### **Historical Government Documents, 1927**

##### **Living Conditions**

Since power generation construction took place in the mountainous areas far from most people's homes, the laborers built barracks near the construction sites that were used as bunkhouses. Additionally, the bunkhouses were managed by a bunkhouse head and others that were familiar with the land and Japan. Under these bunkhouseheads were 20 to 30 workers, who were made to eat and sleep together all in a group. These bunkhouse heads made themselves bosses and managed the others. Also, others would rent one of the few houses that were scattered in the mountains near the construction sites and make themselves the previously mentioned bunkhouse heads. They would then command over their subordinates and avoid living together with the local Japanese workers.

The bunkhouse heads then deducted 70 to 75 sen from their subordinates every day as food expenses, and they deducted another 15 to 25 sen for housing expenses. The bunkhouse heads kept the pay for their own labor while taking away money from the subordinates and using it for themselves. Daily life at the bunkhouses came with few pleasantries. They ate mostly side dishes, like porridge or soup. Since the Korean laborers had bigger appetites than the Japanese workers, bunkhouse heads took 20 sen more every day from the Korean workers than they did from the Japanese workers. Moreover, most workers only had one set of clothes: a shirt, a pair of shorts, and Japanese *tabi* work slippers or barefeet. During the winter, they also wore ragged clothes that would get easily damaged. The laborers would not practice much personal hygiene and would go 15 to 20 days without taking a bath. There were even some who did not take a bath for as long as two months. This contrasted with the local Japanese laborers, whose custom it was to take a bath every day after work. For these reasons, Korean and Japanese laborers did not want to live together.

### **Wages at the Construction Sites**

Wages varied depending on the type of labor, but at the power generation construction sites, the typical wage was 1 yen and 80 sen. For railroad track construction, the daily wage was 1 yen and 70 sen. Food and housing costs were then subtracted from these wages.

### **Diligence and Preferences of Construction Workers**

The laborers living in the bunkhouses only did what they were told to do. There were laborers who hoped to build a better future by working diligently, but they made up only a few. In general, they were lazy and would go to sleep if they were not monitored. However, by always encouraging hard work under considerable supervision, the Korean laborers' natural strength and obedience could be utilized, and depending on the industry, they could even surpass the Japanese workers in efficiency. Because salaries were low, there was a tendency for the employers to make a large profit by abusing Koreans by making them work at various construction sites. The Korean laborers did not have many hobbies, and they just wanted strong tobacco and alcohol. They would spend 20 out of every 25 sen everyday on things like tobacco, and then they would spend their remaining money on alcohol. Recently, those wanderers gave way to more frugal people who send their savings back home.

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### **About Mitsushima POW Camp**

Mitsushima POW Camp (officially called the Tokyo No. 2 POW Dispatch Camp) was built in 1942.

This camp was located on the opposite shore across from Hiraoka Power Station, at the current site of a part of Tenryu Junior High School. Between 200 and 300 POWs, mostly from the U.S. and Great Britain, were held here and made to work on the dam. Because 47 (45) prisoners died here, Japanese stationed at Mitsushima received heavy sentences as B and C class war criminals in the Yokohama War Tribunals. The court found not only cases of "death by torture," but the soldiers sent to Mitsushima after the "Bataan Death March" in the Philippines who already had eating deficiencies, malaria, and skin ailments all became very weak at the camp. The winter of 1944, like all winters, was also very cold and was very tough for the POWs. However, at the war tribunals, the first camp head, Lieutenant Hiro Nakajima (from Nagano Prefecture) and five others were given death sentences. Four others were sentenced to life in prison. Considering the



Yokohama War Tribunals began with the Japanese workers at Mitsushima, and the fact that the first execution was of a worker at Mitsushima, it is obvious that the Allied side felt very strongly that there was torture there.

However, Youkichi Nishino, who was sent a memo when the POWs returned home immediately after the war, was not tried for war crimes. This memo, signed by many of the POWs, was addressed to “Whom it may concern,” and stated in English that “He [Youkichi Nishino] was always kind and compassionate towards the POWs. He never took our belongings, and he was never violent towards us.” This was written so that Nishino would not be tried for war crimes (Nishino died in 1959 in a train accident). Out of the many Japanese who were given death sentences, some were locals from the village. Also, despite many POW camp personnel being charged with torture by the Allies, at the same time, none of the camp personnel responsible for the deaths of Chinese POWs were charged for crimes. This leaves behind a still complicated feeling for the local residents of the village.

### **Testimonies from Koreans (Excerpts specifically related to Hiraoka)**

#### **S, I : Korean resident in Japan**

“The year of the Great Kanto Earthquake, I left for Japan alone searching for work at 14 years old. I passed through Kita-Kyushu, Osaka, and Tokyo like a nomad. I was in Tokyo for the Great Kanto Earthquake, and I became caught up in the massacre of Koreans. I experienced one hardship after another, fleeing from Tokyo to Kita-Kyushu, where I lived like a beggar for some time, but eventually I was able to return to Korea for a while. However, it became harder and harder to make a living in Korea, so I returned to Japan with my younger brother at the beginning of the Showa Period. However, just like last time, I was unable to find stable work. I changed jobs frequently, working on the construction of dams, tunnels, railways, and mines in various areas. Searching for work, we moved from Kyushu, to Shizuoka, to Nagoya, and then to Mitsushima. In the final stages of the war, my brother and I were subjected to forced labor on underground construction in the mountains. At Mitsushima, there were hundreds of Chinese and American POWs in addition to Koreans, who were brought here to build dams and tunnels. There were many victims. Unsure of what to do with the dead bodies, the construction workers would burn the bodies and bury them in the mountains. Sometimes I would see them gather the bones of the dead and toss them into the Tenryu River, as if they were just taking out the trash. It was all horrible.”

#### **I, K : Korean Living in Japan**

“In 1933, I came to Japan at the age of 18. My older brother had already left for Japan and was working at a pottery factory in Nagoya, and I worked there for eight years. However, when the war started, we went to work on construction of the Kurobe Dam in Toyama Prefecture. We were called “vagrants” and together with my brother we carried earthenware pipes. Chinese and Americans were also brought here, and we had to keep a certain distance when we carried the pipes. If we took any breaks, the bosses would beat us with sticks. From Kurobe we were transferred to Mitsushima, and we were sent to even more remote mountains in Ina. We were made to work there for two years. Our job was to dig water pipe tunnels for the dam water to pass through. There were other forced laborers who were brought directly from Korea. The work was very tough, and there were some who tried to escape. When they were caught, they were beaten by the local villagers, and afterwards the soldiers would beat them terribly. Around March of 1945 I was transferred to a construction site in the mountains near Matsumoto. A bomb was dropped there at exactly that time, and so construction had to be rushed. Again the work was very hard and people tried to escape. There, when they were caught, the Koreans were made to line up, and we were subjected to inflict full-scale punishment on each other. Anyway, it was too horrible to even speak about.”

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**Interview with Do-Kwon Park (朴斗權, English spelling unknown) (January 6, 1986)**

While looking into whether or not there were people who knew about the conditions of the Koreans living in Japan at the time, the name of a Korean who lived in Hiraoka came up. His name was Do-Kwon Park (spelling unknown). However, Park left Hiraoka and now lives in Azusagawa Village on the outskirts of Matsumoto City. On January 6, 1986, Park was interviewed in Azusagawa Village. Park was born in 1910, and he was 76 at the time of the interview. He had lived in Hiraoka for over 50 years, and he candidly told us about his hardships there since a very young age.

Park was born the youngest child of a farmer in Gyeongsangbuk-do, Gyeongsan District in Korea in 1910, the very same year Korea was annexed by Japan. His father passed away when he was one-and-half years old. When Park was around 20, 70% of Korea was confiscated and taken over by the Japanese through the Land Survey Ordinance. Long ago, farming in Korea was so profitable that it was said that, “If you can farm for one year, then you can sit back and relax for the next year.” However, after Korea became a Japanese colony, many Koreans couldn’t even pay their taxes.

Park became very poor, and he was unable to even attend school. At age 20, he went to Japan, where his older brother was already working. He went from Tochigi Prefecture to Ibaraki

Prefecture, and then to Mikawa-kawai, and he worked on the construction of the Sanshin Railway (now the present-day Iida Line). At that time, there were around 600 to 700 Korean laborers there, and the daily wage was 1 yen and 50 sen. After not receiving any wages for three months, he went on strike in August and was arrested by the police. He was brought to Okazaki and tortured. He was forced to kneel in a “seiza” position on his knees on a doorsill, while bamboo rods were inserted into the back of his knees. They also put the bamboo sticks between his fingers and clamped down on his fingers. In the end, he received 90% of his wages. The daily wage at the time was 1 yen and 50 sen, with 70 sen taken as food expenses. On rainy days, he would receive no pay, which kept him further in debt.

In 1933, he came to work construction for Kadoshima Dam in Yasuoka, where there were 2,000 to 3,000 Koreans. The Japanese there were mainly caretakers and bosses, with less than 10% of them working manual labor. There was also a labor organization, as well as people who were working underground. At night, there were Japanese language classes where young Koreans could study Japanese. If they were exhausted, they could not quit and leave. By the time they could finally get to sleep, it was already morning. That was their daily life.

Most of the Koreans were brought there by the Japanese bosses to work by force. The Japanese bosses would go to Korea and order the police to gather workers. The Korean police and city halls had no choice but to cooperate. At Kadoshima, the daily wage was 2 yen and 80 sen, and with a 80 sen food expense they could not drink alcohol. However, in Korea the wages were even lower. The daily wage for Japanese workers was between 7 and 10 yen for manual laborers, and around 15 yen for the caretakers. Even though the Koreans made a third of the Japanese workers’ wages, they still had to work many more hours than the Japanese.

In 1935, he was transferred to Hiraoka. While they were building roads and buying scrap metal, construction plans for the dam started in 1939. His job was to carry the straw-baskets, and the extremity of his job made him cry while working on the trucks and trolleys. He would wake up at 4:30 in the morning, eat breakfast, then begin work before 6 am to switch shifts with the night crew. There were two shifts, night and day, and he would work until 6 pm in the evening. There were many workers for both the night and day shifts, and you could never leave the living quarters, even at night. The Japanese bosses would stand guard all night keeping watch. For food, they received two cups worth of rice. In order to have enough strength to work, the workers had to eat thirteen cups worth of rice. Two cups was not enough and would leave them hungry. There were occasional times when they received watered-down, salty miso soup with daikon radish scraps thrown in, and sometimes they received pickled greens or trout. If they wanted other food, they had to buy it with their own money. If they bought eggs or alcohol, they would fall into debt and would not be able to send any money back home to Korea.

Many Koreans died, some of illnesses but most due to injuries. Some workers fell from the mine carts. Since they had to work non-stop on tunnel construction without the wooden barriers, some workers fell from the minecarts, and he saw dozens, or even hundreds, of dead bodies that had to be carried out. There was also one time when he witnessed one worker get hit in the head with the handle of a shovel and die while working on the Onta mine cart. When someone died, some of the bosses would offer 15 to 20 yen for alcohol, but other bosses would pretend not to notice. We would burn the dead bodies ourselves, but there was no wood so it was hard to burn even just one body. If the bunkhouse head was nice, he would send the bones to a temple to lay them to rest. However, they rarely had time to do this. Also, even if they wanted to contact the families of the deceased, they did not know their addresses or names of many of the workers (partially because many workers had fled Korea to come to Japan). He thinks that three times as many Chinese POWs died as well, since there were more than twice as many Chinese people, and they were there for a long time.

There was no escape for those who tried to flee. Those who fled were captured and sent to the police, where they were held for a week and beaten by the bosses.

In 1942, American and British Allied POWs were sent to Hiraoka, as well as Chinese POWs in 1944. The Chinese POWs suffered the most. The Allied POWs were kept in a building on the current grounds of Tenryu Junior High School, and they had glass windows. However, the Chinese and Koreans were kept in flimsy shacks. They were told to work without even being given sufficient food. All they could eat were three fried bread buns, with raw garlic as a side dish. With this little food, they had no strength, but the bosses would still stride around and beat them with sticks.

The POWs often didn't listen to what they were told. In winter, they would carry boulders that were used to build rail lines by the river banks. These boulders were colder than ice and would be very tough on the hands. During the harshest times, people died every day. In total, 80 deaths were recorded. The Chinese workers used hemp sacks as clothes that did little to protect them against the cold air.

At the end of the war, the League of Nations gave out a statement saying, "Japanese people are becoming desperate because they lost the war, so be careful. If you seek vengeance, it will only create more suffering. The everyday people of Japan are innocent, but inform us if the police or government acts up." Therefore, there was no violence at Hiraoka.

Afterward, his older brother returned to Korea, but Park did not. Since his brother, already back in

Korea, also did not tell Park to come back to Korea, in hindsight Park is glad he did not go back.

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**Testimony from Sang-gwan Hong (洪象寬, English spelling unknown) (August 7, 1986)**

Sang-gwan Hong was born in 1921. At the time of this interview, he was 65 years old, living in Takamori-machi in Shimoina District and running a yakitori restaurant. He is from Jeju Island, the warmest place in Korea.

Sang-gwan Hong said that when he was a child, he lived in conditions worse than animals, and he never went to school.

“Since I didn’t have any money, I couldn’t go to school. It seems like my generation had the most people that didn’t go to school. Of all my siblings, only my older brother went to school. I think it was hard because Korea was a colony, but I also think it was partly my parents’ fault. Out of the 60 households in our little hamlet, only nine students went to elementary school. At the time, all the school principals were Japanese. All policemen with the rank of police chief or higher were also Japanese. I couldn’t go to school, but during the winters, some of the villagers taught me at a night school for around four months, and I managed to learn how to read (at that time, they were teaching Japanese language at school). Out of the 50 to 60 households in our hamlet, about half of them went to Japan. In most cases, one family member would go to Japan first to work, then bring over more family members. At any rate, more people left than arrived, and Koreans still in Korea had to spend more than they earned just to make ends meet. Many Koreans in the south moved to Japan, but most of the Koreans in the north moved to Manchuria. It is said that there were more than one million Koreans in Manchuria. Koreans from the north made up less than 10% of the 700,000 Koreans living in Japan. There were also 70,000 Koreans in Sakhalin.

Since my older brother was in Tokyo, I moved to Tokyo around age 15 or 16 to study and relied on my brother. From Tokyo, I moved to Nagoya. After three years in Nagoya, I went to Kizawa (present-day Minami-Shinano Village Kizawa) in 1944. I worked on tunnel construction with around another 100 Koreans. There weren’t many Japanese there other than the bosses and compressor machine supervisors. At that time, Koreans needed to do every kind of construction. In February or March of 1944, there was a landslide near the site of ditch construction in Kizawa, and four or five workers who were taking a break were buried alive and killed.

Koreans built the tunnel connecting the power station in Iijima to the dam in Kizawa. We worked on the tunnel in front of Wada. Compared to nowadays, it was very dangerous work. If one or two people died, we just carried on. We were digging holes and setting up dynamite.

We (free workers, as opposed to the forced laborers) received a daily wage of 5 yen, but the other laborers who were forcefully brought there to work earned cheaper wages of only around 3 yen. Even with the 5 yen daily wage, we had no spending money left over. We would arrive at work at 7 am and work for 12 hours until 7 pm. There were two shifts: day and night. Shifts swapped once a week. When that happened, we would start work at 7 in the morning and work all the way until 7 in the morning the next day. Then we had the whole next day off.

There were people at Kizawa too who tried to escape. However, since they didn't know the surrounding geography, most of them were captured and couldn't escape. They were caught and brought back, where the bunkhouse heads (who were Korean) were forced to beat them up. In less than a year, I saw this happen many times. I think most people tried to flee less because the work was tough, but rather because the job was totally different from what they were told when they were recruited in Korea. There were some nice Japanese people, and I heard of some who would make the workers rice balls and tell the workers of possible escape routes. At the construction sites in Wada and Hiraoka, many Koreans would assault the other Koreans. I heard one story of a brother of a former bunkhouse head who was thrown overboard on the return ship back to Korea after the war because Japanese people favored the bunkhouse heads.

In May of 1945, I went to Hiraoka. I was in Hiraoka for three months until August. There were close to 200 American POWs there, and one of them died my first week there. They were only surviving on porridge with rice and wheat bran. They were made to do the hardest work of using cement mixers and constructing the rail lines. There was one time when I felt bad for them, so I gave them some of my extra food. One of the bosses witnessed that and became furious with me. The food was divided into three tiers: one each for the Koreans, Chinese, and POWs. The Koreans were given rations, the Chinese were given bread, and the POWs were given scraps. Only about 20 to 30 of them survived. Two or three days after Japan surrendered, American military planes came and distributed food and goods.

At that time, there were also Chinese people at Hiraoka. There were more Koreans than Chinese. I believe there were around one thousand Koreans there. At the time we were there, construction on Hiraoka Dam had temporarily halted, and they were instead hurriedly trying to finish construction on a power plant deep in the mountains (Iijima Power Station) so that they could supply electric power.

I felt bad for those that were taken to Hokkaido to the takobeyas<sup>1</sup>. One person (洪覚文, English

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<sup>1</sup> The name of the bunkhouses at the work sites in Hokkaido, where there was also forced labor, little food, and many deaths.

spelling unknown) escaped from a takobeya in Hokkaido, only to die two or three years later at Oshima (Matsukawa-machi).

From what I've heard, construction on the Iida Line was very tough. I heard from an 80 year-old man who was there that there was a bunkhouse at a lumber factory by Ichida Station. There were 70 to 80 Koreans living there, and the yard was piled with stones to keep them from escaping.”

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**Testimonial from Heiji Matsumura (松村炳治, English spelling unknown) (August 11, 1986)**

Matsumura was born in 1922, and he was 68 years old and living in Hiraoka at the time of this interview. He moved to Hiraoka with his father in 1940 around the time when construction began on the dam. His father was the site supervisor and caretaker, and he worked construction for the tunnels at the entrance of Mitake Power Station in Kiso-Fukushima before coming to Hiraoka.

Kumagai-gumi managed construction at Hiraoka, with Takashina managing the power station, Miyagawa managing the tunnels, and Iwateya managing the dam. The Koreans recruited to work (at that time, they were called “People from the Peninsula”) had two-year contracts with the option to either return to Korea afterward or remain in Japan. Around that time, the daily wage was 1 yen and 90 sen, with a food expense of 90 sen. Any extra saved up money would be immediately used up if the workers bought tobacco, rubber-toed work socks called *tabi*, or a cup of alcohol. If they went a whole month without buying any alcohol, they could save about 10 yen. Kumagai-gumi would forcefully take 5 out of that 10 yen for savings (perhaps in order to prevent workers from trying to run away). After two years, they would get a raise, and some other workers in the bunkhouses would bring over other family members. Outdoor work, called “akari,” earned a daily wage of 3 yen, while tunnel construction increased to around 3 yen and 50 sen. Tunnel construction was split into two 12-hour shifts, day and night, with a 45-minute lunch break and one 15-minute break time.

The main food was a thinly sliced, salted trout, and miso soup with salt. It was common for one bunkhouse to house 50 people. Across from the Tenryu Bridge, there were about seven or eight bunkhouses. Those with families had a kitchen and two rooms, and they pasted sacks used for carrying cement onto the walls and stacked hay bales outside the huts. There were many who tried to escape. About half the workers tried to escape within the first three months. In the bunkhouse there was a guard who would stand watch and carry a stick with a handle like a pick-ax. Those who were captured had their heads shaved and were beaten by their own Korean countrymen. I think those that tried to escape had relatives in Japan. The munitions factory in Osaki had higher wages and was considered a desirable place to escape to, so there were people from Hiraoka who

tried to escape to Osaki. Everyday before work, the bunkhouse heads would get 10 sen per worker. If they were free workers they got even more money.

American and British POWs arrived in 1943. There were around 500 in the beginning, but after a year around half of them had died. It felt like everyday we were carrying bodies for cremation. The first POW guard was very strict, and he was given the death penalty after the war and hung. The next boss was nicer, and he was honored by the United States after the war. A man named Captain Imamura did terrible things to the Chinese POWs, so much so that after the war the Chinese searched for Imamura. I later met Imamura when he was a subcontractor at Meiko Construction. As for the Kamijo team, his wife was very attentive. Because she gave rice balls to the Chinese laborers arriving to work, they were happier and more productive.

By around 1943 or 1944, there were many semi-forced laborers, including Koreans as well. Around that time I think there were about 150-200 workers at the power station and over 300 at the dam. In total, I think there were less than 1,000 workers, perhaps around 700 to 800. I was only at Hiraoka until 1942, so I don't know much about what happened after that...

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#### **Testimony from the Japanese personnel (October 10, 1985)**

Mr. Etsuro Kitahara lives in Igara, Ida City. He was born in 1926 and was a teacher. He was 59 years old at the time of the interview. When he was a student of the former Iida Middle School, he was engaged in the construction of a tunnel in Kizawa located upstream of Tohyama as part of mobilization of labor services. At the age of 15 to 16, he worked there for four months from August to December in 1944. His job was to collect gravel and mix concrete with a mixer. He was told that "Once this dam is complete, we can generate enough power to manufacture three aircrafts in a day." In Kisawa, there were only middle school students who were placed there for work and Korean laborers. Korean people were the main workers. Their age varied between 20 to 60, but they were mostly in their 30s to 40s. When Mr. Kitahara was singing Arirang, a Korean senior approached and held his hands, saying "You must be Korean, otherwise you would not be able to sing so well" with tears. Someone called Mr. Kin was in charge of the site. He appeared to be around 40 and liked goat meat. His meal consisted of a bowl 80 percent full of starch (half grains such as rice and barley, and half sweet potatoes) and a soup with hijiki or vegetables. He never ate enough. He had books since he was a middle school student, but he was not able to study at all. There was a morning bugle call, but the sound was always off due to hunger.

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## **Ontake Power Station in Kiso, Uematsu Power Station**

Between 1944 and 1945, 2,014 people were brought from China and forced to build Ontake and Uematsu power stations. They lived in a poorly built wooden shed. They wore the same clothes as the ones they were wearing when they were forced to leave China. They were given small pieces of bread containing 40% bran, and were forced to work 12 hour shifts (one day shift, one night shift). 179 people died in about a year.

699 laborers (44 deaths) at Kajima, Ontake

299 laborers (23 deaths) at Taisei, Agematsu

723 laborers (92 deaths) at Seki, Ontake

293 laborers (20 deaths) at Tobishima, Ontake

A cenotaph was built at the suggestion of alumni of the former Nagano Middle School. However there is no clear picture of Korean laborers.

## **Hiraoka Dam, Yasuoka Dam**

2,300 Korean laborers were sent to Yasuoka Dam, where construction started in 1932. 2,000 Korean laborers were forced to work at Hiraoka Dam starting in 1939. There were many Korean people who were forced to work at Hirugami Power Station starting in 1943 and Iijima Power Station in Minami-shinano starting in 1944. The cenotaph at Hirugami power station is engraved with victim's names including 33 Japanese followed by 25 Chinese, and 13 Koreans. However it became clear that 62 Chinese laborers out of 1,083 died at the construction site managed by Kumagai in Hiraoka. It is estimated that about twice as many Korean people died, but the exact number remains unclear. For the Chinese victims, there is a gravestone with a carved message "Eternal Glory to Chinese Martyrs Deceased in Japan " on the east side of Hiraoka Dam. In 1942, Manchuria Prisoner-of-war camp (Tokyo Prisoner-of-war camp #12) was established in Hiraoka. There were consistently about 200 to 300 prisoners. They were mainly American and British soldiers, but there were also South East Asian, Dutch, and Canadian prisoners. 46 or 47 people died of a disease in the camp. The camp head and four others working under him were categorized as BC class war criminals and were executed by hanging for prisoner abuse after the war.

Note:

Reference

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東京書籍 地理B

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