

Introduction

On December 28, 2021, the Council for Cultural Affairs selected the Sado Gold mines as a candidate for UNESCO World Heritage registration. On the same day, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of South Korea issued a statement saying, “The decision to register the Sado mines, a site of forced labor, as a World Heritage site is deplorable, and we call for its immediate withdrawal.” The Korean media is also persisting in its daily reports portraying the Sado mines “as a site of Korean forced labor” and decrying the nomination.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida announced on January 28, 2022, just before the deadline for submitting recommendations, that he would apply for registration this fiscal year.

The prime minister's press conference at that time demonstrated the Kishida administration's stance on the issue of historical perception.

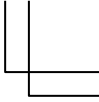
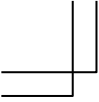
The Prime Minister stated, “With regard to the Sado Island gold mines, we have been conducting a comprehensive study with the aim of taking the most effective measures to realize the registration of the mines as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

The Sado mines are highly revered as a rare example of an enduring industrial heritage that operated on a large scale utilizing traditional handicrafts unique to Japan during the Edo period. On the other hand, we are aware that despite its inestimable value, there have been various discussions and opinions regarding its registration. Calm and careful discussion is required so that the wonderful value of the Sado gold mines might be recognized as a cultural heritage site.

Under these circumstances, we have repeatedly discussed when would be the most effective time to apply for registration and have come to the conclusion that applying this year and beginning discussions at an early date would be the quickest way to procure a listing. The Cabinet has decided to submit an application to UNESCO on February 1.

To that end, we will establish a task force for the World Heritage registration, headed by Mr. Takizaki, Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary, with the participation of relevant ministries and agencies, and will strengthen cross-agency efforts to deal with various discussions, including historical background. In doing so, we intend to actively utilize the knowledge of experts from the private sector and work together to realize the registration of the Sado mines.”


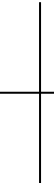
Prime Minister Kishida rejected South Korean claims, adding, “I am aware that there are various discussions and opinions regarding the registration of the site. However, as Foreign Minister Hayashi has stated, “Japan does not accept South Korea's claims regarding the Sado mines, and we have strongly appealed to the Seoul government on the matter. It is extremely regrettable that many reports in South Korea contravene the facts, but we will continue to explain our country's position to the international community” (ibid.).



However, neither the Prime Minister nor the Foreign Minister has clearly communicated the government's position on what part of South Korea's claims runs counter to the facts.

The Japanese government's position is already clear. On April 27, 2021, the Cabinet of Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga issued a decision stating, “We believe that labor performed through “recruitment,” “official mediation,” and “conscription” does not constitute “forced labor” under the Forced Labor Convention, and that it is not appropriate to refer to such labor as “forced labor.””

The Forced Labor Convention, to which Japan was a signatory before World War II, clearly states that wartime labor mobilization is not included in the definition of “forced labor” prohibited by the Convention.

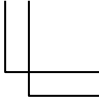
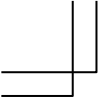


In 2015, at the time of the registration of the Hashima Coal Mine (Battleship Island) and other Meiji Industrial Revolution heritage sites on the World Heritage List, the government stated that it “intends to take measures to ensure that people understand that there were many people from the Korean Peninsula who were brought to Japan against their will and made to work under harsh conditions at some facilities in the 1940s and that the Japanese government also implemented a policy of conscription during World War II.” However, “made to work” was translated as “forced to work” in the English version of this document and consequently misconstrued as meaning “forced labor.”

Incumbent Prime Minister Kishida, who was Foreign Minister at the time, also stated, “This expression “forced to work” does not mean “forced labor.” The term “forced to work” as it appears in this statement simply indicates that people on the Korean Peninsula were also conscripted under the National Conscription Ordinance at the time—this is not any kind of revelation. There is a treaty on forced labor that prohibits the use of forced labor. However, it does not include wartime recruitment. Therefore, we believe that the Japanese wording in this statement, which is based on the National Conscription Ordinance, does not constitute forced labor” (press conference on July 5, 2015).

During both the second Abe and Suga administrations, the Office of the Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary, which is in charge of foreign policy in the Prime Minister's Office, was in charge of the so-called “historical front” and had been working tirelessly on these issues of historical contention.


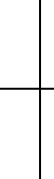
The Prime Minister's advisers (Seiichi Eto and Minoru Kihara) were placed in charge of the historical front at the political level, and together with the Office of the Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary, they had been fighting the war on historical truth together with the administration. Although not widely known, the Suga administration's cabinet decision on Korean wartime



labor, mentioned earlier, was also spearheaded by these aides and the Office of the Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary.

Although the Kishida administration has maintained the Office of the Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary, it has struggled to find suitable aides to take charge of the historical front. That is why we have called for the maintenance and strengthening of the government's historical front response system established by the Abe and Suga administrations in the previously mentioned policy recommendations.

On January 24, 2022, Prime Minister Kishida was asked by Representative Sanae Takaichi of the House of Representatives Budget Committee, “In the second Abe Cabinet, at the behest of Prime Minister Abe, the Office of the Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary began a history public relations program, which the Suga Cabinet took over (omission). Will the Office of the Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary continue to be in charge of international public relations for historical awareness under the Kishida cabinet?” In response, Kishida replied, “In my Cabinet, we are continuing the system that has been in place since the Abe Cabinet regarding issues related to historical awareness, and the entire government, centering on the Office of the Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary, will continue to firmly address historical issues, including international public relations.”

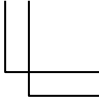
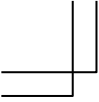


With his answer, Prime Minister Kishida solidified his cabinet’s framework for dealing with issues on the historical front. His earlier statement that “a task force will be established, headed by Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Takizaki, to deal with various discussions, including the historical background (of the Sado mines)” can be seen as an extension of this.

Of particular significance was the Prime Minister’s announcement of his intention to “actively utilize the knowledge of experts from the private sector.” We at the Historical Awareness Research Committee, which has been studying and communicating the position that Korean wartime labor was not “forced mobilization” or “forced labor,” felt that our cue had come when we heard Kishida's statement.


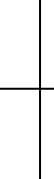
We conducted a field survey on Sado Island in February 2022 and held an academic seminar, “The Reality of Korean Wartime Labor at the Sado Mines,” in Tokyo on March 23, 2022. Four Japanese scholars and activists, including myself, a Korean scholar, and a journalist, were the speakers at the event. This report has been compiled based on these presentations and features several significant revisions.

First, I, the chairman of the Historical Awareness Research Committee, delivered a report titled “Korean Wartime Labor and the Sado Mine” as a general introduction. After providing an overall picture of Korean wartime labor and the actual situation on Sado Island, I gave a detailed



refutation of the 13-point basis for the argument of forced labor as posited by a certain Korean researcher.

Following this, Mr. Kanji Katsuoka, Executive Director of the Historical Awareness Research Committee, gave a report on “The History of Korean Wartime Labor Research in Postwar Japan,” in which he summarized—from the perspective of research history—how propaganda against the historical facts of the forced mobilization of Koreans was born in Japan in the 1960s and how it spread to Korea.

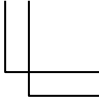
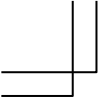


The third presentation was from Yumiko Yamamoto, representative of the NGO Nadeshiko Action, which has been actively engaged in public relations activities on the issue of historical awareness at the UN and elsewhere. In her presentation, titled “Interpreting the ILO Convention: Is Wartime Labor a Violation of the Forced Labor Convention?”, Yamamoto conducted a detailed study of how this issue has been addressed in the annual reports of the ILO's Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations, which are merely the opinions of experts and are not binding under the Convention. Yamamoto analyzed how the statement “Korean wartime labor is a violation of the International Labor Organization (ILO) Forced Labor Convention” came to be included in the annual reports at the urging of anti-Japanese forces in Japan and South Korea, and called on the Japanese government to submit a rebuttal based on its stance to the ILO's Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations.

The fourth paper, “The Actual Conditions of Korean Wartime Labor at the Sado Gold Mines,” by Ryosuke Nagatani, a researcher at the Historical Awareness Research Committee, refutes the theories of forced mobilization and forced labor based on factual data acquired through field research.

The fifth presentation, “The Migration, Mobilization, Working Environment, and Daily Lives of Korean Laborers at the Sado Mines, 1940-1945: A Critique of the “Forced Mobilization” and “Forced Labor” Arguments” by Dr. Lee Woo-yeon, a leading scholar on this issue in the Korean academic community, was a substantial addition to this seminar. It is the pinnacle of academic research on this issue; based on historical documents, Korean scholars have completely debunked the theory of forced mobilization and forced labor. This report will play a significant role in future international public relations.

The final report, “The Present State of the Movement in South Korea Against the Registration of Japan's Sado Island Gold Mines as a World Heritage Site,” by Hwang Ui-won, a representative of Media Watch, a Korean online media outlet, provides a clear summary of the situation surrounding this issue in South Korea.



Mr. Hwang's conclusion is vital: "Japan must first openly defend the truth; it must realize that its current attitude of neglecting the truth in favor of prioritizing a passable relationship with South Korea above all else is hugely detrimental to the future relations between the two countries. (Abbreviation) These South Korean fabulists have already accepted Japan's declaration of historical war. It is time for the forces of truth in South Korea and Japan to further consolidate their position and fight back". Hwang conceives of the controversy over the registration of the Sado gold mine as a UNESCO cultural heritage, not as a dispute between Japan and South Korea, but between "the forces of truth" and the "fabulists" in both countries. The Historical Awareness Research Committee concurs with Mr. Hwang's opinion.


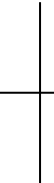
For those who wish to learn more about the reality of Korean wartime labor, please refer to the following bibliography.

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