

Presentation 2

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The History of Korean Wartime Labor Research in Postwar Japan

1. The Generalization of the Term “Forced Mobilization” Began in the 1980s

Although the term “forced mobilization” is widely used today, it did not exist during the war. Therefore, tracing its origins and how it came to be used may reasonably merit its own field of research.

When exactly did this term “forced mobilization” come to replace the term “recruitment” that existed during the war?

According to Chung Daekyun, the words “forced mobilization of Koreans” first appeared in 1960 (*Myth of the Forced Mobilization of Koreans in Japan*, Bunshu Shinsho, 2004). However, in terms of influence on posterity, the origin of “forced mobilization of Koreans” as an issue of historical awareness began with Park Kyong-sik’s 1965 *Record of the Forced Mobilization of Koreans* (Mirai-sha Publishers). This book has become something of a bible for “forced mobilization” activists and is still highly regarded as a monumental work today.

However, this book did not immediately give rise to the widespread historical awareness of “forced mobilization”.

It was not until the 1980s that the term “forced mobilization” was generalized. I investigated the frequency of the term “forced mobilization” in articles on Chinese, Koreans, and comfort women in the Asahi Shimbun database, only to discover that extensive reporting on the “forced mobilization of Koreans” did not begin until after the mid-1980s.

Table 1: Change Over Time in the Frequency of Use of “Forced Mobilization” (Chinese, Korean, Comfort Women) in the Asahi Shimbun (Approximate Figures)

Edition	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	
Chinese	1												1	2			1				
Korean					1									2	1	8					
Comfort Women																					
Edition	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	total
Chinese			1			2		3	3	5	23	13	10	21	39	37	15	36	37	46	296
Korean		1	2	4	11	17	23	14	34	66	178	123	98	59	73	109	57	79	76	45	1081
Comfort Women			1				1		1	3		24	64	19	10	8	25	56	56	8	229

The Actual Conditions of Korean Wartime Labor, edited by Tsutomu Nishioka (National Congress of Industrial Heritage, 2021, p79)

A literature review on the forced mobilization of Koreans reveals that the theory of “forced mobilization” was not the mainstream perception between the 1950s to the 1960s. As indicated by Yoshio Morita, most of the Koreans who came to Japan were migrant workers, and the prevailing view was the logical understanding that they came to Japan to live a better life. Park's History of the Forced Mobilization of Koreans was published as the antithesis of this theory, after which the “forced mobilization faction” eventually came to dominate the mainstream of academia between the 1970s and 1980s.

In contrast, there was no literature rejecting this “forced mobilization” theory for 25 years after it was first posited by Park in 1965; the literature of critics of the “forced mobilization” theory only began to appear in Japan in the latter half of the 90's. Even today, the literature of conservatives critical of the “forced mobilization” and “forced labor” arguments remains less than one-tenth of the literature of their proponents. (My paper “The History of the Korean and Chinese “Forced Mobilization” Movement”, and The Actual Conditions of Korean Wartime Labor, edited by Tsutomu Nishioka (National Congress of Industrial Heritage, 2021))

Originating with Park Kyong-sik's History of the Forced Mobilization of Koreans, the mainstream ascendancy in academia of those who assert that “forced mobilization” did, in fact, take place remains unchanged today.

2. The Historical Research Committee on Japanese-Korean Movements and Studies in the History of Korean Residents in Japan

Park organized the Historical Research Committee on Japanese-Korean Movements in 1976, and the study group's journal *Studies in the History of Korean Residents in Japan* produced many researchers who lauded Park as a teacher. The issue of "forced mobilization" at the Sado gold mines also figured among these developments, as most of the literature dealing with the issues of the "forced mobilization" and "forced labor" of Koreans in Niigata Prefecture was first published in *Studies in the History of Korean Residents in Japan*.

The following are examples of documents that appeared in the journal.

- Document from the Sado Mining Operations "Concerning Korean Personnel Management", *Studies in the History of Korean Residents in Japan*, Issue 12, 1983.
- Yasuji Sato "The Massacre of Koreans in Nakatsugawa, Niigata Prefecture", *Studies in the History of Korean Residents in Japan*, Issue 15, 1985.
- Yuko Hashizawa, "The Korean Labor Movement in Niigata Prefecture", *Studies in the History of Korean Residents in Japan*, Issue 17, 1987.
- Shigeru Nagasawa "Niigata Prefecture and the Forced Mobilization of Koreans", *Studies in the History of Korean Residents in Japan*, Issue 19, 1989.

What these papers (with the exception of the first document) have in common is that they all accepted the perception in Park Kyong-sik's *History of the Forced Mobilization of Koreans* and applied it to historical events in Niigata prefecture.

In his paper "Niigata Prefecture and the Forced Mobilization of Koreans", Shigeru Nagasawa stated that "until around 1942, the Sado gold mines alone accounted for more than half of the number of forced Korean laborers in the prefecture" (page 6). Despite this assertion, he pointed out that there was almost no research on the subject:

<< There is almost no mention of the forced mobilization of Koreans in Niigata Prefecture in either the *History of Niigata Prefecture* (compiled by Niigata Prefecture, 1970-) or the histories of its various municipalities. Also, as general research has only just commenced, it has yet to yield any substantial results. >> (Page 1, Note (2))

Such was the state of research at the end of the 1980s.

3. A Dramatic Turn of Events: Descriptions of "Forced Mobilization" in The History of Niigata Prefecture and the History of Aikawa Town

The situation changed with an account in the eighth edition of *A Comprehensive History of Niigata Prefecture: Modern History Volume 3* (1988). The paragraph "Forcibly Mobilized Koreans" (Chapter 4, Section 2.5) contained the following claim under the subheading "Niigata Prefecture and the Forced Mobilization of Koreans":

“Although the labor mobilization plan initiated in 1939 changed in name from “recruitment” to “official mediation”, to “conscription”, this does not change the fact that Koreans were forcibly mobilized.” (Page 782)

This paragraph was written by Yasushi Sato (list of authors, p. 878), a member of the above-mentioned Historical Research Committee on Japanese-Korean Movements. Considering that this research group held Park in high esteem as a mentor, it is most likely that Sato wrote this in keeping with his teacher’s theory of the “forced mobilization of Koreans”. However, in light of contemporary international law, it is clear that neither “recruitment”, “official mediation”, nor even enforceable “conscription” can be considered “forced mobilization”.

It is a significant issue that such a patent falsity was published in the History of Niigata Prefecture, an official publication, but this marked the beginning of the Sado Mines’ involvement in the “forced mobilization of Koreans” issue, which continues to this day.

Following the History of Niigata Prefecture came A Comprehensive History of Sado Aikawa: Modern History (Aikawa Town, 1995), which detailed the local history of Aikawa Town, where the Sado gold mines are located. The following entry, which echoed the description contained in the prefectural history, appeared under the subheading “Forced Mobilization of Korean Laborers”:

<< Many Koreans came to the mines to work during the war, as described in the 10th edition of the Modern History of Niigata Prefecture :

“Although the labor mobilization plan initiated in 1939 changed in name from “recruitment” to “official mediation”, to “conscription”, this does not change the fact that Koreans were forcibly mobilized.”

The number of people mobilized to the prefecture on January 17 was purportedly 1708, with the Sado mines receiving 802, more than any other single area within the prefecture (Records of Modern Peoples Vol. 10: Korean Residents in Japan, edited by Yusaku Ozawa). (Omission) The unusual measure of forced mobilization of Koreans to the Sado mines began as part of the wartime national policy of gold mining and only came to an end with the conclusion of the war. 》 (Pages 679-684)

Such is the manner in which the history of Aikawa Town adheres to the views espoused in the History of Niigata Prefecture in the same way that the prefectural history follows those in Park Kyong-sik’s History of Forced Mobilization of Koreans. It would be no exaggeration to say that these three texts share an academically incestuous relationship/ “The apple does not fall far from the tree”, as the idiom goes.

4. The Errors in Park's Arguments Acknowledged by the "Forced Mobilization" Faction

However, the term "forced mobilization" has even been subjected to considerable criticism among the "forced mobilization" faction.

For example, Kim Yong-dal, who is considered to be Park's successor, pointed out the inadequacy of the term and criticized it unequivocally.

<< The definition of "forced mobilization" has not yet been established and varies substantially from person to person. (Omission) Without a common understanding of its substance and gravity, the term "forced mobilization" is perceived as though it were a singular, historical term that simply refers to a specific historical phenomenon at a specific point in history, leading to no small degree of confusion.

This means that each person who uses the term "forced mobilization" must clearly indicate the meaning and scope of the term in advance. However, this creates an increasingly chaotic melee of vying opinions, from those who define "forced mobilization" as all those Koreans who traveled to Japan, to those who say that only the Korean workers conscripted under the National Requisition Ordinance qualify as "forced mobilization", to those who claim that all those, including Japanese, subject to legally enforced mobilization during the war constitute "forced mobilization".

Therefore, what I would propose is a conceptual reconstruction whereby the term "wartime mobilization" is used generically to refer to the Koreans forcibly mobilized during the war, and the term "forced mobilization" in relation to the specific phase of violence that took place within the wartime mobilization. >>

("Study of the Forced Mobilization of Koreans", Works of Kim Yong-dal Vol. II, Kim Yong-dal, Akashi Shoten, pp. 45-46)

Kim Yong-dal thus admitted that the ambiguous concept of "forced mobilization" originally used and disseminated by Park Kyong-sik, had generated various misunderstandings and suggested the term "wartime mobilization" instead.

However, his premature death has partially contributed to the intensifying confusion today in the debate over "forced mobilization". Nothing attests to this better than the pragmatic perception in the History of Niigata Prefecture and the history of Aikawa Town that neither "recruitment", "official mediation", nor "conscription" "change the fact that Koreans were forcibly mobilized".

5. Clarifying the "Historical Facts" Across the Public and Private Sectors

Throughout the 1990s, Park Kyong-sik's vision lived on through the activities of the National Assembly for the Study of Forced Mobilization and Forced Labor of Koreans and Chinese and

has been supported since 2005 by the Network for Research on Forced Labor Mobilization (represented jointly by Yuka Anzako and Yousan Hida). These organizations are also working closely with South Korea on the issue of the Sado gold mines.

For example, the Northeast Asian History Foundation in South Korea held an academic seminar on February 16 titled “Response to the Forced Registration of Japan’s Sado Mines as a World Heritage Site and its Connotations”, the first speaker of which was the Deputy Director-General of the Network for Research on Forced Labor Mobilization, Hisashi Kobayashi.

In his presentation “Focusing on the Purpose, Course, and Recent Developments of the Sado Mines’ World Heritage Registration”, Kobayashi made the following statement.

《Current Prime Minister Kishida wears a blue badge on his chest, just as Mr. Abe did before him. However, this historical awareness and the values it connotes are not grounded in historical facts but fiction and fabrications conjured up purely for the sake of self-satisfaction. Such values could not be further from those of the World Heritage, which holds that “heritage is for all mankind” and is not to be bastardized for selfish motives. 》

The members of this organization show no reservation in declaring that the “historical awareness and values” of the “blue badge”, which the Prime Minister wears as a symbolic reminder of the need to rescue the Japanese nationals abducted by North Korea, “are not grounded in historical facts, but fiction and fabrications conjured up purely for the sake of self-satisfaction”. It should be all too apparent who is really using “fiction and fabrications” that “are not grounded in historical facts”.

On January 25, the Network for Research on Forced Labor Mobilization issued an emergency statement in which it made the following pronouncement:

《Regarding the UNESCO World Heritage registration of the Sado mines (“Sado Island gold mines”), the Japanese government declared at a press conference on January 21, 2022 that “South Korea’s unilateral claims regarding the Sado gold mines are completely unacceptable to Japan” (Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Kihara) and revealed that it had protested to the South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the end of last year. The Japanese government has thus officially denied South Korea's allegations concerning the forced labor of Koreans during the war. (Omission)

It is a historical fact that approximately 800,000 people were forcibly mobilized from the Korean Peninsula to Japan through the wartime labor mobilization policy under Japan’s system of total war. South Korea's claim that the Sado mines were the site of forced labor is

true; perceiving it as a “unilateral claim” and “unacceptable” denies the history of forced labor. The Tokyo government should refrain from historical denial and take this opportunity to acknowledge the truth of forced labor. Stigmatizing South Korea’s comments is not the right approach. 》

For all the talk of “historical facts” and “truth of forced labor”, the “facts” of history they insist upon are simply the brandishing of Park Kyong-sik’s five-decade-old History of the Forced Mobilization of Koreans in cultlike worship; mere assertions of “forced mobilization” and “forced labor” unsupported by historical facts.

Today, there is also a veritable wave of expostulations against these claims coming from South Korean scholars who completely repudiate the arguments of “forced mobilization” and “forced labor” by South Korea (Anti-Japanese Tribalism; The Struggle Against Anti-Japanese Tribalism).

I heard that we would be hearing about these counterarguments from the South Korean speakers today, so I am very much looking forward to it. We must determine what is “historical fact” and unite with the public and private sectors in fighting this historical war against South Korea’s preposterous claims. Therefore, it is genuinely heartening to know that there are South Koreans who subscribe to our arguments.

I hope that we can work together in bringing the facts of history to light.