

**The Sado Mines Were Not a Site of Forced Mobilization or Forced Labor:
A Statement by Japanese and Korean Researchers**

On April 11, 2023, Japan's The Network for Research on Forced Labor Mobilization and the South Korean The center for Historical Truth and Justice submitted a statement to UNESCO regarding the registration of the Sado mines as a World Heritage site. These organizations claimed that the Japanese government's application to register the mines as a World Heritage site violated the spirit of UNESCO, alleging that Sado was the site of wartime forced mobilization and forced labor of Korean laborers.

However, there is a significant academic flaw in their claims. Grounded in primary documents, the latest research on the Sado mines from Japan and South Korea unequivocally disproves allegations of forced mobilization and forced labor. Records show that Koreans went to Sado of their own volition. When workers were recruited on the Korean Peninsula for wartime work at the Sado mines, one village had 40 applicants, despite a maximum of 20 laborers who could be taken on. At the labor sites on Sado Island, Korean workers received considerable discounts for daily necessities, were provided with various types of welfare, and entertainment, and were paid the same wages as Japanese workers. Bonuses were also paid upon the renewal of labor contracts, and existing documents prove that those who did not wish to renew their contracts could return home.

The claims of the abovementioned two groups are based almost exclusively on recent testimonials. When examining the testimonials, the absence of any proof of forced mobilization or forced labor is immediately apparent. Many of the testimonials are also riddled with inconsistencies. It should be noted that these testimonials made by South Koreans concerning the Sado mines contain material which appeared in 2005 during the South Korean government's project to compensate former Korean laborers and their bereaved families. Although testimonials involving money must necessarily be fully verified, the groups advancing such testimonials have failed to do so. The basis for allegations of forced mobilization and forced labor is thus highly tenuous.

Furthermore, the application for World Heritage registration covers the Sado mines during the Edo period and does not include the period of Japanese rule on the Korean Peninsula. Therefore, whether or not Koreans were forcibly mobilized and subjected to forced labor is irrelevant to World Heritage registration. Some have claimed that the time scope was specifically limited to the Edo period to cover up the issue of Korean workers. However, this is entirely untrue. Following the advice of foreign experts, Sado City limited the application to the Edo period, an era which is uniquely Japanese. The Network for Research on Forced Labor Mobilization and the center for Historical Truth and Justice also point to forced labor in the Edo period, which is apparently a reference to the labor of "mushukunin." "Mushukunin" were people who had been disowned by their parents or excluded from the religious registries of temples and shrines and had therefore lost the means to work. Over the course of a century, the Sado mines accepted 1,874 of these *mushukunin*. It is worth noting, however,

that at the time, so many people were abandoning their fields to seek work at the Sado mines that a law was enacted prohibiting travel to Sado. The labor of *mushukunin* constituted only a fraction of the entire workforce at the Sado mines. The majority comprised workers who came to Sado voluntarily. Therefore, the claim of forced labor during the Edo period is a malicious fabrication.

The claims of those who cry forced labor in relation to the Industrial Heritage Information Centre's Hashima Island (Gunkanjima) exhibit are similarly baseless. A typical example is the testimonial of Koo Yeon Cheol, a self-proclaimed former laborer at the Hashima Island coal mine. He claims to have come to Hashima Island in 1939 at the age of nine and lived there for six years, during which time he said he witnessed scenes of Korean laborers being abused. However, his story contravenes the facts, with claims that he saw another island he could not possibly have seen from Hashima, and that Japanese soldiers took care of the Korean laborers' meals. Koo also claims that he was a high achiever and the head of his class at school, and yet former islanders who would have been his classmates at the island's only school swear they never heard of him, and there are no records of his having been a pupil there. What Koo says does not prove that Hashima Island was the site of the forced mobilization and forced labor of Koreans; Koo's is simply the case of a self-proclaimed witness, for whom no evidence of his having lived on Hashima Island exists, telling incoherent stories. Does refusing to exhibit something for which no evidence exists constitute a reason for criticism?

We, Japanese and South Korean researchers, held an academic seminar titled "The Reality of Korean Wartime Labor at Sado Mines" in Tokyo on March 23, 2022. Our symposia, "The Sado Mines and Korean Wartime Laborers," held in Tokyo and Niigata on July 9 and 10, 2022, respectively, academically criticized the theories of forced mobilization and forced labor. The proceedings of these efforts were later published in booklet format.

There is no need to adopt academically debunked and virtually unsourced theories of forced mobilization and forced labor. The Network for Research on Forced Labor Mobilization and the center for Historical Truth and Justice ignore the principles of freedom, equality, and democracy, and distort history. In unjustly maligning the Sado mines by wantonly using them as fodder for disputes about Korean laborers—disputes which have nothing to do with the World Heritage application criteria in the first place—these organizations are behind the obstruction of Japan-South Korea rapprochement and violate the UNESCO philosophy. It is our hope that UNESCO will consider the debate dispassionately and detachedly and make a reasoned decision.

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Japan: Tsutomu Nishioka, Chairman/President of the Historical Awareness Research Committee

South Korea: Lee Young-hoon, Head of the Syngman Rhee Academy