

Beyond *The Bridge on the River Kwai*: Labor Mobilization in the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere

W. Donald Smith
University of Illinois

Abstract

Japan's war in Asia and the Pacific would have ground to a halt long before 1945 without the labor of millions of foreign workers, most of them mobilized against their will. For example, production of coal (then Japan's primary energy source) depended in large part on coerced labor from Korea, a Japanese colony from 1910 to 1945. Throughout Japan's wartime empire, at least fifteen million Asians were put to work, often under brutally exploitative conditions, constructing roads, bridges, and air fields; digging minerals; and building boats, among many other projects. Untold thousands died because of harsh treatment, inadequate food and medical care, and poor planning. Many surviving workers, some of whom were left permanently disabled, are still waiting today for the wages they were promised. Such a large, destructive enterprise naturally had consequences that outlived the war. Coercive labor mobilization tore families and communities apart and sharpened class resentments, contributing to revolutionary upheavals after August 1945 in Korea and Indonesia, for example. In Japan itself, where mobilization took place on a relatively small scale and with comparatively little coercion, it left a complex, contradictory legacy, invigorating the labor movement in some ways and strengthening the hand of capital in others. Unlike the situation in Germany, where corporations have recently agreed to compensate wartime forced workers, both the state and corporations in Japan have refused to consider compensation for the foreign workers who kept Japan's war machine running from 1939 to 1945.

American interest in foreign forced labor in Nazi Germany has kept the issue in the headlines recently, forcing German multinationals to come to terms with surviving former workers. However, Japan's coercive mobilization of millions of workers across Asia has received little attention outside that region. On the rare occasions when Americans think of labor in the Japanese empire, the image that comes to mind is usually that of Allied prisoners of war (POWs) working on the Thai-Burmese railway, as dramatized in the film *The Bridge on the River Kwai*. The POWs were subject to extreme coercion and horrific working conditions, but their ordeal is just one small part of a much larger story. They were far outnumbered by the workers Japan mobilized around Asia, most of them against their will, for a variety of projects, including the construction of roads, airfields, and underground bunkers; coal and metal mining; shipbuilding; and factory work. Even on the Thai-Burmese railway, Asian workers outnumbered POWs by a ratio of over three to one.

Japan began building its overseas empire in 1895 with the takeover of Taiwan, adding Korea in 1910, and setting up a puppet state in Manchuria in 1932. Colonial workers played a key role as a reserve labor force in Japanese industrialization, with Koreans especially important in mining and construction in Japan between the two world wars.¹ Foreign labor became even more important as Japan shifted to a total war economy following its commencement of full-scale hostilities against China in 1937. Coercive mobilization of Korean workers began in 1939 and, as Japan incorporated more and more countries into its “Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere”² following the December 1941 bombing of Pearl Harbor and invasion of Southeast Asia, mobilization expanded and became even more coercive. By the end of World War Two in August 1945, at least fifteen million foreign workers had been incorporated for varying periods into Japan’s imperial war economy. “Co-prosperity” was a cruel joke, of course; only the Japanese—particularly the corporate and state elites—and a few of their collaborators around Asia profited from the war. Labor mobilization played an important part, however, in the general social and political upheaval that brought the prewar European colonial order in Asia to an end and set the stage for the violent struggles of the postwar period.

Mobilization of Japanese Civilians

While the peripheral regions of the co-prosperity sphere were to be developed as sources of raw materials and food, Japan itself was to remain the center of the sphere, not only in military, political, and financial terms but in industrial capacity. Mobilization of the Japanese work force was therefore an important concern for wartime planners. Although the Japanese state employed a degree of compulsion even in the mobilization of its own people, programs directed toward Japanese civilians were by far the least coercive of any in the empire. A legal basis for state control of labor (and material resources as well) was established by the National General Mobilization Law of 1938,³ but the state made only limited use of its powers under this act. Outright labor conscription was never applied to women⁴ and accounted for only eight percent of male civilian employees at its peak.⁵ While the threat of conscription probably encouraged many other men to take jobs in war plants,⁶ coercive programs were supplemented with a mixture of incentive pay, appeals to patriotism, mobilization into voluntary labor organizations, and the transfer of workers from nonessential occupations.

The Japanese state’s mobilization of its own civilians was not only much less coercive than the mobilization of foreign labor but began later as well. Japanese civilians were first enrolled under the National General Mobilization Law in November 1941. This was more than two years after workers mobilized under Japanese state sponsorship in Korea began arriving at Japanese mines and factories.⁷

Male civilians aged sixteen to forty and unmarried women aged sixteen to twenty-five had to register for labor conscription in Japan, although only men were actually called up for war work. Altogether, some 1.5 million men were conscripted for factory duty, and patriotic industrial groups, neighborhood as-

sociations, and police joined forces to persuade others to take war jobs before they were conscripted. High wartime taxes and steep prices for daily necessities pushed others to work. In February 1944, labor registration was expanded to men aged twelve to fifty-nine and unmarried women aged twelve to thirty-nine, but again only men were actually called up. Later that year, a job freeze kept 4.5 million workers from leaving their jobs in critical industries.⁸

Unions had been relatively weak in prewar Japan, organizing only eight percent of the nonagricultural work force at their peak, but even this was seen as a threat as Japan moved toward a war economy. A combination of repression of militant unions (and the Left) and the promotion of government-sponsored “patriotic” unions weakened the labor movement severely in the 1930s, clearing the ground for the abolition of all autonomous labor organizations in 1940. In their place, employers set up semicompulsory “industrial service clubs” as a means of controlling labor and maximizing production,⁹ and these “clubs” enrolled a far greater number of workers than had the prewar unions.¹⁰

The full-time labor force was supplemented by the mobilization of Japanese citizens (and a few Korean residents of Japan) into a short-term “people’s patriotic labor corps” under a 1941 ordinance.¹¹ Under this program, 3.9 million civilians were mobilized in 1942, increasing to 5.17 million in 1944, for work in factories and mines. These numbers look impressive, but each person could be mobilized for at most thirty days per year,¹² hardly long enough to learn anything more than the simplest tasks.

The patriotic labor program applied to all men of prime working age (fourteen to forty) but only to some women: those who were unmarried and between fourteen and twenty-five. This discrepancy was typical of official reluctance to make full use of women’s productive capacity despite a labor shortage that worsened as the war went on. Some measures were taken, however, to involve more women in war production. Women were channeled from “nonessential” industries such as textiles into war production, and others already doing work considered important were frozen in their jobs. Protective legislation was suspended, and women over twenty-five were sent back underground into the coal mines, from which they had been banned in 1933.¹³

The government’s reluctance to remove women of childbearing age from the home was partly because of their importance in producing the next generation of soldiers and colonists. Women also played an important role in state ideology, however. The Japanese stem family buttressed the ruling political, social, and economic order as Japan began to industrialize in the late nineteenth century. Capitalist development began to undermine the stem family as both a kinship structure and an agricultural labor organization, however, and by the 1920s, family-state ideology was on the wane. The development of individualism and the notion of the family as part of the private sphere further eroded the family-state concept of the nation. As men left the villages for industrial employment and then military service, leaving a vacuum at the center of the patriarchal family system, women, as wives and mothers, were called upon to repair tears in the fabric of the stem family before the social order as a whole began to unravel.¹⁴

Structural factors also made it difficult to rely on women for a solution to the wartime labor shortage. Many women workers, as Janet Hunter has pointed out, were tied up in inefficient sectors. For example, women accounted for over half of the workers in agriculture, which occupied forty-four percent of Japan's working population in 1940 despite contributing only 18.8 percent of gross national product (GNP). With no way of quickly increasing agricultural efficiency, women's work in the rice fields was critical to maintaining food supplies. Consequently, much of what growth there was in the female labor force went into the agricultural sector. Despite efforts to channel workers out of service occupations, mines and factories also faced serious competition for female labor from employers such as department stores.¹⁵

With policy makers both unwilling and unable to mobilize women as fully as in Britain or the United States (although more women, proportionally speaking, were mobilized than in Germany), the female civilian labor force increased only slowly, from 12.8 million in October 1940 to 14 million in February 1944. Male civilian labor remained static at around 19.5 million, increasing the female share of the civilian labor force from thirty-nine percent to forty-two percent. In terms of the labor force as a whole, including the military, however, women's share was almost unchanged from 37.3 percent in 1940 to 37.4 percent in 1944.¹⁶

The remaining gap in the labor force was filled in large part, as we will see shortly, by colonial labor, but this was supplemented, especially late in the war, by Japanese school and university students. As Japan's economic situation became nearly as desperate as its military position, the government shortened most secondary school programs by a year in April 1943 to release students for war work. This failed to make a dent in the labor shortage so, after April 1944, all students over ten had to join a "voluntary labor corps" for nearly full-time work on farms or in industry.¹⁷ Students were too young and inexperienced to be of much help to some of the industries to which they were assigned, but they did play an important role in aircraft and machinery production, accounting for around eight percent of workers in each sector in early 1944.¹⁸

Coal Industry

One destination for civilians organized into patriotic labor groups was the coal industry, which supplied over half the energy that kept the Japanese war economy operating but faced a severe labor shortage because of the army's conscription of thousands of skilled miners. In April 1944, for example, the coal mines had 17,611 labor corps members and 2,179 seasonal workers, together accounting for some four percent of the industry's labor force. These temporary workers were portrayed in the press as enthusiastic miners who made a great contribution to coal production. In reality, however, many were unhappy to be at the mines, and mine managers were no happier to have them.¹⁹

Because temporary workers, most of whom had no mining experience, stayed for a month at the longest, it was pointless to train them for anything but the simplest tasks. The corps members contributed so little that an industry as-

sociation complained that they were actually interfering with production.²⁰ Despite their inexperience, the majority of short-term mine workers—78.9 percent of them in April 1943, for example—were assigned to underground jobs. Despite the high proportion underground, just 21.9 percent of short-term mine workers were hewers, while 17.2 percent—three times the average for all groups—were miscellaneous underground workers,²¹ suggesting problems finding suitable tasks for these inexperienced workers.

Even in aboveground positions, short-term workers caused serious problems for their employers (and themselves), as the head of the coal sorting plant at a Mitsubishi mine recalled. As the war intensified, everyone from local schoolchildren and housewives to followers of the Tenrikyō religion and cooks from other parts of Japan would be in and out of the plant, one group after another. “They were all inexperienced amateurs, so they couldn’t do a real day’s work,” Yamamoto Yoshimitsu said. “We had real problems, such as when elementary school pupils would fool around on the job and accidentally get themselves killed.”²² Overall, it is clear that short-term workers were of even less value to the mines than their small numbers would suggest.

Women were also brought back into the mines starting in August 1939 as full-time workers, as already mentioned. Wartime women underground miners never numbered more than one-sixth of their prewar peak, but they were important to coal production because many of them, unlike most new male workers, had mining experience, gained before the 1933 ban on their work.²³ Women were especially important at smaller mines, which had trouble securing large numbers of Korean workers.

Underground women miners reached a wartime peak of 11,411 (4.7 percent of all underground workers) in March 1944, but far more women worked aboveground at the mines. Women coal mine workers as a whole hit a wartime peak in March 1945 of 65,613, constituting 15.6 percent of the industry total.²⁴ The vast majority of these female workers were Japanese, but there were 369 Korean women or girls working in or at Japanese metal and coal mines as of June 30, 1944, according to official figures,²⁵ including girls as young as eleven assigned to coal-sorting.²⁶

Koreans at the Mines

For all the publicity given to the role of short-term Japanese workers at the mines, coal production would have slowed to a trickle without the more than three hundred thousand Koreans sent into Japanese mines between 1939 and 1945,²⁷ most against their will. Although most of the Koreans were farmers who had never even seen a mine, they dug over half the coal produced in Japan during the war and, because of their long-term status, made up a large proportion of experienced miners in Japan by the end of the war.

The importance of the coal industry to the war effort was reflected in the assignment of almost half the mobilized Koreans brought to Japan to the coal mines. Many others were put to work on dams, tunnels, airfields, and other con-

struction projects, while a large number also performed unskilled factory labor, especially in the final two years of the war. The vast majority of Koreans mobilized for work in Japan were male, although the official figure of 750 women, all brought in during fiscal 1944, is clearly too low. Unlike Germany, where around a third of foreign workers were assigned to agriculture,²⁸ Japan used very few Koreans in farming; supervision was difficult, and the Japanese didn't trust them. And, as one Ministry of Agriculture official said, "If we had wanted them to grow rice, we might just as well have left them in Korea."²⁹

Korean coal miners in Japan reached a peak of 136,825 in February 1945, when they accounted for 32.1 percent of all workers in the industry. Throughout the war, they comprised the second most numerous group in the mines, exceeded only by long-term Japanese workers, who accounted for 57.6 percent of the work force.

The remainder of the coal work force was comprised in February 1945 of short-term Japanese workers (6.9 percent), Allied POWs (1.5 percent), and Chinese (1.8 percent),³⁰ all of them relatively late additions to the wartime labor supply. Many Allied POWs and Chinese laborers—many of whom were also POWs despite Japan's refusal to recognize them as such—were malnourished and generally in extremely poor health when they reached Japanese work sites. Of 41,862 men assembled in China between April 1943 and May 1945 for work in Japan, for example, over 2,800 died before leaving China, close to 600 died en route to Japan, and over 200 more died before reaching their work assignments in Japan. Another 6,972 were recorded as having died at their work sites.³¹ Allied POWs sent to Japan did not fare much better. Of the 1,000 POWs sent to the Ube mines, for example, seventy-seven died en route of causes such as malnutrition, and so many of the others were ill that only 512 could actually be put to work.³²

Japan's major corporations argue today that they were merely following government policy in accepting Koreans for forced labor in their mines and factories, while the government claims that the responsibility lies with the corporations.³³ Both private capital and the state were, of course, actively involved but, at least in coal mining, it was the industry that pushed an initially reluctant government to "import" large numbers of Korean workers. As early as September 1937, soon after Japan plunged into full-scale war with China, coal industry associations, ignoring the call by a mining journal to resolve the industry's labor shortage by improving working conditions and facilities, began lobbying the government for help in securing Korean labor. The mines also sought permission to send women back underground and to relax restrictions on working hours for all miners. The government was slow to act on the industry's requests, partly because of tensions within the bureaucracy, but the cabinet approved a Korean labor mobilization plan in July 1939 and, a month later, the Welfare Ministry approved the resumption of underground female labor.³⁴

Mobilization in Korea can be divided into three stages of increasing coercion and state involvement. In the period of "group recruitment," from September 1939 until March 1942, the Japanese colonial bureaucracy in Korea assigned recruitment areas to companies. Local officials, many of them Koreans

themselves, then assembled workers for the approval of company officials. Post-war Japanese officials have described this period as one of voluntary recruitment, but the role of police and other colonial officials meant that workers were subject to pressure, especially when quotas were not met through truly voluntary recruitment.³⁵ While most coercion was relatively subtle during this period, some Koreans report that they were abducted and shipped off to Japan. Not so subtle coercion was also applied to ensure that Koreans got to their work sites and stayed there. To “facilitate the utilization” of Korean labor, the government directed in July 1940 that, in addition to improving training and encouraging “harmony-promoting” assimilation programs, the police forces were to be expanded in Pusan, Korea, and Shimonoseki, Japan, the principal ports between which workers traveled. Once workers arrived at a work site, that company was responsible for keeping them there under a 1939 government order prohibiting turnover at firms mobilizing Korean workers.³⁶

Despite the coercive aspects of “group recruitment,” Japanese mines and factories were still short of labor, especially after Japan’s attacks on Pearl Harbor and Southeast Asia in December 1941 dramatically expanded demand for fuel and munitions. In response, the more systematic and centralized system of “official arrangement” was implemented in March 1942. Unlike the previous system, in which each company selected workers at the township level after following a complicated application process, often paying off many officials in the process, companies or industry associations now turned to the Chōsen Rōmu Kyōkai (CRK), or Korea Labor Association, a “one-stop shop” for the supply of Korean workers. Once a company or industry association received recruiting permission, it left everything else up to the CRK.³⁷

The contract period for mobilized Korean workers, originally two years, was lengthened to two and a half years in 1943. The longer contract period only made recruitment more difficult, however, as did stories (most of them true) about companies forcing workers to “voluntarily” renew their contracts. With the “official arrangement” failing to supply sufficient labor and coal production declining, an openly coercive system of labor conscription was put in place in September 1944. Mobilization of workers now became entirely the responsibility of colonial officials, who simply ordered Koreans to join work groups bound for Japan. When that was insufficient, local officials would sometimes drive into the rice fields during the day or barge into houses in the middle of the night, throw men onto trucks, and send them to Japan.³⁸

Japan surrendered in August 1945, so official conscription of workers in Korea for Japanese industry was in effect for only a year. This new method of labor mobilization, however, appears to have come no closer to meeting Japan’s labor needs than did earlier systems. The openly coercive character of the system spurred increased resistance in Korea, and companies complained that local colonial officials had lost their enthusiasm for labor mobilization since the companies had stopped plying them with gifts.³⁹

Once Koreans reached Japan, they were held and managed by more coercive means than those applied to Japanese workers. The higher attendance rates

recorded by Korean miners, for example, despite their disproportionate concentration in injury-prone specialties within the mines, suggest that they were more commonly coerced into working even when injured or ill.⁴⁰ Close supervision at work sites and patrols of surrounding areas by company officials and police were not enough, however, to prevent a high proportion of Koreans from fleeing. Escapes were so common, in fact, that one mine was awarded a police commendation in 1943 for going four months without an escape. Overall, close to forty percent of Koreans sent to Japan during the war fled their work sites, some returning to Korea but most having no choice but to remain in Japan, where they often found work through black-market labor brokers.⁴¹ Many of these brokers were apparently long-term Korean residents of Japan, as were some low-level supervisors in the mines.

Working conditions, especially in the mines, were abysmal during the war, but this was less a wartime aberration than an intensification of prewar conditions. A lack of maintenance and supplies, coupled with intense pressure on workers to meet ever-higher production targets, made the mines even more dangerous places to work than they had been before 1939. Death rates were extremely high for all miners—around one percent annually by official figures—but Koreans were some twenty percent more likely than Japanese to die because of more coercive management, assignment to riskier areas of the mines, or a lack of training and Japanese language ability.⁴² Pay rates, meanwhile, were often similar, at least on paper, except at a few mines that posted openly discriminatory scales, although many Koreans were left with all or part of their wages unpaid at the end of the war.⁴³ While the differences in Japanese and Korean working conditions were significant, they were narrow enough to suggest that exploitation of the two groups was fundamentally similar in character, and that Japan's elites were willing to sacrifice working-class lives, regardless of nationality, to the imperial cause.

Those sent to Japan as miners, construction workers, or factory hands were hardly the only Koreans mobilized against their will in the service of the Japanese war effort. Koreans comprised the majority of the up to 200,000 young women forced into sexual servitude in war zones throughout Asia and the Pacific and at mines and construction sites in Japan.⁴⁴ Another 365,000 Koreans were conscripted by the military for use outside Japan as civilian workers, soldiers, or guards, while some 57,000 were sent to mines and other work sites in Sakhalin and the South Pacific.⁴⁵ Another four million Koreans were mobilized for forced labor in Korea itself, mostly at munitions plants and on construction projects.⁴⁶ Koreans, in turn, were just one of the many nationalities swept up in Japan's wartime labor mobilization.

The Burma-Thailand Railway

Japan's exploitation of labor in its wartime possessions was both briefer and more intense than in its colonies of Korea and Taiwan. For many in the West, that exploitation has been symbolized by *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, a drama-

tization of the construction of the Burma-Thailand railway. The railway, which Gavan McCormack and Hank Nelson have aptly called “Japan’s first large-scale multinational engineering and construction project,”⁴⁷ was designed to supply Japanese forces in Burma. Japan’s occupation in May 1942 of northern Burma allowed it to block the Burma Road, the only source for the gasoline and military supplies needed by Chiang Kai-shek’s Chinese Nationalist forces. The occupation was placed in jeopardy, however, when Japan lost control of the seas following its defeat in the Battle of Midway in June 1942. That same month, with the sea route south of Singapore increasingly vulnerable to American submarines, the Japanese military decided a land route had to be built allowing supplies to reach Burma from Japanese bases in neighboring Thailand. That route was the Thai-Burma railway.

The railroad, designed to link existing routes in Burma and Thailand, stretched 412 kilometers from Kanchanaburi, Thailand, to Thanbyuzayat, Burma, through an area of jungle so remote and malaria-infested that British engineers had declared construction of a railroad a practical impossibility.⁴⁸ Despite the tremendous difficulties presented by the terrain and torrential monsoon rains, the railroad was completed in just fifteen months, between July 1942 and October 1943.⁴⁹ The speed of the project exacted a horrific human cost, however.

The focus in the West, as in *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, has been on the experiences of Allied POWs, some 12,000 to 15,000 of whom died on the railway project.⁵⁰ In fact, however, the Asian death toll was far higher, with somewhere between 42,000 and 75,000 Asian workers succumbing to a combination of overwork, inadequate food and medical attention, beatings, and general ill-treatment.⁵¹ Altogether, 200,000 or more Asian workers, including Burmese, Malays, Tamils, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Javanese, and 60,000 Allied POWs were pressed into service over the course of the railway project, with the Asian work force peaking at around 80,000 at any given time.⁵² These figures produce fatality rates of at least twenty percent for both groups over the course of the project, including both the period of construction and the subsequent twenty-two months of maintenance work. This death toll, as high as it was, was hardly unprecedented, and some groups assigned to other wartime projects suffered considerably higher death rates. Some Asian work teams sent to Japanese-occupied New Guinea had death rates of eighty to ninety percent, for example.⁵³ For a sustained, large-scale project, however, the death rate on the railroad was extremely high.

With the exception of POWs, who made up an unusually high proportion of the labor force, and the some 13,000 Japanese soldiers involved,⁵⁴ labor mobilization for the railroad had much in common with other Japanese wartime projects. Japanese authorities and local officials under their command used a mixture of persuasion, deception, and coercion, with coercion becoming more common as time went on. Some workers in the British colony of Malaya, for example, at first went voluntarily on the promise of good pay and conditions,⁵⁵ just as some Koreans did in the first stage of labor mobilization in their country.

Soong Yit Koi, for instance, was stopped by a Japanese soldier on the street in Malaya and told that Japan was recruiting short-term civilian workers for the military. The conditions sounded better than Soong's present job, so he signed up, having no idea he would be sent to the railway project. Conditions on Soong's stretch of the project were in fact so severe that, of the 780 workers who left Malaya in his group, only forty-nine returned in July 1946.⁵⁶

In other cases, there was no attempt at persuasion; soldiers would simply abduct likely-looking workers. One young Indian rubber-tapper on a British plantation in Malaya, for example, was sleeping outside one night when Japanese soldiers seized him, threw him on a truck, and drove off. The rubber-tapper ended up in Thailand, where he was put to work clearing jungle and building roads.⁵⁷ In other cases, village officials recruited workers, bringing the power of the state to bear on reluctant residents when, as was generally the case, there were not enough volunteers to meet the quotas assigned to each village.

Mobilization, not surprisingly, had a strong class character to it. Just as in Korea, where those without money or influence were the first to be assigned to labor groups,⁵⁸ in Burma those who were better off could often buy their way out of work by bribing local officials to take their names off recruiting lists.⁵⁹ Mobilization also reflected preexisting ethnic and caste divisions. One of the largest groups of workers on the railroad comprised ethnic Indians from plantations in Malaya, where they grew sugar, coffee, tapioca, and rubber. Indians, many of whom belonged to outcast groups, made up some seventy percent of plantation workers in the 1930s and formed the base of a power structure dominated by British whites. The plantations provided a ready source of workers for the Japanese military, who simply inserted themselves in place of British supervisors.⁶⁰

Working conditions on the railroad were harsh, particularly for children. Some workers assigned to clearing jungle, building huts, and then building the actual railway were as young as twelve. One group sent from a rubber plantation in Malaya to the Thai jungle, for example, comprised ten girls aged twelve or thirteen and one aged fourteen. The fourteen-year-old was the only one to survive.⁶¹

Conditions were harsh even for adults, however. Hours were often brutally long. One group of Australian POWs, for example, left camp at seven a.m., often returning at two a.m., and at one point went twelve weeks without a day off. Even prisoners suffering from malaria, dysentery, and tropical ulcers were classified as "light sick" and sent out to work. As in so many other wartime projects, workers on the railroad were pushed even harder than they would have been otherwise because of inefficiency and poor planning. Because of incorrect survey levels, one Australian POW recalled, "it was not uncommon to build an embankment and then remove half of it, to dig a cutting and then fill in a portion of it."⁶²

The nature of railway construction in a mountainous area meant that casual brutality on the part of supervisors could have fatal consequences. Japanese engineers would strike workers bolting platform supports on a bridge across a

mountain stream, for example, with bolts, hammers or lengths of timber, “not a pleasant experience while six meters above the ground,” as an Australian POW recalled.⁶³

Mobilization in the Netherlands East Indies

As brutal as conditions were on the Thai-Burma railroad, they were typical of many projects throughout Japanese-occupied Southeast Asia. The Japanese rounded up workers for a variety of reasons throughout the region, but the Netherlands East Indies—present-day Indonesia—bore the brunt of coercive labor mobilization. Millions of workers were mobilized around Indonesia, the majority of them in Java, for projects ranging from agricultural production campaigns and the restoration of facilities destroyed by the retreating Dutch military to shipbuilding, coal mining, and railroad construction.

Securing oil supplies to fuel the naval war with the United States was Japan’s most important reason for occupying Southeast Asia in the months after Pearl Harbor. Once Japan seized control of Java in March 1942, however, it sought to make the densely populated island its “main supply base in the Southwest Pacific” and “to establish self-sufficiency in rice, cotton, jute, castor-oil, coal and certain other items,” as Shigeru Sato wrote. The military administration also sought to increase agricultural production by “extending irrigation and drainage systems, clearing forests and wild land, and converting land from non-agricultural to agricultural purposes,” much as Japan had done in Taiwan, Korea, and Manchuria, but more rapidly.⁶⁴

As of November 1944, 2,623,691 people were employed on Japanese projects in Java, over eighty-five percent of them by the military administration for “construction of a New Java.” Most of these projects were intended to increase agricultural production.⁶⁵ Many people were employed for short periods, so nearly ten million people in Java were probably mobilized at one point or another, according to Sato.⁶⁶ Java was by far the top supplier of laborers in the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere because of the island’s dense population and because it was never directly attacked by the Allies.⁶⁷

Some Javanese were dispatched overseas, but the total was probably less than 200,000,⁶⁸ perhaps one-fiftieth the number mobilized for work at home. They were sent to places including Burma, where they played a relatively minor role on the railroad project,⁶⁹ Sumatra, Sulawesi, British Borneo, Papua New Guinea, Malaya, Singapore, Indochina, the Andaman Islands, and Guadalcanal.⁷⁰ Somewhere between 25,000 and 50,000 of these Javanese were assigned to the Japanese military in Asia and the Pacific as civilian laborers on a variety of construction projects.⁷¹

Javanese workers, whether sent overseas or assigned to projects on their home island, were mobilized, like others throughout Asia, by a mixture of incentives, deceit, and coercion, with coercion becoming more dominant as time went on. In the initial stage of Japanese military rule, workers were recruited by ordinary administrative bodies but, as stories filtered back to the villages about

the harsh conditions and poor facilities involved, it became difficult to recruit workers in this way. As a result, local mobilization bodies were set up under regional "labor associations," with village officials having final responsibility for meeting recruitment quotas. Landless agrarian laborers and other uneducated people were the most likely to be chosen in rural areas, while petty traders, beggars, and the unemployed tended to be selected in the cities.⁷²

One of many projects in Java designed to increase agricultural production was the Neyama tunnel. Annual flooding during the rainy season fertilized fields with volcanic silt but also damaged crops and homes, so Japanese administrators ordered construction of this 800-meter-long tunnel through a limestone mountain to drain a twenty-square-kilometer swamp into the Indian Ocean. This swamp regularly overflowed during the rainy season so if it could be drained, administrators reasoned, much of the area's flooding could be averted.⁷³

With both equipment and funds in short supply, coercive labor mobilization was essential to rapid completion of the project. Up to 10,000 men a day worked on the first phase of the project, spending seven months cutting a four-kilometer-long open channel through a malaria-infested area inhabited by wild oxen and tigers. The labor force was reduced to an average of just 740 men a day during construction of the actual tunnel, since it was just two meters in diameter, but fatalities must have been high on this nine-month-long phase of the project. With neither drilling equipment nor engineers available, the tunnel was excavated with the materials at hand, primarily yellow powder removed from bombs the Dutch military had abandoned in the swamp, jack hammers borrowed from a Japanese company, adzes, and manual hammers.⁷⁴

The project consumed some two million worker-days of labor before its completion in August 1944, but it had a negligible effect at best in reducing flood damage. Soon after the war, parts of the tunnel caved in, and the waterway to the tunnel filled up with silt. The project's effects on mobilized workers and other area residents were much more long-lasting, however. Japanese authorities claimed that the tunnel claimed the lives of only some fifty-odd laborers, but one Indonesian source said hundreds died daily on the tunnel and a nearby prison construction project. The exact death toll will never be known, but even many of the workers who survived were left with bodies "thin and parched—bone wrapped in skin." The miserable condition of survivors turned the local population further against Japan and may have contributed to an anti-Japanese rebellion in February 1945.⁷⁵

As Japanese shipyards became less and less able to build enough ships to replace those being capsized by Allied torpedoes, meanwhile, Java was also assigned a key role in shipbuilding. Tokyo ordered most Japanese ships in Southeast Asia to be replaced with locally built wooden boats, and Java was to build sixty percent of those boats.⁷⁶

Every stage of the boat-building process was labor-intensive, from felling timber to actual construction of the boats. With timber being taken from remote locations with no good roads (and few trucks available even where there were

roads), hauling was done mostly with human and animal power, supplemented by river transport. Once the timber reached the shipyards, workers used axes brought from home to shape logs into planks, keels, and ribs, using green timber because there was no time to cure it.

One million men, including loggers, timber haulers, and shipyard workers, may have been employed daily on the boat-building project, but it was a tremendous waste of human and natural resources. Because of the technical difficulties workers faced, they were unable to meet production goals for engines, for example, and many of the engines they did produce failed. Even when engines worked, the boats in which they were installed often leaked because green timber shrinks as it dries. Overall, only ten percent of the boats produced were usable, making the project no match for the efficiency of Allied torpedoes. The project left forests devastated, factories robbed of parts, and houses stripped of fences, along with inestimable damage to the health of workers. At sawmills, for example, ax-wielding carpenters stood in lines on either side of a log, about one meter apart, and chopped away until the timber had taken on the desired form. The use of sharp tools in cramped quarters, combined with production pressure that led to work around the clock as deadlines approached, led to an accident rate that can only be imagined in the absence of records.⁷⁷

The Japanese authorities also sought to develop mines in occupied Southeast Asia. In some cases, the military directed the work itself. In Celebes (current-day Sulawesi, Indonesia), for example, Japanese soldiers forced villagers to dig and process mica, an essential ingredient for the burgeoning wartime electronics industry. Every month for over two years, a new group of about one hundred villagers would be sent to the remote mica mine to work for nine hours a day. Men dug, blasted, and hoisted rocks from the mines, while women trimmed, selected, and packed the mica blocks for transport.⁷⁸

More often, however, the authorities took advantage of the expertise of the *zaibatsu* conglomerates. Mitsubishi Mining, for example, which was already mining gold and iron in Korea, coal in China, and gold in Manchuria, in addition to operations in Japan, was asked to send technicians to Indochina after Japan occupied the French colony in September 1940. As the Japanese military expanded throughout Southeast Asia, Mitsubishi was assigned to mine coal on the Malay Peninsula, tungsten in Burma, copper and coal in the Philippines, and tin on Sumatra in the East Indies.⁷⁹

Another of Japan's top conglomerates, Sumitomo, was directed in March 1942 to mine gold and copper on the Philippine island of Mindanao, nickel and copper in Celebes, and coal at Bayah, Java.⁸⁰ Sumitomo Mining was given one year to develop the Bayah mine—a task that officials complained would take three or four years even at home in Japan with the kind of equipment that was not available in Java.⁸¹ Even if the mine could be developed, however, it would be useless unless the coal could be delivered where it was needed, so in August 1942, the military administration ordered construction of a 120-kilometer railroad out of the jungle.

Full-scale work on the railway began in June 1943, and 25,000 to 55,000 peo-

ple worked daily to finish what would normally be a ten-year project in under a year.⁸² A combination of incentives and coercion provided a steady supply of workers to replace the 400 to 500 who reportedly fled the railroad every day, but housing and medical care were so poor and the work so hard that, according to a local Japanese newspaper, the average laborer was physically exhausted in just sixty days.⁸³

The Bayah mine's annual target was 300,000 tons of coal, but production was only 4,000 tons in 1943 and never increased, even after completion of the railway in March 1944.⁸⁴ One major problem was that, while the mine had 15,000 to 20,000 workers on hand at any given time, assembled from across Java on military orders, half of them were too malnourished to properly do their jobs. Sumitomo officials pushed workers to dig more coal, telling them that this would hasten the day of Indonesian independence. Postwar President Sukarno, then a nationalist leader collaborating with the Japanese, apparently echoed these sentiments in speeches at the mine, but the workers insisted that they could be more productive only if they were fed properly.⁸⁵ Problems in getting supplies to the mine, combined with coal seams that were only sixty centimeters deep, also hindered production, as did death and escape rates so high that company officials complained they were never able to get a good head count.⁸⁶

We will never know how many workers died at the Bayah mine and on the adjacent railway project, but the region was infested by malaria and dengue fever, so illness, exacerbated by food shortages, no doubt joined accidents in claiming the lives of many workers.⁸⁷ After Japan's surrender in 1945, the railway tracks were torn up. The project, "undertaken in defiance of towering problems and completed on time at such heavy cost," as Sato pointed out, "thus proved . . . a total waste of time, resources and lives."⁸⁸

The Postwar Consequences

Sato's assessment of the Bayah project as a "total waste of time, resources and lives" could serve as a fitting epitaph for Japan's wartime labor mobilization as a whole, which left untold numbers of Asian workers dead in a futile effort to prolong Japan's imperialist war. Many other workers were left disabled for life, while thousands were simply abandoned, such as the 43,000 Koreans that Japan left behind as Soviet troops occupied Sakhalin.⁸⁹

The consequences of Japan's labor policies go beyond death and destruction, however. Labor mobilization played an important part in the general upheaval that tore many Asians from their prewar social moorings, freeing them to take part in movements for social and economic change. In the case of Korea, Japanese labor policy was one of the most important factors behind a diaspora that left 11.6 percent of the Korean population abroad by 1944, mostly in Japan and Manchuria.⁹⁰ This uprooting of millions of people who had expected to spend their whole lives in the villages where they were born ripped apart social and family connections, contributing to a volatile atmosphere that became even more charged when most workers returned from abroad in 1945 and 1946, bring-

ing with them, in the words of Bruce Cumings, “severe status and property losses and deep grievances.”⁹¹ Some of these grievances were against fellow Koreans—landlords who had been rich enough to keep their sons and daughters out of harm’s way, businessmen who had profited from dealings with Japan, and officials who had enrolled villagers for forced labor—adding to the powder keg of class tensions that exploded after 1945 in popular uprisings, guerilla warfare, and the ensuing Korean War.

Detailed research remains to be done on the role of returnees to Korea, but it seems likely that they not only contributed to social and demographic flux but took direct roles in the abortive revolutionary transformation of southern Korea in the months after liberation. A large number of Koreans, radicalized by their experiences in Japan, also headed to northern Korea upon their return to their homeland, even though most were natives of southern Korea. Cumings puts their number at some 350,000,⁹² but the lack of reliable records makes a firm estimate impossible.

In the Netherlands East Indies, meanwhile, just as in Korea, labor mobilization cut people’s ties to their villages and heightened class conflict. Japan’s labor programs also exacerbated conflict between generations and left a shortage of able-bodied workers. Many of the millions torn away from their villages in Java and other parts of present-day Indonesia were radicalized, not only by their own experiences but by seeing how their wealthier neighbors were able to buy their way out of mobilization and how many members of the Indonesian elite took part, albeit under Japanese pressure, in rounding up workers. This combination of class and generational tensions combined to discredit the prewar elite, and, as B. R. O’G. Anderson argues, formed the background for much of the violence of Indonesia’s 1945–1949 struggle for independence.⁹³

Coercive recruitment also exacerbated ethnic tensions, both in Indonesia and other parts of Southeast Asia. Existing ethnic hierarchies were reproduced and possibly intensified in the segmentation of labor on Japanese projects, as we saw in the disproportionately high number of ethnic Indians from Malayan plantations sent to work on the Burma-Thailand railway. The relatively privileged position of certain groups, such as ethnic Chinese traders in Indonesia, also increased resentment against these minorities when their wealth allowed them to evade labor mobilization.⁹⁴

In Japan itself, labor mobilization played a complex, ambiguous role in shaping a new postwar order. Some aspects of the wartime experience strengthened and radicalized the labor movement. The “industrial service clubs” set up in 1940, for example, provided, as John Dower has argued, a ready-built structure easily mobilized by the Left, serving as a “baseline” for the rapid unionization that followed Japan’s defeat.⁹⁵ The colonial workers brought to Japan during the war, meanwhile, by staging the first strikes in postwar Japan, spurred militancy after 1945, particularly in coal mining.⁹⁶ Other wartime trends strengthened the hand of capital, however. The new company welfare programs, seniority wages, and family allowances started under government pressure to stabilize the work force played an important role in the formation of today’s so-

called “traditional employment system,”⁹⁷ providing more stable livelihoods for many workers while robbing them of any real voice in workplace management. The “industrial service clubs” were also a double-edged sword, with some serving as the basis of postwar company unions.⁹⁸

For some Japanese women, like those in the United States, World War Two brought new (if temporary) opportunities to advance into jobs previously monopolized by men. In the mining industry, for example, some Japanese women became skilled hewers responsible for supervising male Korean haulers.⁹⁹ Some of these new women supervisors belonged to the outcast group known as *burakumin*,¹⁰⁰ and the war opened up new opportunities for male *burakumin* as well, sometimes at the expense of Koreans.¹⁰¹

For most women, however, little changed. Wartime mobilization of women, as Hunter has pointed out, was impeded by both structural and ideological factors, so relatively few women entered previously “male” occupations. Moreover, once the war ended and Japanese soldiers and colonists returned from Asia and the Pacific to seek work in a shrinking manufacturing sector, many women either gave up their jobs to men or were laid off,¹⁰² some under new “protective” regulations. The US Occupation authorities banned women from underground mine work, for example, in 1947.¹⁰³

While the legacy of labor mobilization was overwhelmingly negative for Koreans, Chinese, Southeast Asians, and Allied POWs, and mixed at best for Japanese workers, major Japanese corporations profited from access to a low-cost, largely trouble-free work force. When the war ended, moreover, the state compensated the *zaibatsu* conglomerates for “losses” they allegedly incurred due to the use of forced labor.¹⁰⁴ In contrast to German corporations, which were forced by foreign public opinion to reach a settlement in late 1999 with former forced laborers, Japanese corporations have for the most part been able to evade demands for compensation. With consumers in major markets like the United States showing little interest in Japanese wartime labor abuses, just one Japanese corporation has agreed to pay compensation, to just one worker.¹⁰⁵

The Japanese government has also refused to compensate forced laborers. As of 1996, Japan had paid some one trillion yen (\$9 billion in 2000 US dollars) in reparations, including external payments and Japanese property lost overseas, but this sum has gone to foreign governments, not individuals, and pales next to the forty trillion yen (\$364 billion) Japan had paid its own citizens. Moreover, payments to Japanese injured in the war and the survivors of those killed continue today, while external payments ended in 1977. Foreigners, including Koreans and other former Japanese subjects, even those wounded after being drafted into the Japanese military, are excluded from all payments to individuals except those for atomic bomb victims.¹⁰⁶

With the end of the Cold War, however, and increasing democratization across Asia, many former forced laborers have become free for the first time to demand compensation from Japan. There are also signs of change in the United States, at the grassroots if not the national level. Some civil rights and union activists in America have begun to make common cause with activists in Japan

and other parts of Asia, and a recently enacted California law has opened the way to suits in that state against both German and Japanese corporations for their wartime abuses of workers. With the memory of coercive labor mobilization still an obstacle to better relations between Japan and its neighbors in Asia and the Pacific, even the Japanese government and corporations—with enough pressure from overseas—may begin to change their attitude.

NOTES

1. For recent works in English on Korean labor in interwar Japan, see William Donald Smith, “Ethnicity, Class and Gender in the Mines: Korean Workers in Japan’s Chikuhō Coal Field, 1917–1945” (Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 1999); Michael Weiner, *The Origins of the Korean Community in Japan: 1910–1923* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1989); and Michael Weiner, *Race and Migration in Imperial Japan* (New York, 1994).

2. The Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere, first proclaimed in August 1940, was envisioned as a self-sufficient regional economy under Japanese leadership. It was initially projected to include Japan (including its Korean and Taiwanese colonies), China, Manchuria, and the French, Dutch, and British colonies in Southeast Asia, while some ambitious planners saw India, Australia, and New Zealand as future members. For a useful overview, see John H. Boyle, “Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere,” in *Kodansha Encyclopedia of Japan*, Vol. 3 (New York, 1983), 60–62.

3. Kitagawa Kenzō, *Kokumin sōdōin no jidai* (Tokyo, 1989); and Michael A. Barnhart, *Japan Prepares for Total War: The Search for Economic Security, 1919–1941* (Ithaca, 1987), especially 105–106.

4. Janet Hunter, “An Absence of Change: Women in the Japanese Labour Force, 1937–1945,” in *Conflict and Amity in East Asia: Essays in Honour of Ian Nish*, ed. T. G. Fraser and Peter Lowe (London, 1992), 61.

5. Thomas R. H. Havens, *Valley of Darkness: The Japanese People and World War Two* (London, 1986), 92.

6. Havens, *Valley of Darkness*, 92.

7. For the coercive mobilization of Korean labor, see Smith, “Ethnicity, Class and Gender,” especially Chapter Five.

8. Havens, *Valley of Darkness*, 92–93, 97.

9. For a description of the “industrial service clubs” (*sangyō hōkokukai*), see Andrew Gordon, *The Evolution of Labor Relations in Japan: Heavy Industry, 1853–1955* (Cambridge, MA, 1988), 299–326.

10. In Fukuoka prefecture, for example, the clubs had 489,805 members in 1945, compared to peak prewar union membership of just 23,761 in 1926. Smith, “Ethnicity, Class and Gender,” 287.

11. Kitagawa Kenzō, *Kokumin sōdōin no jidai*, 45.

12. Momose Takashi, *Jiten Shōwa senzenki no Nihon: seido to jittai*, ed. Itō Takashi (Tokyo, 1990), 215.

13. Hunter, “An Absence of Change,” 60. For women’s return to the mines, also see Smith, “Ethnicity, Class and Gender,” 229.

14. Yoshiko Miyake, “Doubling Expectations: Motherhood and Women’s Factory Work Under State Management in Japan in the 1930s and 1940s,” in *Recreating Japanese Women*, ed. Gail Lee Bernstein (Berkeley, 1991), 268–270.

15. Hunter, “An Absence of Change,” 69–70.

16. *Ibid.*, 62.

17. Havens, *Valley of Darkness*, 138.

18. Nishinarita Yutaka, *Kindai Nihon rōshi kankeishi no kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1988), 410–411. For a dramatization of the role of schoolgirls in producing bombsights, see Kurosawa Akira’s wartime propaganda film, *Ichiban Utsushiku*.

19. Smith, “Ethnicity, Class and Gender,” 260–61.

20. Tanaka Naoki, *Kindai Nihon tankō rōdōshi kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1984), 158.

21. Sekitan Tōseikai Rōmubu, “Tankō rōmu tōkeihyō,” September 4, 1943, in *Senjika*

Chōsenjin Chūgokujin Rengōkoku horyo kyōsei renkō shiryōshū, Vol. 1, ed. Nagasawa Shigeru (Tokyo, 1992), 317.

22. Fumoto Saburō, *Mitsubishi Iizuka tankō shi* (Tokyo, 1961), 179. Because of the lack of distinction between singular and plural in Japanese, it is unclear from the original whether one or more pupils were killed.

23. For English-language works on women miners in prewar Japan, see Regine Mathias, "Female Labour in the Japanese Coal Mining Industry," in *Japanese Women Working*, ed. Janet Hunter (New York, 1993), 98–121; Nishinarita Yutaka, "The Coal Mining Industry," in *Technology Change and Female Labour in Japan*, ed. Nakamura Masanori (Tokyo, 1994), 59–96; and W. Donald Smith, "Sorting Coal and Pickling Cabbage: Korean Women in the Japanese Mining Industry," in *Gendering Modern Japanese History*, ed. Barbara Molony and Kathleen Uno (Cambridge, MA, in press).

24. Shōkōshō Kōzan Kyoku, Honpō kōgyō no sūsei, various years, compiled in Tanaka Naoki, *Kindai Nihon tankō rōdōshi kenkyū*, 160–161.

25. Kang Chaeron, "Zainichi Chōsenjin no rokujūgonen," *Kikan sanzenri* 8 (1976):27.

26. Ueno Eishin and Ch'ō Kūnjae, eds., *Shashin manyōroku Chikuhō*, Vol. 9, Ariran tōge (Fukuoka, 1986), 38–39.

27. Labor Bureau, [Japanese] Welfare Ministry, "Report on the Group Importation Situation of Koreans," October 10, 1945, in United States Strategic Bombing Survey, Pacific Survey Records, [US] National Archives. Microfilm Publication M1655, Reports and Other Records, 1928–1947. Entry 41 of National Archives Inventory Series No. 10, Record Group 243, Records of the U.S. Bombing Survey, Pacific Survey.

28. In 1944, thirty-four percent of foreign laborers in Germany worked in agriculture. Edward L. Homze, *Foreign Labor in Nazi Germany* (Princeton, 1967), 234.

29. Jerome B. Cohen, *Japan's Economy in War and Reconstruction* (Minneapolis, 1949), 326.

30. Calculated from Sekitan Tōseikai Kinrōbu, "Shōwa 19-nendo zenkoku tankō rōmusha idō jōkyō shirabe," in Nagasawa Shigeru, *Senjika Chōsenjin Chūgokujin*, 39.

31. John Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York, 1986), 49.

32. Hokkaidō Tankō Kisen K.K., "Shōwa 17-nendo furyo kankei," in *Senji gaikokujin kyōsei renkō kankei shiryōshū*, Vol. 4, Part 2, ed. Hayashi Eidai (Tokyo, 1991), 1455, quoted in Nishinarita Yutaka, "Rōdōryoku dōin to rōdō kaikaku," in *Nihon teikokushugishi*, Vol. 3, ed. Ooishi Kaichirō (Tokyo, 1994), 309–10.

33. When eight Koreans who survived the atomic bombing of Hiroshima as conscript workers at a Mitsubishi Heavy Industries factory visited Japan in August 1991 asking for back wages or at least an apology, for example, a Foreign Ministry official advised the former workers to negotiate with the company, while Mitsubishi insisted that it had no responsibility because it was the government, not the company, that had conscripted the workers. W. Donald Smith, "Former Korean Conscripts Meet Mitsubishi, Gov't Officials" (August 1, 1991) and "Japan's Wartime Victims Demand Compensation" (August 3, 1991), Kyodo News Service.

34. Smith, "Ethnicity, Class and Gender," 224–29.

35. *Ibid.*, 232.

36. *Ibid.*, 236–37.

37. *Ibid.*, 239–240.

38. *Ibid.*, 242–45.

39. *Ibid.*, 246.

40. *Ibid.*, 271–72.

41. *Ibid.*, 278.

42. *Ibid.*, 291–94.

43. Hewers were paid on a piece-work system, generally modified by ratings for individual skill and conditions at the coal face. Some mines assigned higher skill ratings to Japanese only. *Ibid.*, 294–98.

44. For some of the best recent scholarship in English on wartime sexual slavery, see the special issue on "The Comfort Women: Colonialism, War and Sex," *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 5 (1997).

45. Figures from Kang Chaeron, "Zainichi Chōsenjin," 26. For Korean guards, see Yi Hak-Nae, "The Man Between: A Korean Guard Looks Back," in *The Burma-Thailand Railway*, ed. Gavan McCormack and Hank Nelson (St. Leonards, Australia, 1993), 120–126; and Aiko Ut-

sumi, "The Korean Guards on the Burma-Thailand Railway," in *The Burma-Thailand Railway*, ed. McCormack and Nelson, 127–39.

46. Figures vary on the number forced to work in Korea. The figure is put at 4,164,098 in Sohn Pow-key et al., *The History of Korea* (Seoul, 1970), 324; Kang puts it at 4,591,825 in Kang Chaeon, "Zainichi Chōsenjin," 26–27.

47. Gavan McCormack and Hank Nelson, "Introduction," in *The Burma-Thailand Railway*, ed. McCormack and Nelson, 1.

48. Nakahara Michiko, "Tōnan Ajia no 'rōmusha': Taimen tetsudō de hataraita hitobito," in *Iwanami Kōza Kindai Nihon to shokuminchi 5: bōchō suru teikoku no jinryū*, ed. Ooe Shinobu et al. (Tokyo, 1993), 133.

49. Shigeru Sato, *War, Nationalism and Peasants: Java Under the Japanese Occupation, 1942–1945* (Armonk, NY, 1994), 155.

50. The lower estimate is from McCormack and Nelson, "Introduction," 1. The higher figure is from Dower, *War Without Mercy*, 48.

51. The lower figure is based on statements of Japanese POWs to British authorities indicating a death rate of twenty-three percent, or over 42,000 people, while the higher figure is based on a British investigation indicating that a minimum of forty percent, or just over 74,000 Asian workers, died. See Nakahara Michiko, "Tōnan Ajia no 'rōmusha,'" 134.

52. The destruction of records by the Japanese authorities means that we will never have exact figures, but see Yoshinori Murai, "Asian Forced Labor (Romusha) on the Burma-Thailand Railway," in *The Burma-Thailand Railway*, ed. McCormack and Nelson, 61. In this article, Murai cites a Japanese military estimate that Asian laborers peaked at 80,000 and totaled 200,000 on the railroad. Nakahara Michiko, in "Tōnan Ajia no 'rōmusha,'" 134, cites a figure of 182,496 Asians, excluding Thais. For the figure of 60,000 Allied POWs, see McCormack and Nelson, "Introduction," 1.

53. J. Griffin, H. Nelson and S. Firth, *Papua New Guinea: A Political History* (Sydney, Australia, 1979), 82–83, cited in Hank Nelson, "Measuring the Railway: From Individual Lives to National History," in *The Burma-Thailand Railway*, ed. McCormack and Nelson, 21.

54. Nakahara Michiko, "Tōnan Ajia no 'rōmusha,'" 134.

55. *Ibid.*, 138.

56. Utsumi Aiko et al., eds., *Sengo hoshō handobukku* (Tokyo, 1992), 145.

57. Nakahara Michiko, "Tōnan Ajia no 'rōmusha,'" 131–32.

58. Smith, "Ethnicity, Class and Gender," 230–31.

59. Nakahara Michiko, "Tōnan Ajia no 'rōmusha,'" 135.

60. *Ibid.*, 138–39.

61. *Ibid.*, 140.

62. Tom Morris, "Memories of the Burma-Thailand Railway," in *The Burma-Thailand Railway*, ed. McCormack and Nelson, 28.

63. *Ibid.*, 28–29.

64. Shigeru Sato, *War, Nationalism and Peasants*, 175.

65. *Ibid.*, 156–57.

66. *Ibid.*, 158.

67. Yoshinori Murai, "Asian Forced Labor," 63.

68. Shigeru Sato, *War, Nationalism and Peasants*, 158.

69. *Ibid.*, 155.

70. Yoshinori Murai, "Asian Forced Labor," 64.

71. Utsumi Aiko et al., eds., *Sengo hoshō handobukku*, 142.

72. Yoshinori Murai, "Asian Forced Labor," 63–64.

73. Shigeru Sato, *War, Nationalism and Peasants*, 192–93.

74. *Ibid.*, 194–96.

75. *Ibid.*, 192–98.

76. *Ibid.*, 186–87.

77. *Ibid.*, 186–90.

78. Lorraine V. Aragon, "'Japanese Time' and the Mica Mine: Occupation Experiences in the Central Sulawesi Highlands," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 27 (1996):49–63.

79. Mitsubishi Kōgyō Cement K.K. Sōmubu Shashi Hensanshitsu, *Mitsubishi Kōgyō shashi* (Tokyo, 1976), 351–353.

80. Sumitomo Sekitan Kōgyō K. K. Shashi Hensan Inkai, *Wagasha no ayumi* (Tokyo, 1990), 164–65.

81. *Ibid.*, 165.
82. Shigeru Sato, *War, Nationalism and Peasants*, 181.
83. *Ibid.*, 183–85.
84. *Ibid.*, 185.
85. Sumitomo, *Wagasha no ayumi*, 166–67.
86. *Ibid.*, 165. Shigeru Sato cites a maximum depth of eighty centimeters in *War, Nationalism and Peasants*, 186.
87. Sumitomo gives no morbidity or mortality figures but at least it acknowledges the existence of local workers—something Mitsubishi and the smaller company Asō fail to do in their official histories. For Asō's operation of a small mine on Celebes in 1944 and 1945, see Asō 100-nenshi Hensan Iinkai, *Asō 100-nenshi* (Iizuka, 1975), 446.
88. Shigeru Sato, *War, Nationalism and Peasants*, 186.
89. Utsumi Aiko et al., eds., *Sengo hoshō handobukku*, 46.
90. Glenn Trewartha and Wilbur Zelinsky, "Population Distribution and Change in Korea, 1925–1949," *The Geographical Review* 45 (1955):14, cited in Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War: Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes, 1945–1947* (Princeton, 1981), 54.
91. Cumings, *Origins of the Korean War*, 60.
92. *Ibid.*, 61.
93. B. R. O'G. Anderson, "Japan: 'The Light of Asia,'" in *Southeast Asia in World War Two: Four Essays*, ed. Josef Silverstein (New Haven, 1966), 29. Also see W. F. Wertheim, *Indonesian Society in Transition: A Study of Social Change* (The Hague, 1956), 265, for social dislocation and the argument that former forced laborers played an important role in the 1945–1949 nationalist revolution.
94. For ethnic Chinese in Indonesia, see Anderson, "Japan: 'The Light of Asia,'" 29. Clive J. Christie, in *A Modern History of Southeast Asia* (New York, 1998), 14, argues that the Japanese presence as a whole exacerbated ethnic and ideological differences within Southeast Asian states and nationalist movements, partly by emphasizing "unitary national identities under authoritarian governments."
95. John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War Two* (New York, 1999), 257.
96. Smith, "Ethnicity, Class and Gender," Chapter Six.
97. Gordon, *The Evolution of Labor Relations in Japan*, 257–97.
98. For one example, see Smith, "Ethnicity, Class and Gender," 358–59.
99. Interview with historian Idegawa Yasuko, May 16, 1995, Kurate-machi, Fukuoka Prefecture. Idegawa has interviewed dozens of retired Japanese women miners.
100. *Ibid.*
101. Nagaoka Iwao, for example, is sure that, except for the war, he would never have become a labor supervisor. His duties included traveling to Korea to obtain workers for forced labor. Interview, Hōjō-machi, Fukuoka Prefecture, June 14, 1995.
102. Hunter, "An Absence of Change," 71.
103. "The Coal Fields of Kyushu," 21, Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, General Headquarters, Record Group 331, Box 2494, Folder 1, "Records of Allied Operational and Occupation Headquarters, World War Two," Washington National Records Center, Suitland, Maryland.
104. Tanaka Hiroshi, "Gaimushō hōkokusho" kōkai no imi (rejume), in *Dai 7-kai Chōsenjin Chūgokujin no kyōsei renkō kyōsei rōdō o kangaeru zenkoku kōryū shūkai shiryōshū*, ed. Dai 7-kai Chōsenjin Chūgokujin no kyōsei renkō kyōsei rōdō o kangaeru zenkoku kōryū shūkai jikko iinkai (Gifu, Japan, 1996), 6.
105. Steelmaker NKK agreed to pay some \$33,900 to a Korean worker who was hung upside down and beaten for leading a protest against racist remarks by a company official. *The Japan Times*, online edition (<http://www.japantimes.co.jp>), April 7, 1999.
106. Tanaka Hiroshi, "Why Is Asia Demanding Postwar Compensation Now?," *Hito-tsubashi Journal of Social Studies* 28 (1996):9–11.