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**LETTERS TO THE DEAD:
ADDRESSING THE LEGACIES OF VIOLENCE IN JAPAN'S BORDERLANDS**

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In a small temple in central Hokkaido, Ogawa Ryûkichi stands facing the altar, speaking to a man he has never met. The rain patters steadily on the tin roof of the temple, and on the lush greenery all around. Within the building, a group of people – Japanese, Koreans, including second and third-generation ethnic Koreans from various parts of Japan, and a sprinkling of visitors from Europe and elsewhere – sit on the mat-covered floor, listening intently. The altar is decorated with brocade cloth and flowers. Behind it stand rows of small wooden memorial tablets to those who died in the hills around the temple, and whose bodies rested here, far away from their homes and families, for the final night before their burial. Faded photographs on the walls of the temple show the places where they died: vast construction sites gouged out of hillsides and forests for dams, mines and railways.

Ogawa Ryûkichi speaks quietly, and his voice sometimes hesitates, tripping over his words; but he speaks with profound feeling. He wears an *atus* – a jacket woven of elm bark and decorated with the traditional appliqué designs of the indigenous Ainu people of Hokkaido – together with a headdress made of shaved willow bark. “Our Ainu *ekashi* and *fuchi* – our grandfathers and grandmothers – told us to live without conflict,” he says. “This should be a land filled with peace, but violence grows worse day by day. We must do something about this. We must value this peace again. And the task that is left to us is to return these mortal remains to their home.”

The man to whom Ogawa is speaking does not respond: he has been dead for more than sixty years. His bones are contained in a small box of pale wood, which is kept in the temple, and has been placed in front of the altar for this occasion. He was one of many thousands of Korean workers who were brought to Japan under labour conscription

schemes during the Asia-Pacific War and died there from malnutrition, hard working conditions, disease, accidents or the ferocious punishments meted out to those who attempted escape.

Local historians from the Sorachi People's History Forum [*Sorachi Minshūshi Kōza*], who have devoted decades to researching this subject, have produced long lists of the numbers of Korean labour conscripts brought to various sites in Hokkaidō: around 3,000 to build underground military facilities in Sapporo; 9,182 to coalmines in the Mikasa district; 17,852 to the Yūbari coalmines, and tens of thousands more to other parts of the island.¹ In all, some 700,000 Koreans are believed to have been brought to Japan under the various labour recruitment schemes created by the Japanese government between 1939 and 1945, and a substantial proportion of them were sent to Hokkaido. The Japanese labourers who worked in the same mines and construction sites included the poor, unemployed and transients who had been rounded up with as little respect for their freedom and dignity as that accorded to colonial subjects. It is to commemorate these people, Korean and Japanese, and to confront the legacy of their recruitment, that the Sorachi People's History Forum created an East Asia Collaborative Workshop, whose members are gathered in the temple in Hokkaido, listening to Ogawa Ryūkichichi as he addresses the dead.²

Forced Labour and its Legacies

The question of forced labour is one of many problems of historical responsibility for war and colonialism that continue to be fiercely debated in Japan today. The issue, indeed, has recently been given added visibility by the fact that Japan's former Prime Minister, Aso Tarō, is a scion of a family whose company employed substantial numbers of labour conscripts during the Asia-Pacific War. When Aso was Foreign Minister in 2006, his ministry strongly criticized a *New York Times* article which revealed the family company's use of forced labour, including the labour of allied prisoners-of-war. However, after researchers tracked down further evidence on the matter in 2008, during his tenure as Prime Minister, Aso was forced to admit the truth of these reports.³

But denials persist in some quarters. The Japan Society for History Textbook Reform [*Atarashii Rekishi Kyōkasho o Tsukuru Kai*], an influential right-wing lobby group established in 1996, has conducted a long campaign against the use of the term *kyōsei renkō* [“forcible transportation”] to describe the fate that befell labourers recruited from Korea during the war. The Society argues that Korean colonial subjects were legally recruited as war workers, on terms that were better than those of many Japanese, and it denies that any were “forcibly transported”.⁴ There is no dispute about the fact that hundreds of thousands of labour recruits were shipped from Korea to Japan during the war; so the source of contention is clearly the notion that force was involved. In its efforts to refute this, the Society selects a very small number of the many testimonies of forced labour conscripts, and raises questions about dates or other details, thus aiming to cast doubt on the credibility of such testimony as a whole. Drawing on selected quotations from a single notebook kept by one Korean labour conscript, while ignoring or rejecting testimony to the contrary, the Society insists that the living conditions of Korean recruits were good and that workers were well cared for.⁵

As so often when historical debates generate intense passion, this history is not simply about the past, but has important contemporary echoes. Neither the Japanese government nor the companies involved have ever paid compensation to wartime forced labourers, and the unresolved memory of their recruitment continues to haunt Japan’s relationship with its former colonies and with the countries it occupied during the Asia-Pacific War. The issue is complicated by the fact that a very large number of often confused and arbitrary labour conscription schemes were used in various parts of the former Japanese Empire. However, an abundance of research and collected testimony illustrates the widespread use of coercion in labour recruitment.

In some cases, Chinese or allied prisoners-of-war were shipped into Japan to work on mines or construction sites.⁶ In Korea, a series of labour recruitment laws, characterized by increasing degrees of coercion, were introduced in 1939, 1942 and 1944 to bring workers to Japan.⁷ Since 2005, an 85-member Truth Commission on Forced Mobilization under Japanese Imperialism [*Ilje Gangjeomha Gangje Dongwon Pihae Jinsang Gyumyeong Wiwonhoe*], established by the South Korean government, has collected over 220,000 statements from former Korean labour or military conscripts and

their families, and has published 28 volumes of their findings, including many pages of testimony from former conscript labourers in Japan.⁸ These and other testimony show that recruitment methods varied widely. Under the 1944 Labour Conscription Ordinance, individuals received conscription papers ordering them to gather at a place from where they would be shipped to an uncertain destination. In others cases people were simply rounded up off the streets by the police, or jobs in Japan were advertised, and those who went to make enquiries found themselves herded onto trucks and taken away whether they wished or not. Sometimes Korean officials such as village heads acted as intermediaries, placing pressure on villagers to “volunteer”, and threatening unpleasant consequences for their families if they failed to do so.⁹

Those recruited joined other Koreans who had come to Japan more or less voluntarily in earlier years: migrating in search of work, but also often fleeing poverty and debt aggravated by colonial policies.¹⁰ Meanwhile, in Korea and China as well as many parts of Southeast Asia, local people were rounded up to work for the military on construction in the areas where they lived. In addition to the recruitment of male workers, the *Teishintai* (“Volunteer Corps”) scheme was used to recruit colonial women, some of whom became factory workers, but many of whom ended up in military brothels, enduring the most terrible forms of institutionalised sexual abuse.¹¹

The memory of forced labour casts its shadow, not only over Japan’s relations with its Asian neighbours, but also over contemporary debates about the rights of the Korean minority in Japan. After the end of the Asia-Pacific War, around 600,000 Koreans remained in Japan, becoming the country’s largest ethnic minority. The descendents of these colonial-era migrants still live in Japan today but, because of the nature of Japan’s nationality laws, many of the third or even fourth generation do not yet have Japanese citizenship. It is not known how many *Zainichi* Koreans (Koreans living in Japan) are former forced labourers or their descendents. Some certainly are¹², though the substantial majority are descendents of people who arrived in Japan before the introduction of wartime labour recruitment.¹³

The Japan Society for History Textbook Reform’s campaign against the term “forced transportation” is part of its wider crusade against demands by Koreans in Japan for improved social and political rights (including the right to vote in local elections.¹⁴)

The issue has been further muddied by a singularly unhelpful intervention from the prominent Japanese sociologist Miyadai Shinji. Miyadai points out that some critics of the Japanese government wrongly depict *all* Koreans in postwar Japan as forced labourers.¹⁵ This point is a fair one, but Miyadai then goes on to exaggerate the prevalence of this “myth” of forced labour, and to suggest that the need to refute the “myth” justifies the Japan Society for History Textbook Reform’s hostility to campaigns for minority rights.¹⁶

A Question of Violence

Often unspoken, but always present at the heart of these debates lies the question of violence. In much of the discourse about forced labour in Japan, there is an implicit assumption, on both sides of debate, that a clear and unequivocal line can be drawn between the “free” and the “forced”. The focus of controversy, then, is on the number of people who fall on one side of the line or the other. But a growing literature on the global experience of slavery and freedom, and of forced and free migrations, emphasizes the dangers of a simple binary vision of “free choice” versus “coercion”.¹⁷ In theory, for example, slavery can be distinguished from indentured labour by the fact that slaves are forced to work while indentured labourers enter into a voluntary contract. But historical studies highlight the “fine line” that in fact existed between slavery and indenture in some parts the nineteenth century world.¹⁸

As this history shows, forced labour highlights complex issues of the relationship between “coercion”, “force” and “violence”. Classic forms of slavery such as the Atlantic slave trade were based upon direct physical violence: the forced seizure of people from their homes, their transportation in chains to distant places, and use of physical punishment to prevent escape and impose obedience. Over the course of history, other more subtle forms of intimidation, psychological violence and social pressure have come to be used. The International Labour Organization notes that the coercion underlying forced labour may take a variety of forms, including direct physical or sexual violence; the threat of such violence; physical restrictions on movement; debt bondage; the withholding of wages or identity documents etc.¹⁹ (Human trafficking).

To deny the existence of a simple dividing line between freedom and coercion, then, is not to deny presence of violence in this history. On the contrary, it is to emphasise the presence of violence in choices that superficially appear to be free, while also acknowledging the moments of choice which sometimes may be seized by people subject to great violence. Absolute freedom of choice and total coercion must be seen as points at either extreme of a spectrum, with many possible degrees of intermingling in the middle. At the same time, it is important to emphasise that coercion varies not just in degree but also in kind. Understanding problems of forced labour therefore requires careful attention to texture of violence: to all the details of the material, social and psychological conditions in which recruitment occurs, and in which labourers live (and sometimes die) after they have been recruited. As I shall argue, violence may indeed not end with their deaths, but continue in the treatment and remembering of the dead. To explore these issues, rather than re-examining the debate about Japanese wartime forced labour as a whole, I should like to look more closely at the East Asia Collaborative Workshop, for I believe that its experiences suggest fresh ways of approaching legacies of wartime violence, and of seeking paths to overcome those legacies.

Unearthing the Dead of the Uryû Dam

During the 1970s, a Buddhist priest named Tonohira Yoshihiko, who lives in a small town near Asahikawa in central Hokkaido, encountered disturbing stories as he traveled around his district visiting outlying temples. In some places, local people told him of unmarked graves that were believed to lie in the forests. Elsewhere, in the little temple of Kôkenji in the village of Shumarinai, villagers showed him a sack full of mortuary tablets which lay abandoned at the back of the temple. These traces of the uncommemorated dead all seemed to be connected to the sites of wartime mines and construction projects.

Kôkenji is close to the site of the massive Uryû Dam, constructed between 1937 and 1943 by Uryû Electrical Power, an affiliate of the Ôji Paper Company, to supply electricity to Ôji's factories in the coastal Hokkaido town of Tomakomai.²⁰ Over the course of the entire project, almost 3,000 Korean and many thousands of Japanese

workers laboured on the site, which was said to have created the largest artificial lake in East Asia.²¹ Others worked nearby on the construction of the Meiu Railway, which linked the dam to the town of Nayoro, and was completed in 1941.

Tonohira along with other local teachers, researchers and amateur historians who formed the Sorachi People's History Forum began to research the history of these wartime projects in an effort to solve the mystery of the deaths. In doing this, they became part of a seldom acknowledged but significant postwar Japanese tradition. While the Japanese central government has rightly been condemned for its reluctance to face up to its historical responsibilities, a number of small, little-known local history groups in various parts of Japan have taken on the task of exploring the darker sides of their regions' histories, and sometimes of attempting to create reconciliation projects with counterparts in other Asian countries.²²

The researches of the Sorachi group revealed a history of harsh working conditions which went back far beyond the Asia-Pacific War. Hokkaido was Japan's first "settler colony". In most parts of the island, large-scale settlement by majority Japanese did not occur until the second half of the nineteenth century, when land was expropriated from the indigenous Ainu population and "opened up" to the modernizing forces of Meiji Japan. In the early stages of this colonizing process (as in settler colonies elsewhere) convict labour was extensively used on construction sites. By the twentieth century this practice had ceased, only to be replaced by *takobeya* labour: a system which, although less coercive than the use of convicts, was something less than wholly "free".

Takobeya – literally "octopus pots" – were overcrowded, prison-like barracks, apparently so called because the octopus (like the occupants of the barracks) inhabits a space just large enough for its body. *Takobeya* workers were people from the poorest sections of rural or urban Japanese society who were recruited by brokers to work on remote construction and mining sites. Once on the site, they were kept in *takobeya*, subject to extremely harsh working conditions, and often beaten or tortured if they attempted escape.²³ Although these practices had virtually disappeared from most other parts of Japan by the late 1930s, they survived unusually long in the remoter parts of Hokkaido, and provided the foundations on which the wartime recruitment of labour from the colonies was built.

Through archival research in local newspapers, temple documents and the records of permissions for burials and cremations kept by village authorities, the local historians began to put together a picture of life and death on the Uryû Dam and the Meiu Railway. Temple and village records gave details of 169 Japanese and 36 Korean workers buried in unmarked graves: most of them victims of malnutrition (particularly beriberi) or accidents. The total number of deaths at the site is unknown: according to the testimony of one person who worked on the dam site, those who died were sometimes simply entombed in the concrete of the dam wall itself.²⁴ The local records gave an indication of the place where burials had occurred, enabling the identity of some individual victims to be identified. From 1977 onward local people began unearthing the remains of the dead and placing them within the temple. By 1983 the group had unearthed the remains of sixteen of the dead.

Meanwhile, using information on family registrations from the local burial records, they had begun to contact local authorities in Japan in an effort to locate the relatives of the dead workers. In the case of Korea, matters were much more complicated, because local districts and family registrations systems had changed so much since the colonial era. It was a former Korean forced labourer, Jae Man-Jin who came up with a solution to the problem. Why not, he suggested, send letters addressed to the dead? In other words, the researchers in Japan would copy the names and addresses given in the burial records onto envelopes, in which they placed letters. These letters, addressed to people who had died half a century before, would then be posted, in the hope that they would eventually find their way to surviving relatives.

In Hokkaido, the writers of the letters waited anxiously and somewhat skeptically for the results of this strange method of communication, and were astonished to receive replies from family members of seven of the fourteen dead to whom they had written. Until they had received these unexpected and startling letters, most of these families had absolutely no knowledge where, when or how their relatives had died. But the process of returning the remains to their homes for burial proved difficult. Feelings of resentment were still strong. In some cases, families had lost more than one member to forced wartime recruitment, and their sense of anger was so intense that they refused to accept the remains of the relatives. Mediation by a Korean Buddhist priest and by a Korean

resident in Japan who had worked on the Uryû site was needed before the return of the remains could proceed.²⁵ By now the scale of the group's project had become so great that new participants were needed. In 1997, therefore, they launched the first Japan-Korea Collaborative Workshop (*Nikkan Kyôdô Wâkushoppu* – later renamed East Asia Collaborative Workshop: *Higashi Ajia Kyôdô Wâkushoppu*).

The workshops were camps, generally lasting for several weeks, which brought together young Japanese and Koreans (including Korean residents in Japan), and later also people from other countries, to expand, disseminate and exchange knowledge about the forced labour issue, and more broadly about East Asia's modern history. The first workshop was held in Shumarinai and was attended by more than a hundred participants. During the day, the young people excavated sites where bones of dead labourers were believed to be buried. In the evenings, they discussed problems of history and listened to lectures from eminent scholars, as well as singing, dancing and generally socializing.²⁶

Since 1997, a series of summer and winter workshops has been held, bringing together more than a thousand participants in total. As well as further excavations at Shumarinai and other sites in Hokkaido where forced labour was used, the workshops have involved gatherings in Seoul and the Korean island of Jeju, and in Osaka, home to Japan's largest ethnic Korean community.²⁷ The meeting in July 2008 was a shorter gathering, following an international symposium held to coincide with the Hokkaido G8 Summit. On this occasion there were no excavations, but rather quiet reflection on the outcome of over a decade of workshops, and on prospects for the future.

Etching the Past in the Mind, Feeling the Present in the Body

The East Asia Collaborative Workshop is just one example of a mass of reconciliation movements that have emerged in an effort to overcome conflicts over history and memory between Japan and its neighbours. Mostly small in scale, these movements have flourished particularly since the early 1990s, but have received less attention than the right-wing revisionist movements (such as the Japan Society for History Textbook Reform) which have proliferated during the same years. A few of the reconciliation groups have official government blessing. In March 2002, for example, the

Japanese and South Korean governments announced the establishment of a committee for Japan-Korea Joint History Research [*Nikkan Rekishi Kyôdô Kenkyû*], which aims to encourage the exchange of ideas on the history of relations between the two countries, and “to promote mutual understanding”²⁸ In 2006, following anti-Japanese riots in China, a committee for Japan-China Joint History Research [*Nicchû Rekishi Kyôdô Kenkyû*] was established, similarly to pursue the goal of historical reconciliation.²⁹

Non-governmental groups have also been created by academics, editors and other intellectuals from Northeast Asian countries. The East Asia Collaborative Workshop belongs to another category of reconciliation movement: groups which go beyond the world of professional scholarship, and try to engage ordinary people who might not otherwise have much opportunity to debate questions of historical responsibility. What interests me particularly about this group is not just its local and grassroots focus, but also the fact that it centers on the physical presence of the remains of the dead. Why is it that the excavation and return of the bones of the dead plays such a central part in the Workshop’s approach to reconciliation? How does this focus affect the messages that the group conveys to participants and to others who come into contact with its activities?

The historical reconciliation projects created between Japan and its neighbours over the past fifteen years are in part inspired by reconciliation movements in other parts of the world, particularly by the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, whose work during the 1990s provided a model emulated (despite some criticisms) world-wide. But there are also great differences between efforts in Japan to address events from the mid-twentieth century and South African moves to address the violence of the much more recent past. Some of these differences become clear if we turn to accounts of South African reconciliation such as Antjie Krog’s powerful work, *Country of my Skull: Sorrow and the Limits of Forgiveness in the New South Africa*.³⁰

Krog emphasizes how the South African Truth and Reconciliation process brought perpetrators and victims (or perpetrators and the close relatives of dead victims) face-to-face in encounters which forced the perpetrators to confront the reality of their actions in all their excruciating detail. These encounters were often searing experiences for all involved. They did not necessarily produce forgiveness or understanding. But they did help to bring the buried past to light. One of their most important consequences was the

way in which they educated not only the perpetrators of violence but also the “bystanders”, those who saw themselves as uninvolved or merely marginally involved, about the realities of apartheid.

Reconciliation groups like the Japan-Korea Joint History Research and Japan-China Joint History Research projects have none of that immediacy. They bring together historical specialists who compare research findings and share archival resources, but they involve no direct encounters with either the perpetrators or victims of violence. One of the distinctive features of the East Asia Collaborative Workshop, on the other hand, is that it does connect directly with the families of victims. It also exposes young people not simply to documentary evidence about the past but also to other aspects of the physical realities of history, by taking them to the places where forced labourers worked and, in some cases, bringing them face to face with the physical remains of the dead. The Workshop’s aims are described as being “etching the past in the mind, feeling the present in the body, and building a future together”.³¹

This material aspect – “feeling the present in the body” – seems to me to be an important and sometimes neglected element of reconciliation projects, and of research on the history of violence more generally. Even for someone like me, who did not participate in the hard work of excavating grave sites, but merely paid a short and comfortable visit to Shumarinai and the Uryû Dam, seeing and walking across the landscape in which forced labour occurred was an important experience. It taught me things I would not have learnt from history texts or archival documents. For example, the mosquitoes: the largest, fattest, most persistent mosquitoes I have ever encountered. For example, the ubiquitous *sasa* grass, like miniature bamboo with tough stems and knife-edged leaves, which covers every inch of the hillsides. I look again at the fading photographs of the labourers with their bare chests and tattered leggings, and understand just a little more of what work on a Hokkaido dam site really meant.

Visiting the site also made me reflect again on the notion of “escape”. Accounts of forced labour are full of records of failed or successful attempts at flight (*tôbô*) by workers. The Japan Society for History Textbook Reform uses the frequency of instances of escape as one of its prime pieces of evidence for denying the existence of the forced transportation of workers from Korea. Recruits who escaped from one labour site

sometimes ended up working at another. This, the Society argues, demonstrates that these workers were really capable of moving around and choosing their workplaces, and thus proves that “they were not forcibly transported”.³² This curious logic ignores the obvious objection that whole notion of “escape” is premised on coercion. Freely employed workers may be fired, or may leave their workplace with or without the permission of their bosses, but they do not “escape”, and if they do leave, they are do not (as Korean labour conscripts were) hunted down by the police.

Some years ago in the archives in Sakhalin I discovered a long list of hundreds names and details of escaped Korean labour conscripts, including some from the Uryû Dam site. These lists were circulated to police stations throughout Japan and even as far afield as the colony of Karafuto (Sakhalin) to alert police, who were asked to arrest and return the abscondees. Escape was also prevented by the fact that on many labour sites, workers’ wages were not distributed but paid into “patriotic savings accounts” controlled by the management.³³ Here again we can see how wartime labour conscription developed almost seamlessly out of forms of coercion imposed on impoverished Japanese workers through the *takobeya* system.

But until I visited the Uryû Dam site, I had completely failed to comprehend the desperate nature of many acts of escape. Shumarinai and its surroundings are the most remote parts of Japan I have ever seen. It is true that depopulation has reduced the size of the village since its peak in the late 1930s to early 1940s.³⁴ However, workers taken there by ship, train and truck from Seoul, Busan, Tokyo or elsewhere found themselves in a landscape in which, apart from the dam site itself, there was nothing to be seen in any direction except endless forest and *sasa*-covered mountains. Many Korean workers, and probably some of their Japanese counterparts, had no absolutely no idea where they were. They may not even have known that they were in Hokkaido. They certainly had no map to guide them over the scores or hundreds of miles of trackless mountains to Asahikawa, Sapporo or other cities. Even if they had possessed maps, few would have been sufficiently literate to read them. Though more direct forms of restraint also existed – one skeleton at the site was found with its arms still bound together with wire – the landscape itself shut the workers off from the outside world as effectively as walls or fences could do. The violence of forced labour, in other words, did not always involve the use of guns

of shackles, but also arose from the way in which the natural environment and the background of the labourers themselves were deployed as weapons of control.

The Return of the Dead

In his careful and profound reflections on the aftermath of the My Lai and Ha My massacres of the Vietnam War, Korean scholar Kwon Heonik explores “the enduring wounds in social life caused by mass violence”, and above all “the social practices emerging to attend to those wounds”.³⁵ Vietnamese villages which experienced massacres are literally haunted by the memories: villagers in many places report hearing the cries of the ghosts of the dead, or seeing crowds of ghosts moving along roads on the journeys which they make particularly on certain days of the lunar month.³⁶ These spectral presences reflect the fact that those who die “bad deaths”, deaths away from the protecting shelter of their homes, particularly in violent circumstances, continue to haunt the community until appropriate ways can be found to lay them to rest. One response to such presences lies the act of re-burial. As Kwon writes, in words which seem particularly relevant to the Hokkaido project:

“a proper burial and an appropriate ritual commemoration are two primary conditions for the welfare of the dead... The reburial creates a break in the life of the dead, thus enabling the dead to be separated from grievance as their bodies are moved to a new place, and when the act concerns a mass grave, it also allows the dead to recover their individuality.”³⁷

I have not heard any stories of ghosts of former forced labourers in Hokkaido, but the return of dead forced labourers certainly has particular potency in Korean society, because the care of ancestral graves and the performance of rituals for the dead play such central parts in Korean social and religious life. Although the strength of these traditions varies from place to place and from generation to generation, for many Koreans, respect for the ancestral dead lies at the core of family life.

Against this background, the return of the remains of dead labour conscripts is a profoundly important event, but also one fraught with its own burden of complexities. The returned remains must be given an appropriate resting place – which is likely to be

an expensive process. They must be honoured and cared for. When the dead are returned more than half a century after their deaths, at a time when those who knew them best may all have died, the return lays anxieties and uncertainties to rest, but also imposes new, heavy and perhaps unwelcome responsibilities on the living.

On the other hand, the endeavours of the East Asia Collaborative Workshop help to fill a void which is not specific to Korean or Japanese culture, but which has universal resonance. The loss of loved ones far from home and in violent circumstances always leaves deep scars, but an even more painful form of loss is *disappearance*. When family members have no knowledge when and how their brother or sister, son or daughter died – no certainty even that he or she is dead, but only a fear that gradually dissolves into almost-certainty – it is extraordinarily difficult to come to terms with the loss. The living are constantly tormented by unresolved imaginings about the fate of the presumed-dead.

In this sense the East Asia Collaborative Workshop highlights the violence of the forced labour system, while also helping to address consequences of that violence. The Uryû Electrical Power Company's acknowledgement of the suffering involved in the dam's construction extended to erecting a vast concrete obelisk at the dam site, inscribed with the words: "for the repose of soul of the employees who laid down their lives". The term "employees who laid down their lives" – *junshokusha* in Japanese – is laden with overtones of voluntary self-sacrifice for the cause. The monument does not include any further details of the numbers, names or origins of those who "laid down their lives". The company's sense of responsibility for their deaths did not extend to publishing its own records, conducting its own investigations of the identities dead, or notifying relatives of the deaths. Needless to say, neither the Uryû Electrical Power Co. nor its past and present parent companies Ôji Paper and Hokkaido Electrical Power have ever expressed apology or paid compensation for these deaths. Following request from South Korea's Truth Commission on Forced Mobilization, the Japanese government has finally begun to send its own requests to local governments, seeking information about burial records of Korean labourers in their areas. However, the Japanese companies involved have generally refused to provide information to assist the work of the Commission.³⁸

The violence of forced labour, then, lies not only in the methods of recruitment and in the conditions of employment of the labourers, but also in what happens after: above all

in the fact that these workers, whether Japanese or Korean, were seen as so disposable that the companies involved felt no need to attempt to account for their deaths to the families – no need, in other words, to spare these families decades of uncertainty about the fate of their loved ones. An important part of the value of the East Asia Collaborative Workshop projects is that they address this failure. Like the Vietnamese reburials described by Kwon Heonik, they pluck at least some of the victims out of the anonymity of the mass graves and the concrete obelisk, allowing them to “recover their individuality”. In this way, the workers cease to be a nameless throng who “laid down their lives” and return to being (for example) Pak Hae-Bok, born on 1 May 1914, who died after five weeks of illness at the age of 29 while labouring on the Uryû Dam site in the summer of 1943, and was finally laid to rest by his family in Korea half a century later.³⁹

Reading the Archive, Speaking to the Dead

Of course, from a standard academic point of view it is irrational to speak to the dead. The dead cannot hear us. Yet the strength of the Sorachi People’s History Forum and the East Asia Collaborative Workshop, I would suggest, lies precisely in their ability to bring together traditional historical research, attention to the voices of the subjects of history (former forced labourers and their families), and a willingness to speak to the dead. The groups’ participants combine careful examination of archives with the tasks of “feeling the present in the body” and acting to address the “enduring wounds in social life” left by violence.

It would be a mistake to over-idealise the Workshop’s achievements. Though some of its young participants have had their lives changed forever by the experience, others have left uninfluenced by or dissatisfied with the group’s approach. To some victims’ families, the return of relative’s remains have brought a form of closure after decades of psychological suffering; but others remain as hurt and angry as ever. Today, as it has done in the past, the Workshop is again re-examining its strategies for pursuing the elusive goals of justice and reconciliation. Its work over the past decade, however, has

deepened understanding of the coercive aspects of wartime labour recruitment in several important respects.

First, the focus on the physical remains of the dead transcends national boundaries, creating a recognition of the common experiences that linked Japanese *takobeya* workers and Korean labour conscripts. This recognition, though, does not lead in the direction proposed by the Japan Society for History Textbook Reform – towards the conclusion that Korean workers suffered no more than their Japanese counterparts, and therefore that “forced transportation” is a myth. Rather, it creates insight into the long tradition of violence in labour recruitment that lay behind the wartime system. Second, the East Asia Collaborative Workshop’s projects highlight the fact that the denial of freedom in “forced transportation” was not just a matter of the way in which people were physically brought to Japan, but also of the multiple forms of coercion by which they were confined after their arrival. Third, the unearthing of the remains of the dead and the search for the bereaved reveals the profound violence inflicted even after death by the way in which the companies which used forced labour treated the dead as well as the living.

One important message which emerges from this decade of work is that there is still an unfulfilled need for the Japanese government and the companies involved to make restitution to the victims. In the meanwhile, though, the rituals performed by the East Asia Collaborative Workshop are small steps towards undoing at least some of the effects of past violence. When Ogawa Ryûkichi addresses the dead, the dead (of course) remain as silent and voiceless as ever. But we, the living, who listen to his words, are made to reach out with our imaginations to the dead worker whose bones lie in the box before us, and to whom Ogawa speaks. We are made to confront the experience of the labour conscript in its materiality, and to recognize the conscript as a unique and infinitely complex individual human being whose life ended miserably, alone and far from home. We cannot console him in his death, but we can at least finally accord him some of the respect that his was denied in living and dying, at the same time developing a shared and deeper understanding of this moment of violence in history, and of its echoes in the present.

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NOTES

¹ Sorachi Minshûshi Kôza, *Shumarinai to Kyôsei Renkô, Kyôsei Rôdô*, Fukagawa, Sorachi Minshûshi Kôza, 1996, p. 31.

² On the Workshop, see Kim Yeong Hwan, “Promoting Peace and Reconciliation as a Citizen of East Asia: The Collaborative East Asian Workshop and the Grassroots House Peace Museum”, *Japan Focus*, 17 December 2007, http://www.japanfocus.org/Kim_Yeong_Hwan-Promoting_Peace_and_Reconciliation_as_a_Citizen_of_East_Asia_The_Collaborative_East_Asian_Workshop_and_the_Grassroots_House_Peace_Museum accessed 10 August 2008.

³ Mure Dickie, “Aso Admits Family Mine Used POWs”, *Financial Times*, 6 January 2009.

⁴ See for example Atarashii Rekishi Kyôkasho o Tsukuru Kai, “Daigaku Nyûshiki Sentâ Shiken no ‘Kyôsei Renkô’ ni kansuru Setsumon ni tsuite no Kôkai Shitsumonjô”, 24 January 2004, on the Society’s website: http://www.tsukurukai.com/01_top_news/file_news_ct/ct_news_040127.html; also http://www.tsukurukai.com/07_fumi/text_fumi/fumi38_text02.html, both accessed 9 January 2009.

⁵ See Atarashii Rekishi Kyôkasho o Tsukuru Kai, “Chôsenjin no iwayuru ‘Kyôsei Renkô’ mondai wa nan nanka”, http://www.tsukurukai.com/14_web_special/text_webspecial/webspe_rachi_topic04.html accessed 9 January 2009.

⁶ On forced labour by Chinese prisoners-of-war, see Sugihara Tôru, *Chûgokujin Kyôsei Renkô*, Tokyo, Iwanami Shoten, 2002.

⁷ For a good discussion of this issue, see William Underwood, “Names, Bones and Unpaid Wages (1): Reparations for Korean Forced Labor in Japan”, *Japan Focus*, September 2006, www.japanfocus.org/products/topdf/2219 accessed 10 September 2007.

⁸ See the publications section of the Commission’s website: http://www.gangje.go.kr/admin_list0302.asp; also William Underwood, “New Era for Japan-Korea History Issues: Forced Labor Redress Efforts Begin to Bear Fruit”, *Japan Focus*, 8 March 2008.

⁹ See, for example, Ilje Gangjeomha Gangje Dongwon Pihae Jinsang Gyumyeong Wiwonhoe, *Sujogman Meolljeong Hamyeon Mak Ganeun Gyeoya (Gangje Dongwon Gusul Girokkip 6)*, Seoul, Ilje Gangjeomha Gangje Dongwon Pihae Jinsang Gyumyeong Wiwonhoe, 2007 (available on the website: http://www.gangje.go.kr/admin_list0302.asp); Tsubouchi Hirokiyo, *‘Bôshû’ to iu na no kyôsei renkô: Kikikaki aru Zainichi issei no shôgen*, Tokyo, Sairyûsha, 1998; Kang Sangjung and Oguma Eiji eds., *Zainichi Issei no Kioku*, Tokyo, Shûeisha Shinsho 2008;

- ¹⁰ On prewar Korean migration to Japan, see for example Sugihara Tôru, *Ekkyô suru Tami: Kindai Ôsaka no Chôsenjinshi Kenkyû* (Tokyo, Shinkansha, 1998).
- ¹¹ See Y. Yoshimi, *Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery in the Japanese Military during World War II*, (New York, Columbia University Press, 2000).
- ¹² A number of interesting case studies can be found in Kang Sangjung and Oguma Eiji eds., *Zainichi Issei no Kioku*, Tokyo, Shûeisha Shinsho 2008.
- ¹³ Not surprisingly, it was those who had lived longest in Japan who were most likely to wish to remain after the war. The schemes for repatriation created by the Occupation authorities also gave priority to forced labourers, ensuring that a large number of them returned to Korea in the eighteen months immediately following liberation.
- ¹⁴ See “Chôsenjin no iwayuru ‘Kyôsei Renkô’” op. cit.
- ¹⁵ This mistake appears in English-language as well as some Japanese-language writings on the subject. For example, ‘Contemporary Japan: Culture and Society’, part of the ‘Asia for Educators’ website hosted by Columbia University, which states: ‘Another major ethnic group in Japan is the Korean Japanese population — in Japanese sometimes called *zai-nichi kankokujin*, ‘Koreans-resident-in-Japan’ — who are a large population estimated in the hundreds of thousands, perhaps in the low millions, of descendants of Koreans who were brought to Japan as forced laborers from the Japanese, from the beginning of the Japanese colonial period in Korea, which started in 1910 when Korea was annexed by Japan.’ See http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/at_japan_soc/common/all.htm (accessed 12 May 2008)
- ¹⁶ See the online video debate between Miyadai, Tokyo University academic Kayano and *manga* writer Kobayashi Yoshinori, distributed by Videonews.com Internet TV on 29 June 2007,
- ¹⁷ See for example D. Eltis ed., *Coerced and Free Migration: Global Perspectives*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2002.
- ¹⁸ Richard B. Allen, “The Mascarene Slave Trade and Labour Migration in the Indian Ocean during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries”, in Gwyn Campbell, *The Structure of Slavery in the Indian Ocean, Africa and Asia*, London, Taylor and Frances, 2004, pp. 33-50; quotation from p. 44.
- ¹⁹ See United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Convention (no. 29) Concerning Forced Labour*, adopted 28 June 1930 by the General Conference of the International Labour Organization, <http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/31.htm> accessed 5 January 2009.
- ²⁰ Onodera Masami, “Uryû Suiryoku Hatsudensho no Kensetsu to sono Haikei ni Kansuru – Saikô: Ôji Seishi no Hokkaidô Shinshutsu to no Kanren o Chûshin ni”, *Hokkaidô Gakuen Daigaku Keizai Ronshû*, vol. 39, no. 2, Jan. 1992, pp. 89-106, see particularly p. 91; Sorachi Minshûshi Kôza, *Shumarinai to Kyôsei Renkô, Kyôsei Rôdô*, op. cit., p. 16.
- ²¹ Onodera, “Uryû Suiryoku Hatsudensho no Kensetsu”, *Hokkaidô Gakuen Daigaku Keizai Ronshû*, op. cit.
- ²² For some interesting examples, see Curtis Gayle, *Local History and the “Centre” in Japan, 1945-1960*, Canberra, Australian National University, unpublished PhD thesis, 2005.
- ²³ See Sorachi Minshûshi Kôza, *Shumarinai to Kyôsei Renkô, Kyôsei Rôdô*, op. cit.
- ²⁴ Sorachi Minshûshi Kôza, *Shumarinai to Kyôsei Renkô, Kyôsei Rôdô*, op. cit., p. 37.
- ²⁵ Sorachi Minshûshi Kôza, *Shumarinai to Kyôsei Renkô, Kyôsei Rôdô*, op. cit., pp. 54-57.
- ²⁶ Sorachi Minshûshi Kôza, *Deau, Horu, Manabu: '97 Nikkan Kyôdô Wâkushoppu in Shumarinai*, Fukagawa, Sorachi Minshûshi Kôza, 1999.
- ²⁷ Kim Yeong Hwan, “Promoting Peace and Reconciliation as a Citizen of East Asia”, op. cit.
- ²⁸ Gaimushô Ajia Taiheiyô Kyoku Kita Ajia Ka, “Nikkan rekishi kyôdô kenyû sokushin keikaku”, released by Cabinet Secretary Fukuda, 5 March 2002. On these groups, see also Tessa Morris-Suzuki, “Lost Memories: Historical Reconciliation and Cross-Border Narratives in Northeast Asia”, in Steffi Richter ed., *Contested Views of a Common Past: Revisions of History in Contemporary Northeast Asia*, Frankfurt, Campus Verlag, 2008, pp. 397-417.

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- ²⁹ Gaimushô, “Nicchû Rekishi Kyôdô Kenkyû Dai-1kai Kaigô (Gaiyô)”, 2006, http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/china/jc_rekishi_01.html
- ³⁰ Antjie Krog, *Country of my Skull: Guilt, Sorrow and the Limits of Forgiveness in the New South Africa*, New York, Three Rivers Press, 2000.
- ³¹ Quoted in Kim Yeong Hwan, “Promoting Peace and Reconciliation as a Citizen of East Asia”, op. cit.
- ³² Atarashii Rekishi Kyôkasho o Tsukuru Kai, “Chôsenjin no iwayuru ‘Kyôsei Renkô’ mondai wa nan nanka”, op. cit.
- ³³ Underwood, “New Era for Japan Korea History Issues”, op. cit.
- ³⁴ Sorachi Minshûshi Kôza, *Shumarinai to Kyôsei Renkô, Kyôsei Rôdô*, op. cit., p. 9.
- ³⁵ Heonik Kwon, *After the Massacre: Commemoration and Consolation in Ha My and My Lai*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2006, p. 4.
- ³⁶ Kwon, *After the Massacre*, pp. 87-89.
- ³⁷ Kwon, *After the Massacre*, pp. 133-134.
- ³⁸ Underwood, “New Era for Japan Korea History Issues”, op. cit.
- ³⁹ Sorachi Minshûshi Kôza, *Shumarinai to Kyôsei Renkô, Kyôsei Rôdô*, pp.36 and 57.