

The following two reports address a wound that has still not closed after a half-century—that of Japan's actions during the 15 Year War and of the failure of the Japanese government to compensate victims. Several groups of war victims and bereaved families came to Japan this summer to press their case for better treatment. Tanaka Hiroshi, a professor of Japan-Asia relations at Aichi Prefectural University who has been involved in the issue of Korean residents of Japan, records the struggles of these groups in the first article. In the second, Nakahara Michiko, a professor of Eastern History at Waseda University, brings a report from her visits to the Thai-Burma Railway.

Unfinished Business

Japan and War Compensation

By Tanaka Hiroshi

Meeting with several groups of Asian war victims convinced me that their distrust of Japan is deeply rooted in what the Imperial Army did during WW II and what Japan hasn't yet done for them. It would be foolish to disregard their anger. Ironically, I met them during the same month our Diet was busy deliberating its euphemistically named "Peace Cooperation Bill."

The first group, the Taiwanese Federation of Former Japanese Soldiers and Bereaved Families, came on October 17th to get back the savings they'd deposited in military post offices and their unpaid wages from WW II. The arrears are estimated by the Japanese government itself as: ¥250 million military pension, ¥82 million wages on deposit and ¥178 million postal savings. In Tokyo I was handed a flyer by a Japanese support group. They quoted a Taiwanese ex-Japanese soldier, "I can't die in peace until the Japanese government offers a sincere apology and compensates us for its transgressions in Asia." They're still waiting.

Just ten days later a second group arrived in Nagoya from Korea: the Pacific War Victims and Bereaved Families. Their faces, lined with age and worry, spoke clearly of the grudge against Japan that has rankled in their hearts for 45 years. They came to file a suit against the Japanese government for apology and for compensation. To save money, they came by ferry (Pusan to Shimonoseki) instead of by air. The next morning in Nagoya station, with banners reading, "Plaintiffs in Apology and Compensation Suit," they came upon prime minister Kaifu. I was there also to see the group off. I don't know if their strips caught Kaifu's eyes. He may have been too absorbed with the U.N. Peace Cooperation Bill.

On November 7th, I flew to Beijing with a friend to meet with survivors and bereaved families of Hanaoka, a well-known forced labor camp during WW II. Kajima, today among Japan's five largest construction companies, stole Chinese men from their families and took them to a mine in Hanaoka, Akita Prefecture, in the north of Japan.

In the summer of 1990, six survivors of the camp went to Ohdate City to attend observances at a special monument bearing 418 Hanaoka victims' names on it. Following the ritual, they went to Tokyo to negotiate with the company, demanding a formal apology, the construction of memorial museums in both Beijing and Ohdate, and amends of ¥5 million to each worker or bereaved family. Kajima expressed its deep apology, but the negotiations on compensation had to be postponed.

Later, I attended a Hanaoka observance in Beijing along with more than 100 survivors and bereaved families. The 45 years since their release have eased neither the scars on their bodies nor those in their hearts. Watching a videotape of the six people's trip to Japan reminded them of the harsh days in Hanaoka. The way they watched the video was bloodcurdling.

In addition to the above cases, 21 Koreans filed a damage suit against the Japanese government for forced labor in Sakhalin, demanding compensation of ¥10 million each. They filed on August 29, 1990, when the Gulf Crisis was making headlines, and our government was also busy preparing the "Peace Cooperation Bill."

In November 1987, a group of Korean Atomic-bomb victims also claimed \$2.3 billion (¥30 billion) against the Japanese government. The figure is derived from:

$(¥99.1 \text{ billion} \div 368,000 \times 23,000 \times (12+10))$, where ¥99.1 billion is the total amount the Japanese government paid to atomic bomb victims in Japan during fiscal 1984, 368,000 is the number of victims in Japan who have "Atom bomb victims handbooks," 23,000 is the number of atom bomb victims in south Korea, 42 is the number of past years the group demands compensation for, and 10 is the number of coming years the group demands compensation for.

In February 1942, U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, which authorized the detention of about 12,000 Japanese (half of them were Japanese nationals and the rest were American citizens) in concentration camps located in remote areas.

In 1980, the U.S. Congress organized an ad hoc committee on Japanese American Reparations. For the next two years, they held 20 public hearings and heard testimony from 750 witnesses. The committee made a final report on the

issue in 1983, a document full of serious reflection on the case.

The report recommended that the government "apologize formally and pay \$20,000 to each of about 60,000 living victims." On October 9th, 107-year-old Mamoru Eto and nine other Japanese-Americans were invited to the Department of Justice, where Attorney General Richard Thornburg handed each of them a check for \$20,000 and a letter from the President. The letter read, "A monetary sum and words alone cannot restore lost years or erase painful memories; neither can they fully convey our Nation's resolve to rectify injustice and to uphold the rights of individuals. We can never fully right the wrongs of the past. But we can take a clear stand for justice and recognize that serious injustices were done to the Japanese Americans during World War II."

In Canada, also, an agreement was signed in September 1988 between the Japanese Canadian Association and Prime Minister Brian Mulroney allowing for reparations. Both Canadian and American governments have even sent officials to Japan to meet the needs (explanations and help with applications) of victims now living in Japan. Although the two countries are among the victors in WW II, they seem to believe that even victors should apologize and compensate victims of wartime transgressions.

What Has Japan Done?

The fighting in the Gulf War is over, and the Japanese government has come up with several ideas to cope with postwar issues. First, it presented a bill to authorize the participation of Self-Defense Force personnel in United Nations peacekeeping operations. Second, it ruled it could dispatch SDF troops overseas to airlift refugees, and finally it sent four minesweepers to conduct operations in the Persian Gulf.

A major Hong Kong newspaper, *Minpo*, reported on March 30 that a proposition demanding compensation from Japan and research on those killed or victimized by the Japanese Army was presented to the 7th People's Council in Beijing. It suggested that the Chinese Red Cross be authorized to make a total count of victims and of the value of property lost. This was reported by Kyodo News Service on April 11 along with an interview of the person who presented the idea (only a few national newspapers in Japan

carried this story).

The proposition put the damage inflicted by the Japanese Army at \$300 billion—\$120 billion against the military and \$180 billion against civilians. China renounced its right to claims in the first category when it normalized diplomatic relations with Japan, but civilians still retain the right to compensation.

The man who presented the proposition told Kyodo, "Japan has not fulfilled its responsibilities. They have repeatedly hurt our feelings by revising school textbooks, and having government officials visit Yasukuni Shrine."

Former Japanese Internees in the Soviet Union

Soviet Union President Mikhail Gorbachev's visit to Japan centered around the territorial issues, but I was concerned with the issue of former Japanese, a long-time thorn in the relation between the two countries. With the progress of *perestroika* the Soviet Union officially recognized for the first time that they had interned some 600,000 Japanese. They also promised to reveal relevant information—the names of the dead and the burial sites. Gorbachev even paid a visit to graves in Khabarovsk.

On January 28th, Sok Sen-gi, a north Korean resident of Japan, demanded a disability pension from the Japanese government. He was drafted

into the Japanese army in 1942, and was seriously injured in the Marshall Islands in 1944. Although former Japanese soldiers with similar fates are receiving about ¥3.3 million in pensions a year, he has been denied that benefit just because he is no longer a Japanese national.

The Japanese Foreign Ministry did an international study in 1982 on the handling of foreigners who were injured or killed in the war. All the five countries surveyed, the United States, England, France, Italy, and West Germany, were paying pensions almost equivalent to those paid to their own nationals. "The Japanese government insists on sending Self-Defense Forces to the Middle East, saying this is a humanitarian issue. Why isn't it helping us with our humanitarian issue? We have been left like this for more than 40 years?" Sok asked.

If the government is really serious about enhancing its trust in the international community, it should recognize its past conduct against its Asian neighbors and work hard to clear up the suspicions held deep in their minds. As long as it insists it has no responsibility for damages done to individuals, it will find it hard to be welcomed as a real member of Asia.

This article appeared originally in Japanese in the organ of the Komeito (Clean Government Party).

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Forgotten Victims

Asian and Women Workers on the Thai-Burma Railway

By Nakahara Michiko

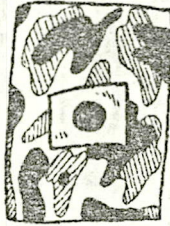
Today, many Japanese have never even heard of the Thai-Burma Railway. In the West, people may know something of it, but only through the American film *The Bridge over the River Kwai*. For the six months following the attack on Pearl Harbor, Japanese people were fascinated by news of victory. Singapore, Great Britain's impregnable fort, a stronghold of the British Empire, fell to the Japanese Imperial Army on February 15, 1942. Rangoon fell on March 8, 1942 and within just two months all of Burma had been conquered by Japan.

But this swift Japanese victory did not last long. The Japanese Navy was decisively beaten at the Battle of Midway in June 1942. Four aircraft carriers were annihilated along with their air fleets.

The large Japanese army based in Burma was totally dependent on the Navy for support and for supplies of arms and ammunition. After Midway they were faced with the sudden urgency of building a transport route to the Burmese front—there was not a single railway nor even a proper road between Burma and Thailand. A railway seemed to be the answer.

In July Imperial Headquarters finally ordered the construction of the Thai-Burma Railway. It was to be completed as quickly as possible and at any cost. The deadline given for its completion was August, 1943.

With these orders, they began construction of a 415-kilometer railway between Kanchanaburi, Thailand and Thanbyuzayat, Burma, using incredibly primitive tools. The area was a rugged, pestilence-ridden, trackless jungle, and also an area known to have one of the largest amounts



of annual rainfall in the world. Additionally, the construction plan itself was reckless.

Two Japanese railway regiments with a total of 12,000 men were assigned to the project. Then the Japanese mobilized about 60,000 British, Dutch, Australian and American prisoners of war to

Burma and Thailand to help complete the project. Approximately 12,000 of these POWs died.

In Kanchanaburi, I visited a war cemetery with the remains of 6,982 people. I saw people watering the surrounding trees and flowers. I walked around and read each epitaph. They seemed almost endless. Each one of these dead soldiers had a mother, father, sisters, brothers, a wife, children and friends. I felt anger toward those who had caused their deaths in the jungle prison camps and toward those who had made them take up arms and fight in foreign lands.

During the same trip I visited a site where the bones of more than 700 corpses had been excavated in 1990. A huge hole left from the excavation still lay gaping. Villagers told me it had been dug as a burial site for the Asian laborers who worked along the railway. Almost all the surviving Asian laborers I had a chance to interview in Malaysia said they'd seen anywhere from fifteen to thirty corpses thrown into mass graves every day. As soon as these holes were filled with bodies, a process which took just several days, they were covered over with mud. Sometimes rain would wash away the mud and the arms and legs of corpses would stick out. The smell of dead bodies would become intolerable. One Tamil laborer told me he had been thrown into one of these graves while he was unconscious but still alive. He said he'd been brought back to