

## A FORCED LABOR IN HASHIMA ISLAND, 1939- 1945: A HIDDEN DARK HISTORY

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In 2015, Hashima Island in Japan was designated as a UNESCO World Heritage site as a main spot of the Meiji Industrial Revolution. Hashima Island or Battleship named based on the shape of the distant silhouette. The official title of the Hashima Island in UNESCO heritage site is ‘Sites of Japan’s Meiji industrial Revolution: Iron and Steel, Ship building and Coal Mining.’<sup>1</sup> Every year, over 10 million of visitors come to this Island as it is designated as UNESCO heritage site in 2015. It became the symbolic existence of modern Japanese history. When we look at this conflict between Japan and Korea about Hashima Island on its own, we might think that it is a diplomatic tussle between Japan and South Korea over their wartime legacy. However, when we view it in the context of the Japanese occupation over Korea, we can see that actually the official recognition of forced labour of Koreans in Hashima Island during the 1940s was not given by Japanese government. This paper explores how the Meiji industrialisation developed and caused Japanese occupation of Korean and forced labour in Hashima Island. It reveals how the unacceptability of forced labour by Japanese government initiated the problems in modern-day history.

The theory which changed the destiny of Japan and Korea

All the deaths and terror in Korea during Japanese occupation and World War II began from a single ideology from Japanese politicians. During the 1850s in Japan, Yoshi Shoin, a political theorist, spread the idea of reformation and taught about national prosperity and military power to his students.<sup>1</sup> Yoshida Shoin spread ‘Jeong-han lon’ which was a theory of

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<sup>1</sup> *Diary of PD – Hashima Island*, directed by Hyung won Jang (2017; Seoul: MBC,2017), TV

the occupation of Korea for Japan's national prosperity and defense. He specified in the following statement:

With haste to prepare for the armed forces, with the warships and the turrets, immediately pioneered Hokkaido and feasted the feudal princes to take Kamchatka and Okhotsk, conquer Okinawa [Ryukyu] and Joseon, And occupy the Manchu Island and capture the islands of the Taiwanese and the Filipino Luzon in the south to reveal an enterprising momentum to regain the glory.<sup>2</sup>

This had been on the rise since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and Japan already established it. There was the turbulence between the Tokugawa shogunate in 1867 which was a previous regime started from 1603 who has ruled Japan over 260 years and the Meiji reformation. Yoshida Shoin's students ended Tokugawa shogunate and succeeded with the Meiji restoration. The Meiji restoration reformed Japan as a constitutional monarchy as it restored the role of the Japanese emperor to enforce the reformation policy to become an imperialist nation. Four people from his students such as Ito Hirobumi, Inoue Gakutei, Katsura Taro and Masatake Teruchi became the prime minister of Japan and they lead Japan to the most powerful nation in Asia.

At the same time, Korea faced the end of the Cho Sun dynasty after 518 years of history and they became the first victim of Japan. Those people who guide Japan as an advanced country were the main culprit for Korean who made them a ruined country. That theory caused the occupation of Japan over Korea which naturally brought to light all the tragedies that happened during Japanese occupation including forced labor in Hashima Island as a consequence of it. The UNESCO designation of the seven places of Meiji industrial relics which have a history of forced labor with 57900 of Koreans in 2015 including Hashima island also can be seen as one of the processes of eliminating the history about Japan's Asian

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<sup>2</sup> Yoshida Shoin, 유수록(幽囚錄), Japan, 1854

war of aggression and their colonial rule in Asia. This settles the basis of stronger Japan which can maintain the peace and control east Asia.

The origin of the conflict with Hashima Island between Japan and Korea has started in earnest since 1910 when was the start of the annexation of Korea by Japan which ended in 1945, then Japan lost World War II.<sup>3</sup> During 35 years, the Japanese Government-General of Korea accomplished the colonial policy on Korea, such as the erasure policy and the colonial exploitation policy. Those years can be divided into three periods of forced ruling (1910-1919), cultural politics (1919-1931), and Japanese Land strum with Korean (1931-1945). The history of Hashima Island between Japan and Korea is related to the last period, particularly 1939-45.<sup>4</sup>

Japan in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the Meiji period

One of the main characteristics of Japan's foreign policy during Japan during the 20<sup>th</sup> century was imperialism.<sup>5</sup> During this period, Japan had a major change with its system of the state. Edo Japan's feudal government had changed to Modern Emperor country by the Meiji government. After that, there was a dramatic reformation with the politics, military, economics, diplomacy, education, religion and culture. When the world was preparing for the second world war, there was a rise of new politicians during the Meiji period (1868-1912) who argued for the change of Japanese society. As Japan was ruled by the warlord power since the 12th century, they put emphasis on loyalty to their empire. Historian Hee Yeob Sung explained that during this period, Japan tried to modernize, detribalize, and westernize like

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<sup>3</sup> “일 제강점기 (Japanese occupation over Korea)”, *Doosan Dictionary*, 2013, 29 July 2017, <http://terms.naver.com/entry.nhn?docId=1136764&cid=40942&categoryId=33384>

<sup>4</sup> Hee Young Gwon, Myung hee Lee, Sae Ok Jang, Nam Su Kim, Do Hyung Kim, Hee Won Choi, *High School Korean History*, Seoul: Gyohagsa, 2017, 67

<sup>5</sup> W.G. Beasley, *Japanese imperialism: 1894~1946*, Seoul: Hankuk Foreign Language University Press, 2013, 47,323-327

other western countries.<sup>6</sup> Their aim was to expand the influence of Japan and their imperialism.

One of their strategies to complete their aim was the development of steel, shipbuilding, and coal industries on the military purpose which leads to the basis of the rapid industrialization during the mid-19th centuries to the early 20th century. From 1850 to 1910, the Japanese industrialization which completed over 50 years was divided into three periods. First, they were concentrated on the investigation of steel and shipbuilding as well as the military defence with the Navy from the 1850s to early 60s. During the Meiji Restoration which was started from 1860, Japanese government tried to import Western technologies and scientific knowledge and apply it. During 1890 to 1910, Japanese government highlighted their contribution to developing their own technologies with changing the western technology to fit with their demand and social transition.

The Meiji Industrial Revolution changed the Japanese economy significantly. Based on the compensation of the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-5, led to the promotion of finance of trade as the military industry. In 1900, the shipping industry also developed such as the Yokohama Jeonggum Bank and Japan Yusen Company which were responsible for the operations and trade finance. Not only those business, but also railway industry, transportation, and mining and manufacturing industries also developed. Also the role of colony including Korea and China grew to gain profit by trade. Also, the development of coal mine was also significant to manage the supply for the war, one of the examples of developed coal mine is one in Hashima Island.

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<sup>6</sup> Hee Yeob Sung, 조용한 혁명: 메이지 유신과 일본의 건국: 일본 근대사 100년에 관한 성찰 (*Silent revolution: Meiji-revolution and Japan's state-buildings*), Seoul: So Myeong Publishing Co., 2016, 12

Before 1810, Hashima Island was an uninhabited Island which was belonged to Japan. The fisher accidentally found coal for the first time in 1810. From 1890, coal mining industry started by Mitsubishi. In 1916, the first concrete apartment with seven floors in Japan was built on the island to solve a lack of space by the overpopulation.<sup>7</sup> After that building, they built an apartment with 10 floors, school, hospital, temple, bathhouse, pachinko and movie theatre during the 1910s. In 1959, the island's population reached its peak with 5,259, with the population density of 835 people per hectare in the whole island.<sup>8</sup> The Hashima coal mine reached its peak with the production of coal in 1941 with 410000 ton. Since the mining industry in Hashima Island closed in 1974, there is nobody who lives on the island.

As a preparation of the war, its government developed munitions industry. The Japanese steel metallurgy industries was created and their main aim is to support the Japanese military during the war. During the 1930s and 1940s, Japan continuously started the war with foreign countries to expand their imperialism based on the Meiji Restoration. Those examples are the Manchurian Crisis in 1931, the Sino-Japanese war in 1937, and the Pacific war in 1941. It triggered the expanse of war which made other countries involved. However, the difference of national power between Japan and the U.S. was thirtyfold.<sup>9</sup> For Japanese military, the value of Hashima Island was hugely significant to maintain the predominance of its military in the early years of war and complete their dominance over Asia.

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<sup>7</sup> Christopy Gunkel, "Geisterstadt im Ozean", Spiegel online, 2009, <http://www.spiegel.de/einestages/vergessene-orte-a-948617.html#featuredEntry>

<sup>8</sup> Diana Magnancy, "Japan's 007 island still carries scars of wartime past", CNN, 2013, <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/06/11/world/asia/japan-hashima-island-magnay>

<sup>9</sup> Suck Sun Park, Seung Chul Son, Dong Gwu, Min gyo Seo, "태평양 전쟁 – 전쟁의 확대 (Pacific War – the expand of the war)", *Mirae N*, 2009, <http://terms.naver.com/entry.nhn?docId=1008024&cid=42997&categoryId=42997&expCategoryId=42997>

The war footing within Japan has strengthen from 1938, and it caused inflation because of the financial expansion due to the operation of the exhibition economy. As the Sino-Japanese war became longer than they expected, Japanese government enacted the national mobilization which gained the right to control the economy and people's lives without congress's consent. Additionally, the legislation of "National People Recognition Ordinance" in 1939 made nations to contribute in the munitions business.<sup>10</sup> It recruited the forced labour from Korea which was the colonized country under Japan to support the limited amount of people of soldiers and workers.

#### The meaning of 'forced labour' in Hashima Island for Koreans

The history of forced labour is one of the most controversial issues in Korea and, along with the history of comfort women, still causes political and historical disputes with Japan. Koreans were denied their basic human rights and forced to fulfil Japan's imperialistic ambitions by engaging in intensive labour. They suffered from the two atomic bombs in Japan which were a tacit warning with the start of the cold war. The situation after the end of World war II in 1945 made those victims conceal their memory and the past which is yet to be redeemed. Japan, who forced Koreans to work in a coal mine in Hashima Island and did not officially apologize for that, made Hashima Island a UNESCO heritage site and glamorized their use of this island and the contribution of Korea during World War II. When the designation of Hashima Island happened, Koreans began arguing that Japan limited the

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<sup>10</sup> Suck Sun Park, Seung Chul Son, Dong Gwu, Min gyo Seo, "삼국 방공 협정과 중.일 전쟁 (Tripartite Agreement between the Three Kingdoms and China and Japan), *Mirae N*, 2009, <http://terms.naver.com/entry.nhn?docId=1008022&cid=42997&categoryId=42997&expCategoryId=42997>

time period to the 1910s, which was before the time of forced labour, in order to hide the dark history of forced labour with compulsory mobilization among Koreans.

The Committee of Korean Forced Labour and Peace reported that the exploitation of the Koreans had started in July 1939 when national conscription in national mobilization was published by the Japanese government to Korea until Korean liberation in August 2015.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, historian Kim Min Chul stated that the problem of forced labour is still an unsolved problem from the Japanese colonial period. The island was perfectly isolated from Japan and Korean. The island is located in 18km away from Nagasaki port which has the area of 0.0063km squared which is double size of a baseball stadium.<sup>12</sup> The number of people who were sent to the coal mine or factory in Japan as an international mobilization was 68 million. Since 1939, Japan drastically increases the number of forced labourers because of the prolonged Sino-Japanese war. As the war was extended further than expected, the labour force allocated to coal mines and factories in Japan became insufficient.<sup>13</sup> At this point, Koreans were the solution to support that shortage.

Kim also mentioned the reality of forced labour in Hashima Island. Between 1943 and 1945, there were 500 to 800 of Koreans who worked in Hashima coal mine.<sup>14</sup> Those were supposed to be males between ages of 17 to 55 and singled, widowed, or childless females between ages of 14 to 25 that were sent to the service club. However, in reality, there were also boys who are just 14 or 15 who were forced to work in a narrow channel of a coal mine.

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<sup>11</sup> Gwang Mu Hur, Ill Hwan Oh, Sang Ui Lee, Hye Kyung Jeong, 일제 강제동원 Q&A 1. (Japanese forced labor Q&A 1.), Seoul: Sun in Publishing Co., 2015,33

<sup>12</sup> Min Chul kim, Seung Eun Kim, Young Hwan Kim, Jin young Kim, Nogi Kaori, Han Sung cho, Si Hyun Cho, Mi Kyung Kimg, Jung Mi Kim, Mameda Dosiki, Sorano Yosihoro, Yano Hideki, Yamamoto Naoyosi, Ueda Kaesi, Yichiba Junco, Hee Ja Lee, Wan Ik Jang, Hurukawa Maskai, 군함도, 끝나지 않은 전쟁: 군함도에서 야스쿠니까지, 강제동원 100년의 진실을 밝히다 (*The Battleship Island, the endless war: from Battleship Island to Yasukuni, reveal the truth of forced labor*), Seoul: Saeng-gagjeong-won Publishing Co. 2017,34

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.,35

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.,43

Kim also interviewed the Japanese officers who are deeply related to the forced labour in Hashima Island.<sup>15</sup> One officer said, “I worked in the construction in Hokkaido and airfield construction site as a chief from the late 1930s to 1945. Because of the characteristic of my job, I often travelled to Korea and saw the reality of exploitation. When Japanese government recruited Korean workers, each Japanese company called the people under the control of the Japanese Government-General of Korea from many aspects such as the district, policies and labour mobilization. During this process, it was normal to give a huge amount of black money to the high-ranking government official or give them women who are from service club.”<sup>16</sup> This source directly shows the unfairness towards Koreans with their working condition which Japanese government is trying to conceal and deny.

For Korean forced labourers, Hashima Island was referred to as an ‘Island of hell.’<sup>17</sup> The accommodation for Korean workers was located at the end of the island which was the furthestmost and lowest area. At the other end of the island, there were other accommodations for Chinese workers because, if the Koreans and the Chinese lived together, they could cooperate to escape. Conversely, the residence for Japanese was provided in the highest region of the island with the newly constructed apartment. This shows a clear discrimination of Koreans during the Japanese colonial era, where the Japanese treated Koreans as second-class. These incidences explicitly show the reality of ‘forced labour.’

This discrimination was more severe in the workforce.<sup>18</sup> The coal mine in the island was a submarine coal field which was located 1000 meters under the sea with the slope of 60 degrees. The course to the end of the channel was too small, so small that children were also

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.,43

<sup>16</sup> Anonymous, interview by Min Chul Kim, 2016

<sup>17</sup> Sibata Dosiaki, interviewed by Seung wan Ryu, 2017

<sup>18</sup> “The Battleship Island, and Abe’s history war”, directed by Hung won Jang (2017; Seoul; 2017), TV



mobilized to work in it. According to the testimony of victims of Hashima coal mine affirmed that the channel had a temperature of over 40 Celsius with the danger of a gas explosion. Also, sea water kept coming out from the wall and there was no waste system. The service environment for Koreans was normally two shifts making up 12 hours altogether or two shifts of 8 hours for each person, in total 16 hours a day. This intensive work ended when they managed to complete their quota, and if they rested, then Japanese officers whipped them. Under these strict Japanese surveillance, many Koreans tried to escape from the island. There were few survivors who managed to swim to Nagasaki ports, but the majority got caught by Japan's maritime police or drowned. Based on the 'Basic Survey on the Death of the Hashima Coal mine in Japan', among the Koreans who had a compulsory manpower draft, 122 (20%) of them died with disease and malnutrition.<sup>19</sup> According to the list of the victims of Hashima Coal mine, majority of causes of death are deaths from pressure, violent death, asphyxia or drowning. However, rest of the documents about the deaths of Korean forced laborers were burnt when Hashima coal mine was closed in 1974 without any notice to the bereaved. This demonstrates that Japan was trying hard to conceal evidence of its exploitation of Korean labourers, a behaviour that Japan still presents today in relation to the UNESCO designation.

### The beginning of the confliction

When the UNESCO meeting in Bonn, Germany, was held in 2015, a Japanese representative announced that the Japanese nation were "prepared to take measures that allow an understanding that there were a large number of Koreans and others who were brought against their will and forced to work under harsh conditions in the at some of the sites in the

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<sup>19</sup> "군함도 – The Battleship Island", *Current affairs dictionary*, 2017, <http://terms.naver.com/entry.nhn?docId=2843498&cid=43667&categoryId=43667>

island” However, the Japanese government suddenly changed their statement immediately after the event. Kishida Fumio who is a Japan foreign secretary announced that “the expression of ‘forced labor’ does not mean compulsory labor.” To add on, Abe Shinzo, the Japanese prime minister, denied the fact about forced labor: “those people who wanted to work in factory also conscripted.” Due to the criteria for the designation of the UNESCO heritage site, there are three promises that Japanese government keep. First, the Japanese government should show the whole period of history about Hashima Island. Second, they should promote that there was history about the forced labour. Last, they should give a report on the process of these promises by December 2017. However, the Japanese government did not fulfil those criteria until July 2017. The controversy continues as Japan does not implement these recommendations properly.

The Japanese reluctance towards accepting the fact of forced labour in Hashima Island made a huge contrast with Germany’s approach to the Zollverein Coal Mine.<sup>20</sup> During World War II, Germany mobilized the prisoners of war as workers on the coal mines. However, as they admitted the compulsory mobilization after the war, the surrounding nations did not oppose when the Zollverein Coal mine was chosen as a UNESCO Heritage Site. When its designation occurred, UNESCO explained that “This coal mine commemorates a strong human spirit which resisted with its suppression of freedom of action and ideology and the final solution. This site reminds the Holocaust, segregation, and Human barbarism. To add, the horrible memory of the site will get across to the next generation and gives the warning of dangerous thoughts and the denial of human dignity.” This reveals the difference with the attitude towards forced labour among Japan and Germany.

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<sup>20</sup> “무한도전 – 배달의 무도, 군함도 (Infinite challenge – the Battleship Island)”, directed by Tae ho Kim (2015;Seoul;2015), TV

## Final Analysis and Conclusion

As Hashima Island was designated as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2015, the conflict between Japan and Korea has accelerated. When the coal mine in the Island was activated, there was the Meiji Industrial revolution which led Japan to the major economic power in Asia and settled the basis of the beginning of the war. There was enormous progress with coal mining, shipbuilding, steel, and railway businesses, including Hashima Island. The Korean government claimed that there was forced labor with Koreans in Hashima Island under the Japanese government during the occupation. Regardless of age or gender, a large number of people suffered and died. Poor working conditions in the undersea coal mine, child forced labor, numberless deaths with many different reasons made the island to be called 'island of hell.' Japanese government hid horrors and terrors to promote only the value of the island as evidence of the influence of Japan in Asia.

Currently, Japanese government hides all the truths and documents about forced labour and is not following the instruction which UNESCO notified them to complete by the end of 2017. There are no mentions about the fact of forced labour in Hashima Island. This historical analysis suggests that the relationship between Japan and Korea will be bettered only when these reparations are made. Although Japanese government disguises a fact, the deep and dark history of Hashima Island will be remembered in the memories, records, and history of Koreans.