

ARTICLE

# Japan's Forgotten Korean Forced Laborers: The Search for Hidden Wartime Graves in Hokkaido

Ágota Duró<sup>1</sup> and David Palmer<sup>2</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Humanities Department of International English, Hiroshima Jogakuin University, Hiroshima, Japan and <sup>2</sup>School of Historical and Philosophical Studies, The University of Melbourne, Melbourne, VIC, Australia

**Corresponding author:** David Palmer; Email: [palmer.d@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:palmer.d@unimelb.edu.au)

This article has been updated since original publication.

## Abstract

The return of remains of Korean forced laborers who died in Japan between 1940 and 1945 has been a major controversy for over half a century for Koreans. These deaths reveal the tragic consequences of Japan's World War II forced labor system. Japan forcefully mobilized nearly 800,000 Koreans who were taken to at least 1,589 worksites in Japan and 381 worksites in Hokkaido. Over 10 percent of all Koreans forcefully mobilized throughout the empire are estimated to have died or disappeared, but the precise number of Korean forced laborers' deaths inside Japan remains unknown. Until 1989, remains recovered from graves throughout Japan by local people were immediately cremated by Japanese Buddhist priests, making cause of death and precise identities forensically impossible. This account relates the first and only comprehensive effort to exhume Korean forced labor graves without immediate cremation, coordinated by Korean and Japanese activists and academics based in Hokkaido. This effort helped revive a neglected aspect of Korean forced labor history while focusing on the concerns of bereaved Koreans seeking the remains of their lost family members. Nevertheless, the project had serious limitations due to working in a difficult political environment and neglect of forensic science protocols in mass grave excavations and identification. This complex situation prevented identification of victims' names and cause of death that could have held the Japanese government and companies involved accountable.

**Keywords:** Japan; Korea; Forced labor; Labor history; World War II; Hokkaido; Return of remains

## Introduction

In 1973, Fukagawa Munetoshi began searching for Koreans believed to have perished in a typhoon in September 1945 as they tried to return to Korea. They had been forced laborers at Mitsubishi's Hiroshima Shipyard complex where Fukagawa had been their dormitory supervisor. The men survived the atomic bombing of the city in August,

but the Koreans did not survive the journey. It was believed that their remains had been buried on Iki Island in the strait between Kyushu and Busan, by islanders who found unidentified bodies that had drifted ashore. Fukagawa, together with No Jang-Su, the brother of one of the Korean forced laborers, went to Iki Island after they heard an account of the tragedy and excavated some of the remains thinking they were the lost Koreans from Hiroshima. The remains were never authentically identified, and instead were cremated and stored in Buddhist temples in Japan. The return of their remains to Korea has not been resolved as of this publication.<sup>1</sup>

For Koreans, the issue of what happened to their fellow countrymen who were sent to Japan during World War II to work under harsh conditions for Japanese companies involves far more than compensation for the survivors. It also encompasses locating and returning the remains of those Koreans who died in Japan, as closure for their bereaved families, justice for the Korean people, and recognition of an historical injustice that is officially denied in Japan. For progressive Japanese, like Fukagawa in 1970s Hiroshima, it represented an effort to apologize, acknowledge the past and to seek reconciliation with Koreans even if the official Japanese stance has been one of denying that forced mobilization and forced labor had occurred.

Under Japan's colonial rule over Korea (1910–1945), the country's people and resources, including Korean workers for industry, became a core part of the economic power of the Japanese empire. South Korea's Commission on Verification and Support for the Victims of Forced Mobilization under Japanese Colonialism in Korea (2004–2015) documented 798,043 Koreans who were forcefully mobilized and sent to Japan to work between 1939 and 1945 at 1,589 of 4,119 worksites. Some 2,900 companies used Korean forced labor. The Commission estimated that of those, "more than 10 percent died or went missing from sites or during repatriation," meaning that it is possible that some 80,000 Koreans who were sent to Japan died or went missing.<sup>2</sup>

Only 9,043 of the Korean forced laborers who died in Japan have been identified by name, according to researcher Takeuchi Yasuto.<sup>3</sup> Thousands more who either died in Japan and or during attempted repatriation remain unaccounted for. Without identification and repatriation of their remains, their families have no closure. Their oppression and suffering continue in death. Furthermore, many of the forced laborers who perished in Japan are presumed buried in unmarked graves, which could contain crucial physical evidence related to human rights abuses. If their deaths resulted from malnutrition that led to death by disease, from preventable accidents, from failure to provide medical care, or from physical abuse and torture, the unmarked graves are potential scenes of crimes against humanity.

### The forced mobilization and the forced labor system in Wartime Japan

Japan's wartime economy from the late 1930s to 1945 differed from the interwar period spanning the depths of the Great Depression and Japan's invasion of Manchuria to the onset of full-scale war in Northern China by 1937. One scholar has characterized the earlier period as one of "contingent labor" (uncertain, insecure employment) for Koreans who migrated voluntarily to Japan. In contrast, the strain on Japan's labor force increased at the end of the 1930s as troops were mobilized for combat in China.<sup>4</sup> Jerome Cohen notes that Japan's conscription system during World War II made no

exceptions for skilled Japanese industrial workers, in contrast to Allied countries like the United States where exemptions in strategic industries for all workers, especially skilled ones, became standard policy. This led to extreme inefficiencies in Japan's labor system. Korean and other forced laborers replaced Japanese workers sent to war, though Japanese workers remained the majority in industry and mining. The highest concentration of Koreans was in coal mining, where over 50 percent of the Hokkaido miners were Korean. The South Korean Commission on Forced Mobilization verified 381 worksites in Hokkaido that used Koreans as forced laborers, while Takeuchi has documented 261 companies that used Korean forced laborers there. Both these numbers indicate that Hokkaido used more Koreans for forced labor than any other prefecture in Japan.<sup>5</sup>

In 2012, the South Korean Supreme Court confirmed the legal basis for defining "forced mobilization" and "forced labor" historically under present South Korean law in a ruling against Nippon Steel and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, and for the plaintiffs who were former forced laborers. Korea was colonized by Japan from its annexation until after World War II. The South Korean court's decision dismissed the legitimacy of Japanese colonial law, which Japanese courts assumed had validity, as well as the fact that forced mobilization occurred in Korea under Japanese rule even though the plaintiffs worked in Japan afterward. The South Korean judgment can be read as an affirmation of human rights, not just protection of sovereign Koreans:

[T]he founding Constitution of the Republic of Korea provides in its Preamble that 'We, the people of Korea ... upholding the cause of the Independence Movement of 1 March 1919 ... hereby establish an independent democratic nation.' ... In light of these constitutional provisions, Japan's control over the Korean Peninsula during the Japanese occupation period was an unlawful possession by force; and any legal interests resulting from such unlawful control, which is not compatible with the spirit of the Constitution of Korea, cannot be recognized as effective. ... [T]he Japanese decision [dismissing plaintiffs' cases] clearly violates 'the good moral and other social order' of Korea [as stated in the ROK Constitution].<sup>6</sup>

The legal cases presented solid evidence of forced mobilization, abuse on the job and wage theft.

Further evidence of forced mobilization and forced labor can be found in the testimonies of hundreds of Korean survivors which have been published, almost all in Japanese and Korean, and are far too numerous to cite comprehensively here. The publications of independent researcher Takeuchi Yasuto (all in Japanese) quote from the accounts and provide one of the best introductions to the testimonies and sources.<sup>7</sup>

Japan's Korean mobilization policies developed in three phases during the war. First, from September 1939 to March 1942 individual Japanese companies recruited Korean workers under Japanese colonial authorization, with the cooperation of Korean officials at the local level. This phase involved high levels of deception. Koreans generally could not leave their jobs once in Japan, were not paid properly and were subjected to harsh abuse. The second phase ran from March 1942 to September

1944 when authorities in Tokyo centralized recruitment with greater company–government–military cooperation.

The third phase occurred from September 1944 until the end of the war. The military directly enforced mobilization at this point and organized collection points at villages in Korea supervised by Japanese military police. Representatives of the *zaibatsu*—huge, vertically integrated family conglomerates, each with their own bank and many industries—participated in overseeing the mobilization. The largest of these were Mitsubishi, Mitsui, and Sumitomo. Koreans who resisted were severely punished. Japanese documents and later postwar government statements hide the repressive character of the system by stating that it was “national conscription.” Imperial Japan considered Koreans “Japanese subjects of the Emperor,” requiring them to follow national emergency laws like all “Japanese.”<sup>8</sup>

### Korean forced labor deaths and unmarked graves in Japan

If an estimated 80,000 Koreans died or went missing while working in Japan or during repatriation, why have fewer than 10,000 been positively identified? The problem involves unmarked mass graves, a paucity of documentary evidence, and the practice of cremating without identifying the remains, rendering forensic analysis all but impossible. A crucial factor when exhuming remains from graves is to find evidence that will help determine identities of the dead and how they died. The search for evidence requires investigating physical evidence forensically that can corroborate documentary evidence. Reducing exhumation simply to a symbolic return of cremated remains, as was the case with Korean deaths in Japan for almost a half century, meant that physical evidence revealing how they died was lost, as were in many cases, their individual names.<sup>9</sup>

The unmarked graves of Koreans in Japan were in “communal cemeteries” shared with Japanese, but there were separate sections for marked Japanese graves and unmarked graves were most likely Korean and possibly Japanese with no family connections in the area to tend for their grave. Another important factor observed at the Shumarinai Communal Cemetery was that Koreans were buried individually in shallow, unmarked graves close together, which in that sense made them “mass graves.”<sup>10</sup> This contrasting pattern of burial—deep and in coffins for Japanese versus shallow and without coffins for Koreans—became the primary way to differentiate between Japanese and Korean dead at Shumarinai in 1997. But this was done without the use of forensic techniques, which would include laboratory analysis of bones off-site, making this rudimentary differentiation between Koreans and those Japanese without grave markers problematic.

Another key factor is that Korea and Japan traditionally had completely different funerary practices. In Japan, cremation was the norm for centuries, but in South Korea cremation has only become common practice in the last few decades and is not universal as in Japan. Traditional burial in Korea goes back some 500 years when the Yi (Chosŏn) Dynasty (1392–1910) outlawed cremation according to Confucian filial piety and practice. Instead, full body burial in mounds visible from the surface became standard. In contrast, Japanese cremation stemmed from Buddhist practice dominant since the Heian period (from 794 to 1185), a millennium from the twentieth

century. It is estimated that only some 1 percent of Koreans practiced cremation during Japan's colonial occupation, even though the colonial government made cremation official policy. Koreans continued to bury their dead in visible grave mounds, refusing cremation, an act that can be viewed as a form of resistance to Japan's colonial domination and destruction of Korean culture during that era. Shamanist advice on the proper location of graves, using geomancy, was popular among a majority of Koreans during the colonial era. Japanese authorities viewed the traditions as superstitious and anti-modern and imposed Japanese cultural practices on Koreans. Colonial authorities sought to end the local practices common in rural villages through regulations and police arrests but failed to prevent their continuation. This is just one example of Japan's colonial interference and efforts to destroy Korean culture, which also included pressuring Koreans to change their names to a Japanese version, teaching Japanese in schools as the national language instead of Korean and promoting Shinto as a form of reverence for the Emperor. These policies were initially promoted, but by 1938 strictly enforced.<sup>11</sup>

The Japanese Buddhist practice of cremation throughout Japan has been a complicating factor for the "return-of-remains" movement but one that has been ignored by scholars writing in English.<sup>12</sup> A project focused on excavating the graves of Korean forced laborers that commenced in 1997 at Shumarinai in Hokkaido marked the first time in Japan that the practice of cremating exhumed victims was halted. This was due to the efforts of Chung Byung-Ho, a cultural anthropologist who criticized the practice when he met local Hokkaido Buddhist priest Tonohira Yoshihiko in 1989. The two men were key figures in the movement to identify and repatriate the remains of Korean forced laborers. Their project made important progress but faced many challenges, not least of which was a lack of forensic evidence.

### **Tonohira Yoshihiko, the Sorachi People's History Association, and initial excavations at Shumarinai**

Since the 1970s, when Fukagawa and No Jang-Su journeyed to Iki Island, a movement of individuals and groups has sought to return the remains of Korean forced laborers who died in Japan during World War II. They have included Buddhist activists who have promoted returning Korean remains even without an apology from the Japanese government, while other activists have generally opposed returning Korean remains until the Japanese government acknowledges its forced labor history and pays compensation to the families of the victims. All the remains from excavations prior to the 1990s were immediately cremated under Japanese Buddhist priests' supervision, without forensic anthropologists present to ascertain the identities or cause of death of the Korean victims. Many local temples kept memorial tablets with the Korean names of those buried nearby who died during the war. Local government offices also recorded the Korean names of some of the men who died at wartime workplaces.<sup>13</sup>

Tonohira played a major role in the movement from the mid-1970s on. He practiced the Buddhist ethics of the Jōdo Shinshū (Pure Land) sect in his advocacy for the rights of Japan's minority groups and led community efforts in Hokkaido to uncover the hidden history of Korean forced laborers there. While attending Ryukoku University in Kyoto, Tonohira became involved in the social justice and peace movements of

the 1960s. He returned to Hokkaido in 1973 to take up his position at the Ichijōji Temple in the town of Fukagawa. By this time he believed that much of Japanese society remained deeply entrenched in ultra-nationalism, with its symbolic center in Tokyo at the Yasukuni Shrine where Class A Japanese war criminals' remains are interred. He and other activists called this "Yasukuni-ism." This led to his involvement in the Okhotsk People's History Association, which was investigating the local history of Korean victims of forced labor.<sup>14</sup>

After listening to the testimonies and wartime experiences of former Korean forced laborers who stayed on in Hokkaido after the war, Tonohira helped organize a local group, the Sorachi People's History Association in the summer of 1976. The group consisted of local community members who wanted to research the undisclosed wartime history in their region and its victims. In September that year, Tonohira visited Kōkenji Temple for the first time with Miyakawa Eshū, a fellow Buddhist priest. They discovered 70 Buddhist memorial tablets that included 51 men who died while working on the construction of the Uryū Dam and Shinmei Railway between 1935 and 1943. Many had Korean names of men in their 20s and 30s. Although the workers died in wartime, "there were no enemy troops or combat operations in Hokkaido" then, so Tonohira wondered, "What could have killed so many young men?"<sup>15</sup>

The Uryū Dam, built between 1938 and 1943, was located at Shumarinai, a train stop on a local line 40 kilometers from Horokanai. Uryū Electrical Power Company managed the dam construction for Oji Paper Company. Mitsui owned Oji, as well as four massive coal mines in Hokkaido. Mitsui's company empire ran operations in Korea, Manchuria (Japanese Manchukuo), Taiwan, and other parts of Asia and the Pacific. Beyond coal mining, its divisions included aircraft construction and chemicals, along with Mitsui Bank. The Sorachi Association estimated that 3,000 Koreans were brought to the Uryū Dam construction site as forced laborers starting in 1940. Upon completion, Japanese claimed Uryū was "the largest dam of the East."<sup>16</sup>

In response to the discovery, Tonohira and members of the Sorachi Association launched a movement for the excavation of the remains of the victims. They conducted surveys among local residents to learn more about the dam construction and to find the bereaved families of the victims. They also visited Horokanai City Hall and found the burial or cremation permits for 110 workers who died during the dam and railway construction. The documents included the victims' names, nationality, occupation (listed as *coolie*), date of death, and cause of death. They successfully located families of some of the Japanese victims based on certificates for burial or cremation, and found some of their families, but had difficulty finding the families of Korean victims. After the discovery at Horokanai, the financial patrons of Kōkenji Temple showed Tonohira the place where they believed both the Japanese and the Korean victims of the dam and railway construction had been buried, an area behind the Shumarinai Communal Cemetery. This cemetery still served as a burial place for people in Shumarinai and had grave markers. The site where the unmarked Korean and Japanese wartime victims had been interred, however, became the private property of someone from Bifuka Town and had become overgrown with bamboo thicket. Several hollow places on the ground of the unmarked grave area gave visible indications where remains could potentially be found. Members of the Sorachi Association with the help of local people began excavating the graves and exhumed sixteen remains between 1980 and 1983.<sup>17</sup>

They assumed that a number of the remains were of Koreans but could not accurately identify their ethnicity since no forensic anthropologists were present. In the 1980s and 1990s, Tonohira and Miyakawa visited South Korea to share this information with any Korean families they could find. Following the exhumations, Japanese Buddhist priests cremated all unearthed remains, believing this would console the souls and they would no longer be lost, wandering spirits. The cremated remains were placed into urns and stored at Kōkenji Temple until their intended return to South Korea.<sup>18</sup>

In 1992, Tonohira returned the cremated remains of Im Sang-Bok to his family, who agreed to have them interred in the National Cemetery for Overseas Koreans. Im died in 1942 from “illness” at the Uryū Dam site, and his remains had been stored at Hōsenji Temple by the entrance of Shumarinai Communal Cemetery. His remains could be identified because his name was written on the wooden box containing his ashes. Tonohira returned another set of remains, unidentified, that had been excavated by the Sorachi Association in the 1980s. They were interred in the National Cemetery. In 1995, he returned a further eight sets of remains to the National Cemetery which also came from the Sorachi 1980s excavations. Again, none of the relatives could be located. Except for Im’s remains, none of the other remains could be connected to names in documents, nor was their ethnicity verified forensically as all had been cremated by Buddhist priests after exhumation. The possibility that some of the remains without identification could have included Japanese therefore existed.<sup>19</sup>

### 1989–1997—Tonohira and Chung develop the East Asian workshops at Shumarinai

The Sorachi People’s History Association ceased excavations around Shumarinai in 1983 because of local objections. Realizing that many remains had not yet been exhumed, Tonohira became determined to continue. His hopes were realized in 1989 when Chung Byung-Ho visited Tonohira’s Hokkaido preschool. Chung was conducting research on Japanese preschool centers for his Ph.D. studies in cultural anthropology at the University of Illinois. He found he shared similar social justice values with Tonohira. Both had been activists when they were younger and were still motivated by the desire to address Japan’s wartime injustices toward Koreans.<sup>20</sup>

Chung learned from Tonohira how Buddhist priests had been cremating remains exhumed at Shumarinai. He later related his deep concern over this practice, “By not doing standard archaeology, not preserving evidence of burial patterns or of what a bone can tell us about cause of death, they did away with all the data we might have used for analysis.” He promised to return to assist with new excavations when he finished his degree and became a professor in South Korea. Tonohira reflected on his meeting Chung. “For a long time, I’d been searching among Koreans ... but somehow I never met anybody who shared my hopes or views or feelings. It seems like I was waiting for Byung-Ho to show up.”<sup>21</sup> Tonohira and the Sorachi Association continued their activities, renovating the abandoned Kōkenji Temple at Shumarinai where the original Korean memorial tablets had been found. They transformed the temple into a museum in 1995, renamed the Sasanobohyō Exhibition Hall, displaying the local history of Korean forced labor, including documentation on the men who died while working at Shumarinai wartime construction sites.<sup>22</sup>





Figure 1. First Shumarinai Joint Workshop, 1997.

Photo courtesy of Tonojira Yoshihiko on behalf of East Asia Cooperative Workshop.

Chung returned to Shumarinai in 1997 after becoming a cultural anthropology professor at Hanyang University in Seoul. He prepared a “workshop” for students that focused on Korean forced laborers. Sasanobohyō became the base for the workshops and for recommencing excavations at the Shumarinai grave site (see Figure 1). The first excavation that summer involved 230 participants from both South Korea and Japan. The group included students and cultural anthropology academics. Local community members, including young people of Ainu descent, also participated. The first students to arrive in Hokkaido stayed at the Honganji Betsuin Temple in Sapporo.<sup>23</sup> The previously local Sorachi movement had transformed into a transnational one, with both local and international participants, but had shifted to emphasize university student involvement and on-site education.

According to Chung, the project combined exhumation of the graves with cultural awareness education. “The workshop was planned as an anthropological program to further mutual understanding as well as an archaeological excavation of the remains.”<sup>24</sup> He modeled the workshops on his graduate school experience in an archaeology training course, along with related classes including forensic anthropology, at the University of Illinois. Many years later, he made it clear that he was not a fully trained forensic anthropologist. He invited many of his students from Hanyang University to participate along with Japanese students and others to promote cultural interaction. When the first excavations began in 1997, students worked on excavating during the day and at night engaged in intense debates about colonial history and Japanese-Korean relations.



The days ended with festival-like partying that Chung believed would strengthen bonds among the students. Chung felt that this social interaction helped the young people enjoy the work while relieving the stress of daily confronting death. Tonohira found this approach unusual, but he came to view it as a creative way to engage the students.<sup>25</sup>

Encountering the remains in the graves disturbed the Japanese and Korean students, but the experience gave many a new emotional awareness of the past. At the 1997 workshop, their excavation work lasted for 9 days and led to the discovery of four victims' skeletal remains and one victim's cremated remains placed in an urn. Regarding the skeletal remains, two were Japanese buried deep in the ground in wooden coffins with personal *hanko* seals, which made identification possible based on funeral certificate records from Horokanai City Hall. The other two were assumed to be Koreans buried closer to the surface, not in coffins, and without any means to identify them other than that Japanese men would not have been buried this way.<sup>26</sup>

Tonohira and Chung came to different conclusions regarding the broken condition of the skeletal remains. Tonohira believed it was the result of deterioration over time.<sup>27</sup> In contrast, Chung believed that the broken bones were probably caused by accidents or violence. In his Korean-language article, "Public Anthropology of Memory and Remembrance: Discovering and returning victims of forced labor during the Japanese occupation," he stated that, "evidence known through the excavation of bones will disappear unless the ... remains are systematically analyzed. By recording and analyzing the victim's age and physical characteristics, the cause of death and estimating the situation ... can confirm identity through burial items and DNA tests." Nevertheless, he did not cite any forensic reports documenting the excavations or other evidence specific to the workshop excavations or mention any forensic methods that might have been used in the excavations, such as how depth and form of burial differed between the Japanese and Koreans; soil type (acidic or alkaline that would have affected bone conditions); or any forensic assessment of bones specific to Korean remains found that would have revealed trauma or violence.<sup>28</sup>

The workshop discussions for students centered primarily on cross-cultural education and personal interaction with those from differing cultures, as well as religious cultural ceremonies that occurred when bones were exhumed. Physical anthropologist Park Seon-Ju<sup>29</sup> supervised, with students doing much of the digging, but there were no regular forensic anthropologists on site or involved in the planning and later the examination of remains.

The accounts by Tonohira and Chung of the excavations and discovery of bones did not encompass a forensic anthropological perspective but were generally impressionistic in the absence of any substantial data. This is understandable for Tonohira, who was a Buddhist priest. But for Chung, even if he was a cultural anthropologist and had some training in forensic anthropology at university, this absence of data is a concern. Chung's account here is representative of his overall analysis:

The excavation of the remains [assumed Korean] was extremely difficult. Scraping the dirt from the ground, level by level, with shovels and trowels and investigating the traces of burial by slight changes in dirt color, we were able to unearth the facts of horrendous treatment of the dead. They were bent and

crouched without coffins in shallow ground, some with fractured skulls, their bodies tangled in roots over the years. When the first of the remains was found in the dirt, the participants from both countries trembled and cried together. Facing the evidence of this historical crime, the young generation pledged to build a peaceful future together based on truth and reconciliation.<sup>30</sup>

These emotional responses are understandable, but the reactions also seem to have obscured the need to accurately assess the forensic reasons for the bone fractures and for the students to be fully informed on how to assess skeletal remains in graves that were over half a century old and in densely forested areas. The “crouched position” of the Korean skeleton could potentially be interpreted as a traditional Korean burial practice that would have been totally alien to the Japanese present. Verification of “horrendous abuse” would have required off-site laboratory forensic examination of the bones.

Chung emphasized the cultural aspects of the Korean deaths, especially religion. He stated that the deceased Koreans had been young *nōmin*—peasants—whose “religious outlook or beliefs ... had Confucian elements but really it was Shamanism. For the general [Korean] population, Shamanism is the main source of deep-rooted spirituality.” Consequently, a shaman (*mudang* in Korean) escorted the South Korean participants to the Shumarinai site in Japan in 1997. Chung recalled that the shaman “asked the gods down in the earth to excuse us for disturbing them with our digging.” In a similar recognition of indigenous culture, Tonohira believed that “we have an obligation to invite the Ainu people ... to come to witness our work and to perform their own ceremonies,” and as a result they were present.<sup>31</sup> In his publications, Chung did not address the contrasting *physical* burial practices of traditional Confucianism and Shamanism in Korea, and how Japanese Buddhist cremation practice was the opposite.

### 1998–2013—from the Shumarinai workshops to the Asajino Airfield excavations

Between 1998 and 2013, the “workshops” combined educational sessions with hands-on experience in excavation at some half a dozen abandoned grave sites. The original name, the Japan–South Korea Collaborative Workshop, was changed to the East Asian Collaborative Workshop for Peace in 2001 after Zainichi Koreans in Japan who identified with North Korea began participating. In some cases, workshop leaders determined the excavation sites based on local people’s memories going back decades. The educational sessions moved beyond Hokkaido, with workshops held in Seoul (1998, 2000), Osaka (1999), and Jeju, South Korea (2002). The initial excavation in the summer of 1997 had created considerable expectations for further activity, but excavations did not resume until 4 years later. In 2001, two skeletal remains believed to be Koreans were exhumed at Shumarinai. But when Professor Matsumura Hirofumi of Sapporo Medical University analyzed the bone remains in 2003, he concluded that they belonged to seven different individuals, although in most cases not full skeletons, as only small bone fragments had been excavated. In 2005, excavations again resumed, but this time at a new location, the former Asajino Military Airfield in far north Hokkaido.<sup>32</sup>

Wartime construction of the Asajino Airfield began in 1942 and was completed in 1943. The Sorachi Association learned from testimonies and local sources that about 400 Korean forced laborers (according to other testimonies, the number was far higher) worked there under cruel conditions. They believed that 118 people died during the airfield construction, including 96 Koreans, 21 Japanese, and a person of unknown nationality, all apparently buried in a communal cemetery.<sup>33</sup> In the postwar period, the disused airfield site turned into grassland and was sold to a private owner. The old communal cemetery was closed, and the Japanese remains were moved to a new location. But the remains of the Korean victims were abandoned, forgotten in the space where the old cemetery once existed. In 1971, the Japanese manager of the *Tenpoku Shimbun* (newspaper) erected a monument in Hamatonbetsu near the old graves for the victims of Asajino and initiated annual memorial services. By the 1990s, a growing number of local people participated in investigations to learn more about the victims of the Asajino Airfield construction.<sup>34</sup>

Tonohira helped organize a new community group in 2003, the Hokkaido Forum to Consider the Victims of Forced Conscripted and Forced Labor. It had a five-member board that included the president, who was Chinese living in Japan, two Korean Japanese, a Japanese Christian pastor, and Tonohira, a Japanese Buddhist priest. Hokkaido Forum was instrumental in assisting the South Korean Commission in finding Korean families with relatives who had been forced laborers, as well as persuading local politicians sympathetic to Koreans to assist in the return-of-remains efforts.<sup>35</sup>

Calculating precise numbers of sets of remains from excavations and the *condition* of those remains (cremated or skeletal) is a crucial part of this story, but has not been accurately presented in any current published account. The Hokkaido Forum, the Sorachi Association, and East Asia Cooperative Workshop collaborated in conducting excavations led by physical anthropologist Park Seon-Ju. A total of thirty-four Korean remains were exhumed at Asajino between 2005 and 2010: one set of remains in 2005; eleven in 2006; eight in 2009; and fourteen in 2010. The publicity pamphlet for the 2015 “Homecoming After 70 years” event listed thirty-four remains from Asajino without any mention of the condition of the remains.<sup>36</sup> All the Korean remains from Asajino were stored in their original condition (cremated and skeletal) from exhumation at Tenyūji Temple (Soto Zen) in Hamatonbetsu.<sup>37</sup>

Where the Workshop excavations took place is another key part of this account. In 2012, the East Asia Collaborative Workshop undertook an excavation at the former Mitsui Ashibetsu Coal Mine but found no human remains. This coal mine used Korean and Chinese forced laborers, as well as Allied prisoners-of-war. Surprisingly, workshop leaders did not investigate other coal mining sites in Hokkaido where there might have been hidden Korean graves. Takeuchi Yasuto, not involved with the Workshops, identified 261 worksites that used Korean forced laborers in Hokkaido, 141 of these coal mines. Takeuchi’s documentary sources, though not his publications, all were available during the years of the Workshops. The Mitsui Ashibetsu Coal Mine, however, was the only mine site where the Workshop attempted an excavation. Chung later stated, “Unless there is a more powerful and influential citizen group, we cannot start excavations there based on some testimonies that indicate the approximate locations where the bodies had been buried.” Had the Workshop conducted a comprehensive mapping

analysis to locate possible sites where Koreans worked, particularly at coal mines, this problem might have been overcome and included new community contacts.<sup>38</sup>

The final excavation in Hokkaido by the workshop took place in 2013 at Higashikawa near the Eoroshi Power Plant, later owned by Hokkaido Electric Company. Although claims were made that 1,700 Koreans and Chinese worked on this construction project, the workshop excavation found no remains.<sup>39</sup> Chung believes there may be thousands of Korean graves yet to be found in Japan, but further investigations have not occurred as of this publication.<sup>40</sup>

By 2005, the return of Korean remains had become a major issue for the governments of Japan and South Korea, with intergovernmental consultations focusing on returning the cremated remains in Japanese Buddhist temples. Representatives from the South Korean Commission on Verification and Support for the Victims of Forced Mobilization under Japanese Colonialism led this effort. When Japanese officials learned of the activities of the workshops and the community-based Hokkaido Forum, which made private arrangements for returning remains, they withdrew their active participation in the consultations. However, the withdrawal was also linked to South Korean President Lee's visit to the disputed Dokdo/Takeshima Islands in 2012, as well as forced labor litigations in South Korea that year. None of the consultations involved remains recently exhumed from graves with skeletal remains intact. Instead, the discussions centered on the cremated remains held in Japanese Buddhist temples.<sup>41</sup>

Following the breakdown of the Japan/South Korean return-of-remains consultations, the leaders of the East Asian Cooperative Workshop, with support from Hokkaido Forum, decided in late 2014 to independently organize a return of Korean forced laborers' remains from Hokkaido to Seoul. All activity shifted to private organizations while working with Seoul's influential Mayor Park Won-Soon, then considered a possible future presidential candidate and a longtime friend of Chung. Mayor Park arranged for interment of the 115 remains at the Seoul City Municipal Cemetery, since the government of President Park Geun-Hye denied access to the National Cemetery due to the regulation for not allowing "mixed bones." Instead, Chung and the others planned an event called "Homecoming After 70 Years" where remains in 115 boxes covered in white cloth would be carried from Hokkaido through the same cities that the Koreans had passed through during the war on their way to forced labor worksites. These boxes would include the cremated remains from the two Hokkaido Buddhist temples, the largest number from Sapporo Honganji Betsuin Temple.

### The Betsuin Temple and Chizakigumi—Mixed remains, lost identities

We originally assumed that a substantial number of the returned Korean remains came from Shumarinai, but later learned that only four of the sets of remains returned to Seoul in 2015 came from there, even though they could document forty-two Korean deaths at the Uryū Dam through Takeuchi's published Korean death list and the handwritten list Tonohira provided us. Each Korean's name is in this data, along with the date and cause of their death in Hokkaido for most of them. However, their lists have *no date of arrival in Japan*, meaning further data is needed to verify that the Koreans were forcefully mobilized in the 1940–1945 period. Sixteen remains were exhumed by the Sorachi group from the Shumarinai cemetery between 1980 and 1983, without

clear proof of whether they were Korean or Japanese. All were cremated by Buddhists. According to publications by Tonohira and Homecoming publicity brochures, between 1997 and 2001, the workshop excavated four remains at Shumarinai presumed Korean, all skeletal and identified based on proximity to the surface and lack of coffins. Location of the further remains of twenty-two Koreans on the Takeuchi/Tonohira lists is unknown. No Korean remains from Shumarinai have ever been identified by name.<sup>42</sup>

Tonohira's publications and the 2015 pamphlet in Japanese publicizing the Homecoming event led us to identify four site locations where remains were located by the workshop and returned to Seoul. Research from other sources and interviews led us to these identifications of the 115 returned remains:

- Six remains from Mitsubishi Bibai Coal Mine held at Honganji Jōkōji Temple, in Bibai—all cremated
- Four remains from Uryū Dam held at Sasanobohyō Museum, Shumarinai—all skeletal
- Seventy-one remains from Chizaki and other construction companies held at Honganji Betsuin Temple, Sapporo—all cremated
- Thirty-four sets from Asajino Military Airfield held at Tenyūji Temple, Hamatonbetsu—*unclear how many cremated, how many skeletal*.

At this point in our research, we had a clear idea of the number of cremated and skeletal remains at the first three sites in this list. The Asajino site evidence needed further investigation as it was the only site lacking specifics on skeletal versus cremated remains.

Matching names to remains was only possible for cremated remains that came from Jōkōji Temple, Bibai (names on individual urns), while name identification was impossible with the Asajino and Shumarinai sites. Betsuin Temple remains, however, proved even more complicated. The Homecoming project included seventy-one sets of cremated remains claimed to be Korean that were stored at Betsuin Temple in Sapporo. Tonohira's account of the Korean remains stored there emphasizes the role that Chizaki Construction Company had in supporting the temple's decision to mix the cremated Korean remains, moving them from individual urns to large, common containers. Koreans' remains brought to Betsuin between 1942 and 1946 were of those who had worked for a number of construction companies, but Chizaki took responsibility for all the remains.<sup>43</sup>

The head of Chizakigumi (Chizaki Company) was a patron of Betsuin Temple in the 1990s and financed the storage of the remains in a separate temple annex, even though other companies also had employed the workers whose remains were stored at this annex. The remains held at the temple annex were mainly Korean, but also Chinese and Japanese. By 1953, 123 sets of remains had been deposited by Chizaki officials and other companies at the Betsuin Temple annex. Some remains were claimed by families over the years. By 1969, there were 101 remains left from the war era in the annex that included Koreans, Chinese and Japanese. All were cremated (ash with bone fragments), as required by the Buddhist Jōdo Shinshū sect. Some of the remains had been combined and divided several times but apparently still were stored in individual urns,

and some may still have had name identification attached. Lists were kept documenting the holdings, but were poorly maintained. The 1969 “Inventory of Remains and Artifacts” list for the Chizaki-funded annex described the Korean remains as 73.3 percent of the total held there. Then in October 1997, a Chizaki company official and a Betsuin Temple employee decided to mix all the remains collectively.<sup>44</sup>

The full exposé of Betsuin Temple’s actions was finally documented in Kim Min-Young’s 2017 investigative report on the controversy, published only in Korean. This report was commissioned by the Japanese Forced Mobilization Victims Support Foundation based in South Korea in response to the controversy over the commingled remains from Betsuin Temple brought back to Seoul. A major concern was the discovery by Koreans that Japanese and Chinese remains stored at the temple had been mixed in with Korean remains and what led to this failure to properly maintain the remains. The Homecoming event did not publicize this issue, but only alluded to it in one small part of its publicity pamphlet, so there were few in South Korea beyond those working with Chung who knew this at the time of the Seoul event. Kim had earlier worked in the section dealing with return-of-remains under the South Korean Commission investigating forced labor claims that was disbanded at the end of 2015 by the conservative Park Geun-hye government.

The report states that the Chizaki executive who was a temple patron ordered that all the remains (Korean, Chinese, and Japanese) be combined in three large, collective containers. The executive claimed the company was concerned about funding the storage costs for individual urns. He used the excuse that no families had claimed the remains for many years and that Chizaki was facing potential bankruptcy (which did not transpire).<sup>45</sup> Commingling the remains of Koreans, Japanese and Chinese into larger containers hardly saved Chizaki money, but it was a convenience for maintaining the annex.

Tonohira as a local Buddhist priest and activist played a major role in seeking public disclosure of the Betsuin Temple’s failure to protect the Korean workers’ remains. He learned about the commingling of remains when he attended a regional meeting of Buddhist temple heads. Alarmed, he visited the Betsuin Temple in December 2000 to investigate. A temple priest told him that the remains had been mixed without the approval of the families, put in three large containers, and then returned to the temple annex ossuary.<sup>46</sup> Was this possibly a coverup by Chizaki to eliminate identifying individual Koreans whose remains were in the annex when the East Asia Workshop commenced excavating remains at Shumarinai in 1997? Further investigation is required but this remains an open question. Students involved in the project were given free accommodation at the temple when the project began. Tonohira wrote

The fact that four sets of remains [at Shumarinai] were excavated was published by the local newspaper and was in the TV news ... meant that the priests at Betsuin Temple and the employees at Chizakigumi must have heard about it. Two months later the two of them decided to mix the 101 sets of remains at Sapporo Betsuin Temple.

When the remains were commingled into three large containers, a temple staff member was told to dispose of small possessions found with the victims and a strip of paper with names written on it.<sup>47</sup>



When the scandal first broke in 2003, there was widespread publicity in Hokkaido and it was also known in South Korea. In the decade that followed, the South Korean Commission, working with the Hokkaido Forum and the few bereaved families whose relatives' remains were held at the Betsuin Temple annex, tried to find a solution, and finally agreed in 2012 that there could be a "symbolic burial" for the commingled Korean remains. Earlier Japanese representatives in the consultations also agreed to this outcome. But the full details of what had happened at Betsuin Temple were only partially conveyed in publicity for the 2015 "Homecoming" event. The 115 sets of remains returned to South Korea included 71 urns from Betsuin Temple that could not be individually identified by name, and the commingling of Korean ashes with Japanese and Chinese ashes in the urns was not publicized. Aware of the situation, the Homecoming event leadership agreed to this because they felt too much time had gone by without the remains being returned to Korea and that perhaps they never would be returned. The "seventy-one" individual urns were determined by temple staff, who weighed a "percentage" of Korean ash remains relative to Chinese and Japanese ash remains in the three commingled containers. The details of how this was carried out were only fully revealed to the public when the Kim Report published its findings. Nevertheless, the report praised the memorial aspect of the event, while calling for greater involvement by the South Korean national government in both the return of remains in the future and locating bereaved families.<sup>48</sup>

### Bones or ashes? Why skeletal remains are critical for verifying identification

The only prospect for genuinely identifying the Korean forced laborers whose remains were returned in the "Homecoming" ceremony depended on the few skeletal remains still intact from the Shumarinai and Asajino excavations. This distinction has been overlooked not only in every publication in English related to the issue but also those in Japanese and Korean. Those writing in English about the return of remains regularly refer to "bones," when in fact all the remains stored in Japanese Buddhist temples had been cremated (ash with small pieces of bone mixed in).<sup>49</sup> To ascertain the actual state of the remains taken to Seoul in 2015, we had to determine how many sets of remains were cremated and how many were intact skeletal remains. Only the latter would allow for further forensic examination that might determine their identities through DNA matches with relatives and might indicate cause of death.

No one involved in the workshop project could tell us *exactly* how many skeletal remains existed at the time of the 2015 "Homecoming" journey or provide precise written documentation. Our research and interviews did make it possible for us to determine the exact number of skeletal and cremated remains for three of the four sites: Uryū Dam (Shumarinai—four skeletal); Mitsubishi Bibai Coal Mine (in Jōkōji Bibai Temple—six cremated); Chizakigumi sites (in Betsuin Sapporo Temple—seventy-one cremated).

The Asajino site therefore held the answer, but without further evidence we could not determine how many of these thirty-four sets of remains exhumed were cremated or skeletal. We then turned to visual evidence—photographic and film. David Plath, Chung's former Ph.D. supervisor, directed a documentary film with footage of the "Homecoming" event, including details of the journey from Hokkaido to Seoul. But the



**Figure 2.** Homecoming Skeletal Remains Boxes in Osaka Temple.  
Source: Sohn Sung-hyun.

film footage never revealed a full procession of the larger skeletal remains boxes, either on the journey or at the Seoul ceremonies, which would have allowed for an accurate count.<sup>50</sup>

The most detailed visual record for the entire “Homecoming” project was done by the international photographer Sohn Sung-Hyun. Much of his work has been displayed in his online exhibition, “70 Year Homecoming: Displaced Souls, Displaced People.”<sup>51</sup> He revealed to us his photos of all the skeletal remains boxes, taken at an Osaka temple during the return journey to Seoul. We finally established the exact number of skeletal remains returned from the exhumations at 21<sup>52</sup> (see [Figure 2](#)).

Tonohira confirmed that each large box contained the remains of only one Korean individual and were not commingled bones. Sohn’s photos are published here for the first time and are the only record we could find that verify the exact number of skeletal remains returned to Seoul. The opaque character of this fundamental information further raises the problem of how the project prioritized general memorializing of the deceased Korean forced laborers while neglecting a concerted effort to examine the few skeletal remains still intact to determine their names and connect the remains to bereaved families.

## Conclusion

Knowing the *exact number of skeletal remains* of the Korean forced laborers returned to Seoul seemed to at least open the possibility of comprehensive forensic identification of some of them by name, as well as how they died, not possible with cremated remains. But after the main ceremony in Seoul where the remains in boxes were brought into the city’s public square, the twenty-one skeletal remains were cremated at Seoul City Municipal Cemetery in Paju to be placed in a memorial ossuary wall. The South Korean government under President Park Geun-Hye denied permission to have the remains interred in the National Cemetery, changed the regulations, and provided no assistance to the “Homecoming” project. No forensic examination of the skeletal remains occurred once they arrived in South Korea. DNA taken earlier at Shumarinai and Asajino was stored at Chungbuk National University, but no matches to family descendants have been found. No publications related to research linked to this DNA, in any language, have been published as of 2023.

Tonohira made important contributions to efforts to understand and educate people about the tragedy of Korean forced laborers in Hokkaido, working with local historical groups, supporting the workshops run by Chung, building strong ties in his community including other Buddhist temples, and establishing the Sasanobohyō Exhibition Hall and Museum in remote Shumarinai highlighting the history of Korean forced laborers. Chung's contributions also should be recognized, but absence of professional forensic work and detailed publications with data on the project are the responsibility of academics, not local people like Buddhist priest Tonohira.

The Kim Report praised the memorial efforts of the project and the symbolic importance of the "Homecoming" event for Koreans, even though contacting bereaved families not living in Seoul was quite inadequate. The report criticized the view that broader government involvement should be avoided, Chung's view that private initiatives are the way forward. The conservative South Korean government of President Park Geun-Hye defunded the South Korean Commission by the end of 2015, but had earlier obstructed efforts to investigate and return Korean forced laborer remains. Nevertheless, two years later the progressive government of President Moon Jae-In revived this effort, making government involvement, assistance, and even funding for expertise possible. What might have happened had the "Homecoming" ceremony been conducted in 2017 or 2018, with this major change in government and policy?

One weakness of the Kim Report is that it did not address the role cremation played in destroying the evidence of the skeletal remains. It also did not distinguish between the excavations of Korean graves in Japan by the workshops where skeletal remains were preserved and the cremated Korean remains in Japanese Buddhist temples. It accepted Chung's explanation that DNA had been taken and stored prior to the cremation of skeletal remains at the Seoul City Municipal Cemetery. The report did criticize the South Korean government's failure to make available DNA information for Korean families seeking the remains of those they lost in wartime Japan. Chung understood this crucial problem of not cremating remains when he first met Tonohira in 1989, but by 2015 this had changed.

As of 2023, both the conservative governments of Japan under Prime Minister Kishida and of South Korea under President Yoon promoted "moving on" from the forced labor issue, a view that angered a majority of Koreans. The paradox is that progressive Japanese, working with progressive Koreans, came together under adverse conditions to uncover Korean forced labor history and to find the remains of Koreans who died as a result. Efforts to find the hidden graves of Korean forced laborers who died in wartime Japan has only just begun.

**Acknowledgements.** The authors thank Tonohira Yoshihiko, Chung Byung-Ho, Sohn Sung-Hyun, Song Ki-Chan, David Plath, Nikolai Johnsen, Sakashita Atsushi, Takeuchi Yasuto, Kikkawa Tetsunin, and Robert Jacobs, two anonymous referees, and two senior ILWCH editors for general advice.

## Notes

1. Fukagawa Munetoshi, *Chinkon no Kaikyō—Umi ni Kieta Hibaku Chōsenjin—(Straits of Dead Souls: The Korean Atomic Bomb Survivors Who Vanished at Sea)* (Akashi Shoten, 1992—originally published 1974); Ágota Duró, "Confronting Colonial Legacies: The Historical Significance of Japanese Grassroots Cooperation for the Support of Korean Atomic Bomb Survivors," (Ph.D. dissertation, Hiroshima City University, Hiroshima, 2017), 217–43; David Palmer, "The Straits of Dead Souls: One Man's Investigation

into the Disappearance of Mitsubishi Hiroshima's Korean Forced Labourers," *Japanese Studies* 26, no. 3 (December 2006): 335–52.

2. Commission on Verification and Support for the Victims of Forced Mobilization under Japanese Colonialism in Korea, *Final Report of the Commission's Activities* (Republic of Korea, June 2016), 38–55. The Commission's 10 percent overall figure for deaths and missing includes Korean "soldiers, civilian workers in the military, laborers, and comfort women" as well as imprisoned victims who "refused to be drafted or who died in the mobilization process," so this percentage encompasses all of Japan's wartime occupied territories, not just Japan proper.

3. Takeuchi Yasuto, *Senji Chōsenjin Kyōsei Rōdō Chōsa Shiryōshū* (*Wartime Korean Forced Labor Research Documents*) (Kobe Student Youth Center, 2022), 242. These figures do not include deaths at sea offshore Hokkaido or Sakhalin, Okinawa, and other locations beyond the main islands of Japan.

4. For Korean workers in the interwar period, especially the 1920s, and the "contingent labor" argument, see Ken C. Kawashima, *The Proletarian Gamble: Korean Workers in Interwar Japan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

5. Jerome B. Cohen, *Japan's Economy in War and Reconstruction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1949), 300, 301; David Palmer, "Japan's World Heritage Miike Coal Mine—Where prisoners-of-war worked 'like slaves,'" *The Asia Pacific Journal/Japan Focus* 19, no. 13 (July 1, 2021): 5605; Commission, 51, 52; Takeuchi, *Senji Chōsenjin*, 18. By the middle of World War II, the Japanese government sent skilled workers overseas, leaving a serious skills deficit even as forced laborers took their place, along with high school students and women without skills. The national distribution of employment in Japan's coal mines further reflects this. By March 1945, there were 412,241 employees in coal mines: 265,776 Japanese full and part time; 135,751 Koreans; 9,651 Chinese (all forced laborers); and 7,362 Allied POWs. The deteriorating conditions in Japanese industry, including the deadly coal mines where physical labor dominated over mechanized mining, would most likely have led to Korean death rates of 10 percent or higher. The disparity between the Commission's worksite numbers and Takeuchi's company numbers for Hokkaido is a problem that requires further documentary investigation. Takeuchi's company data in general appears to be more comprehensive than the Commission's. For total number of companies in Japan using Korean forced laborers, Takeuchi lists 2,926 with company names, while the Commission Final Report lists 2,876 but without company names.

6. Supreme Court of Korea, 1st Division Judgment, "Case no. 2009 Da 22549, Issued May 24, 2012" (unnamed plaintiffs v Mitsubishi Heavy Industries), *Korea Journal of International and Comparative Law* 2 (2014): 214. Nippon Steel (found liable in a parallel lawsuit) and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries appealed the 2012 decisions. In 2018, the South Korean Supreme Court denied the appeals and ordered both companies to pay compensation to the plaintiffs and threatened seizure of the companies' assets in South Korea if they refused to comply. For background on the 2012 Mitsubishi Hiroshima Shipyard case involving Korean workers, see David Palmer, "Foreign Forced Labor at Mitsubishi's Nagasaki and Hiroshima Shipyards: Big Business, Militarized Government, and the Absence of Shipbuilding Workers' Rights in World War II Japan," in *On Coerced Labour: Work and Compulsion after Chattel Slavery*, eds. Marcel van der Linden and Magaly Rodriguez Garcia (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 159–84. For legal and political events from 2018 to 2023, see Sven Saaler, Hideko Yano, and Yeong-Hwan Kim, "Japanese and Korean Perspectives on the Issue of Forced Labor in the Asia-Pacific War," *The Asia Pacific Journal / Japan Focus* 21, no. 10 (October 17, 2003), 5799.

7. See, for example, Takeuchi Yasuto, *Chōsa: Chōsenjin Kyōsei Rōdō—Tankō Hen* (*Investigation: Korean Forced Labor—Coal Mine Volume*) (Tokyo: Shakai hyōronsha, 2013).

8. Palmer, "Foreign Forced Labor at Mitsubishi's Shipyards," 171, 172; Cohen, *Japan's Economy*, 271–326.

9. For forensic anthropology and scientific excavations of graves internationally, see Angi M. Christensen and Nicholas V. Passalacqua, *A Laboratory Manual for Forensic Anthropology* (London: Academic Press, 2018); and Layla Renshaw, *Exhuming Loss: Memory, Materiality and Mass Graves of the Spanish Civil War* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2011).

10. Tonohira Yoshihiko interview with Palmer, online, May 9, 2021.

11. Gil-Soo Han, *Funerary Rites in Contemporary Korea: The Business of Death* (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2019), 179; Chang-Won Park, "Funerary Transformations in Contemporary South Korea," *Mortality* 15, no. 1 (February 2010): 21–3; Ri-Hye Han, "Graveyard Geomancy in Korea under Japanese Rule – Focusing on the 1930s," *Contemporary Japan* 32, no. 1 (2020): 25–42; Mark E. Caprio, *Japanese Assimilation Policies in Colonial Korea: 1910–1945* (Seattle: University of Washington Press), 141–70.

12. Tessa Morris-Suzuki, "Letters to the Dead: Grassroots Historical Dialogue in East Asia's Borderlands," in *East Asia Beyond the History Wars: Confronting the Ghosts of Violence*, ed. Morris-Suzuki, et al.

(London: Routledge, 2013), 87–103; Yeong-Hwan Kim, “Promoting Peace and Reconciliation as a Citizen of East Asia: The Collaborative East Asian Workshop and the Grassroots House Peace Museum,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal/Japan Focus* 5, no. 12 (December 1, 2007).

13. Duró, “Confronting Colonial Legacies,” 217–243; authors’ email exchanges with Tonohira regarding Japanese Buddhist cremation standards for temples.

14. Tonohira Yoshihiko, *Ikotsu—Katarikakeru Inochi no Konseki (Remains: Traces of Life that Speak to Us)* (Kyoto: Kamogawa Shuppan, 2013), 47; Tonohira interview with Palmer; David Plath, *So Long Asleep: Waking the Ghosts of a War* (Massachusetts: Documentary Educational Resources, 2016) (video documentary).

15. Sorachi Minshūshi Kōza Henshū, *Wakai no Kakehashi: Shumarinai, Kankoku, Minshū (Bridge of Reconciliation: Shumarinai, Korea, and the People)*, (Asahikawa, Hokkaido: Sorachi Minshūshi Kōza, 1994), 16–17; Tonohira Yoshihiko, *Wakamonotachi no Higashi Ajia Sengen: Shumarinai ni Tsudou Nichi, Kan, Zainichi, Ainu (Young People’s East Asian Declaration: Japanese, Korean, Zainichi, Ainu Meet in Shumarinai)* (Kyoto: Kamogawa Shuppan, 2004), 29; Plath, *So Long Asleep*.

16. Kikkawa Tetsunin, “Shirizu: Rekishi no Shinjitsu e – Hokkaido (Shumarinai), Kōbo, soshite Nikkan kōryū, ikotsu hōkan undō” (Without knowing: Toward the Historical Truth – Hokkaido (Shumarinai), Kōbo, and Japan-Korea Exchange, Return-of-remains Movement), *Kyūjō no Kai Hatsukaichi Kaihō* no. 57, (October 1): 2018; Tonohira, *Wakamonotachi*, 23–5; Takeuchi, *Senji Chōsenjin*, 74; John G. Roberts, *Mitsui: Three Centuries of Japanese Business* (New York: Weatherhill, 1974), 341–64; Ahn Michimasa, “Ikotsu to tsuitō: Hokkaido Shumarinai ni okeru Ikotsu Hakkutsu Undō o Jirei toshite,” (Remains and Mourning: The Movement to Excavate Remains in Shumarinai), *Japan Oral History Association* no 3 (September 2009), 141; Cohen, *Japan’s Economy*.

17. Tonohira, *Wakamonotachi*, 29–32, 110; Plath, *So Long Asleep*.

18. Ahn, “Ikotsu to tsuitō,” 141, 33–4; Yamaori Tetsuo, *Wandering Spirits and Temporary Corpses: Studies in the History of Japanese Religious Tradition* (Kyoto: International Research Center for Japanese Studies, 2004); Plath, *So Long Asleep*.

19. Sorachi Minshūshi Kōza Henshū, *Wakai no Kakehashi*, 76–7; Tonohira email to Duró, Nov. 5, 2021; Ahn, “Ikotsu to tsuitō,” 125–44.

20. Plath, *So Long Asleep*.

21. *Ibid.*

22. Kikkawa, “Shirizu.”

23. Chung Byung-Ho, “Gieogwa chumoui gong-gong-inlyuhag: ilje gangjenodong huisaengja balgulgwa gwihwan (Public Anthropology of Memory and Remembrance: Discovering and returning forced labor victims from the Japanese occupation),” *Research Papers, Korean Cultural Anthropology* 1, no. 50 (March 2017): 7–9. (Korean translation: assistance Nikolai Johnsen); Tonohira, *Wakamonotachi*, 72, 126; Anonymous academic participant email correspondence with Palmer.

24. Chung Byung-Ho, “Coming Home after 70 Years: Repatriation of Korean Forced Laborers from Japan and Reconciliation in East Asia,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal / Japan Focus* 15, no. 35 (June 15): 2017.

25. Plath, *So Long Asleep*; Chung, “Gieogwa”; Chung Byung-Ho interview with Duró, Shumarinai, Hokkaido, August 19, 2023.

26. Song Ki-Chan interview with Duró, March 26, 2021; Sakashita Atsushi, “Hokkaidō Shumarinai no Ikotsu Hakkutsu Henkan Undō” (Movement to Excavate and Return Human Remains in Shumarinai, Hokkaido) (Master’s thesis, Sapporo University, Sapporo, 2005), 17.

27. Tonohira, *Wakamonotachi*, 38.

28. Chung, “Gieogwa.”

29. Physical anthropology is concerned with the study of human biological and physiological characteristics and development but forensic anthropology (considered a subfield of physical anthropology) is the more specialized systematic study of skeletal or fragmentary remains to create a biological profile of the deceased requiring training in exhumations and scientific laboratory analysis.

30. Chung, “Coming Home after 70 Years.”

31. Plath, *So Long Asleep*.

32. Tonohira, *Wakamonotachi*, 12–13. Matsumura Hirofumi, “Horokanai-chō shumarinai yori shutsudo shita jinkotsu” (Human Bones Excavated from Shumarinai, Horokanai Town), medical report, Sapporo Medical University, 2003; Sakashita, “Hokkaidō Shumarinai,” 24–25.

33. Tonohira, *Ikotsu*, 23; Takeuchi, *Senji Chōsenjin*, 154, 155, lists 91 Korean deaths at Asajino.

34. Tonohira, *Ikotsu*, 23–8. *Tenpoku Shimbun* (天北新聞) was a local newspaper in Sōya (宗谷) Subprefecture in the 1970s.
35. Hokkaido Forum, in Sapporo, functioned independently from Chung’s East Asian Cooperative Workshop. It was involved in consultations with Japanese and South Korean government-affiliated representatives in trying to resolve the “return-of-remains” issues. Kim Min-Young, *Hoskaido (baehaedo) saspolo byeol-won sojang yugoljosa (Investigation into Remains held by Hokkaido Sapporo Betsuin Temple Annex)*, Japanese Forced Mobilization Victims Support Foundation, Dec. 2017; Chung, “Gieoggwa.”
36. Tonohira’s book *Ikotsu* (2013) gives a similar number but without any description of the remains being cremated or skeletal. When we questioned Tonohira as well as participants involved in the Asajino excavations, they gave differing answers on how many remains were skeletal. Chung’s article in Korean incorrectly states that 38 Korean remains were found at Asajino. These conflicting numbers and the absence of accurate published data is indicative of poor record keeping by the Workshop leaders.
37. Tonohira, *Ikotsu*, 29–39.
38. *Higashi Ajia Wakushoppu 2015 in Kansai (East Asia Workshop 2015 in Kansai)* 6-9 (program guide provided by Song Ki-Chan); Takeuchi, *Senji Chōsenjin*, 15–18, 74, 75, 122–61; Chung interview, August 19, 2023.
39. Song interview; “Higashikawa de Kyōdō Wakushoppu—Kyōseirenkō Giseisha no Ikotsu Hakkutsu—Tsuito Kai” (Higashikawa Cooperative Workshop—Excavation of Korean forced labor victims’ remains—Mourning Association), *Weekly Ashikawa Shimbun Online*, August 6, 2013 <http://www.asahikawa-np.com/digest/2013/08/00707715/> For the schedule and plan for the excavation, see accessed March 6, 2023, <https://blog.goo.ne.jp/kioku-2011/e/ed7cfafe9fd04de7f623873b0749ca47>.
40. Plath, *So Long Asleep*.
41. For a detailed account of these government-to-government consultations and the inability of the South Korean Commission to move forward with Japanese government representatives by 2012, see Kim Min-Young, *Hoskaido*. Between 2008 and 2010, 423 “ash boxes” were returned to South Korea but these were all “forcibly mobilized as soldiers or civilian workers in the military” rather than Korean forced laborers in Japan. Every reference to “remains” in the Commission summary report refers to “ash boxes,” but none to excavations of graves in Japan or the problem of cremation destroying evidence for DNA or forensic analysis (Commission, 92, 93).
42. Takeuchi, *Senji Chōsenjin*, 74, 153, 154; Tonohira Yoshihiko, Uryū Dam Korean deaths, handwritten list, April 2021.
43. Tonohira, *Ikotsu*, 205–206; Kim Min-Young, *Hoskaido*; Honganji Sapporo Betsuin Ikotsu Chōsa Inkaei (Honganji Sapporo Betsuin Temple Remains Investigation Committee), “Honganji Sapporo Betsuin ni okeru ikotsu mondai hōsa Hōkokusho, ‘Jōkeshū Nōkotsudō’ to ‘Chizaki Kōgyō Nōkotsudo’” (Investigation Report Concerning the Remains Problem: “Jōkeshū Ossuary” and “Chizaki Company Ossuary”), November 30, 2003.
44. Tonohira, *Ikotsu*, 209, 214; Kim Min-Young, *Hoskaido*.
45. Kim Min-Young, *Hoskaido*.
46. Tonohira, *Ikotsu*, 204-208; Kim Min-Young, *Hoskaido*.
47. Tonohira, *Ikotsu*, 209, 210.
48. *Ikotsu Hōkan: 70 Nenburi no satogaeri* (Honorable Return of Remains after 70 Years), “Homecoming” pamphlet in Japanese, 2015, from Tonohira; Song interview; Kim Min-Young, *Hoskaido*.
49. See for example Morris-Suzuki, “Long Journey Home”; William Underwood, “Names, Bones, and Unpaid Wages (1),” *The Asia-Pacific Journal / Japan Focus* 4 (September 2006): 2219 [original title of this publication].
50. Plath, *So Long Asleep*.
51. Sohn Sung-Hyun, “70 Year Homecoming: Displaced Souls, Displaced People,” online exhibit: accessed March 6, 2023, <http://www.70yearhomecoming.com/>.
52. Photos taken by Sohn Sung-Hyun in Osaka at the Jōdo Shinshū temple during the September 2015 journey from Hokkaido to Seoul. Sohn message with photos to Palmer, March 11, 2022.