

The True Circumstance of Mobilized Korean Laborers

On October 30, 2018, the Korean Supreme Court ruled that Japanese companies, which employed Korean labor as wartime mobilization, pay compensation to Korean laborers, who raised lawsuit to request compensation payment.

The Korean government supports the Supreme Court verdict. As a result of this, Japanese peoples' right may be greatly violated. And in case of Japanese government response to this verdict, there is a high possibility that Korean's peoples' right be greatly damaged. The reason why this problem occurred is that Korean judicial administration and government executive have not grasp the historical truth concerning the wartime labor mobilization.

I. The mobilization of Korean laborers was not "forced" or "slave hunting" but "on own will" or on legal procedure based on "drafted labor".

Mobilization of Korean laborers started from September, 1939, when national mobilization act was promulgated in Japan proper to draft laborers. Then until March/April, 1945, 725 thousand Korean laborers moved to Japan to replenish labor shortage during the war.

As different from Japan, labor mobilization in Korea started in the form of "private recruitment" Japanese companies which needed labor force dispatched their own staff to Korea to recruit laborers. . This form was applied till February 1942, and about 300 thousand Koreans were estimated to move to Japan.

From March 1942 to September 1944, labor mobilization was conducted in the for of "good offices of government". This form was used to recruit laborers which were need by Japanese companies more efficiently by Korean government general acting as private placement agency. About 350 laborers moved to Japan under this system.

The nature of Koreans move to Japan through "private recruitment" and "god offices of government" are based on their own will. Law based "draft" which has legal enforcement was introduced in Korea November, 1944, 5 years and 1 month later than Japan proper. If rejecting draft, less than 100 yen fine or less than imprisonment of up to one year were imposed. Since the Koreans were at that time Japanese national, it was lawful according to international law. There were no haphazard, arbitrary or Violent execution of "forced recruitment". Of the whole labor mobilization of about 65 months, "draft2 mobilization was only 6 months. It is estimated that less than 100 thousand Koreans were

“drafted”.

Apart from the wartime labor mobilization, 1, 550, thousand Korean people moved to Japan seeking higher wages. When lawful move to Japan was not possible, many Koreans tried to move to Japan using small ships by risking big amount of money and life. Under such situation there were no need to transport Koreans for forced labor to Japan. There could not be “forced transport” or “slave hunting”, and not at all actually.

II. Korean laborers were not discriminately forced to work or forced salve work but worked under the same condition as Japanese co-workers.

1. Koreans and Japanese worked in the same circumstances.

Someone says that Koreans were intentionally positioned at dangerous and hard work by racial discrimination. But this is not true. The Koreas themselves testify that they worked in cooperation with Japanese workers.

In 1930s mechanization in coal mining progressed rapidly. There one man machine drill and conveyers were widely used. Usually Koreans’ period of engagement was two years, and then they went back to Korea. Most of them were not well educated and two years experience was not enough for them to master machine operation. If less experienced Korean workers worked by themselves alone, it was dangerous to cause accident including dynamite explosion, so experienced Japanese workers and not experienced Korean were grouped as one team. Korean workers worked under the same condition as Japanese.

2. Wages were payed fairly

Wage is the most important element for working condition. Korean workers worked in Japan were payed normally. This was the same as “forced draft” after September, 1944. National social security system was applied drafted Korean workers. Their wage level was very high. Korean coal miners’ wage in 1940 was 2.4 times as much as Korean banking staff and 5.2 times as much as weaving workers in Korea. As compared with initial salary of male clerk graduated from university and police officer in Japan, the Korean coalminers⁷ wage was 2.4 times and 3.7 times respectively.

Korean workers wages were very high but they were not necessarily paid in cash. The countries engaging in WW II were suffered huge fiscal deficit. Japan tried to diminish inflation by recovering

bank notes by forced saving. This forced saving were applied to every worker. In case of Korean workers, more than 50% of wages were deducted by meal cost and forced saving. Since actual money handed Korean workers were smaller than that of Japanese with many family dependents, some Koreans misunderstood they were unfairly treated.

Koreans' economic thought is clear, and when they finish the contract term, they normally recovered saving and other reserves. If paying problem occurs, their family in Korea can claim the problem governor general office in Korea. The companies had to solve the paying problem in order to secure labor supply. So normal payments were mostly made and therefore Korean family can settle the debt and purchase farms to improve the family economy.

Except for exceptional period of August 15, 1945, wages were payed normally.

3. There were no national discrimination concerning wage and treat.

The coalmining work wage was stipulated by achievement based system. The records of that time show that some Koreans were payed higher than Japanese.

In case of a coalmine in Hokkaido in 1942, 50 yen or less payed workers represented 75% of Korean workers but 17.6% of Japanese workers. The reason was that period of work of less than 2 years was 89.4% of Koreans but 42.8% of Japanese. No Koreans worked more than 3 years but 43.8% of Japanese worked more than 3 years. Wage difference was not baes on national discrimination but on working length and resultant skill.

The biggest dissatisfaction Korean workers was about meal. The fact was that the same amount of meal was supplied but Koreans did not satisfied with the amount. That was the difference of custom.

Except for working time, they were free. After the work time or two days off in every two months Korean workers went out in the streets to enjoy eating and drinking and photo taking. Around big factories there were Korean girl comfort house for Koreans.

For Japanese companies, discriminating Koreans, forcing labor, or forcing slavery work mean nothing more than causing trouble. It is an irrational deed for the use of labor effectively. Japanese government, which are ardent in executing the total war, strictly supervise such actions. Government and police organization were in charge of administration and supervision of companies which employ Koreans.

To sum up, mobilization of Korean workers was not “forced transportation” or “slavery work” but was conducted based on free will or through lawful procedure of “draft”. That was just the same war time mobilization as applied to Japanese under the war time mobilization system.

Since the real situation is above mentioned, United Nations Human Rights Council are requested to advise Korean government to adhere to the Agreement on Concerning the Settlement of Problems in Regard to Property and Claims and Korea and Economic Cooperation, which was confirmed by the Governments of Japan and the Republic of Korea in 1965, by recognizing the historical truth concerning the mobilization of Korean labor during the time of Annexation of the two countries. This is a very important matter for the future development of Korea and Japan relations. .