

ULASAN BUKU/BOOK REVIEWS

Asian Labor in the Wartime Japanese Empire, edited by Paul H. Kratoska, Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2005, 1–433 pp.

This book provides detailed insights on the various forms of labour mobilisation by the Japanese during the Second World War. It is a compilation of 17 chapters divided into 10 parts. Part 1 to part 9 covers labour mobilisation in Japan and in occupied territories including Manchuria, North China, Korea, Taiwan, Indonesia, Malaya, Philippines and Vietnam. The last part, part 10, touches on memory of the war and reconciliation after the war.

Part 1 comprises a chapter by Paul H. Kratoska, which gives an overview on labour mobilisation in Japan as well as in occupied territories. It covers a wide range of labour mobilisation, including military recruitment, civilian labour, agricultural workforce, women in labour force, mobilisation of students and young people, and relocation of labour. It also discusses training programs that aimed at enhancing technical skills of the labour. Given the massive scale of the war, it was to be expected that shortages of labour plagued Japan throughout the war. While Japanese labour was loyal to the emperor and responded to appeals to patriotism, there was much doubt over the commitment of labour in occupied territories towards the idea of Greater East Asia propagated by Japan and thus a combination of generous wages and benefits and draconian measures was used by the Japanese to secure the much needed labour.

Part 2 comprises a chapter by David Tucker, which looks at labour mobilisation in Manchuria. It focuses on construction labour, the coolie and the *batou* system of labour recruitment, and labour control in Manchuria. The situation in Manchuria was particular tricky as nationalist and anti-Japanese sentiments were high in North China. The Japanese initially depended on Chinese intermediaries through the *batou* system to ensure adequate supply of labour for the construction industry in Manchuria, which was driven by increased Japanese immigration in line with the establishment of the Manchukou. The *batou* system was

able to deliver large numbers of skilled and well-managed workers for limited and flexible periods of time. However, the system came under serious strain as war widened and as the Japanese regime attempted to limit worker remittances. Consequently, the Japanese had to resort to labour conscription. Forced labour was not only expensive but also poor in skills and thus low in productivity.

Part 3 comprises a chapter by Ju Zhifen, which examines Northern Chinese labourers in the Manchukuo. It discusses the Japanese system of expropriating labour in North China, the Japanese invasion and the movement of North China labour after 1942 as well as forced labour in Japanese military engineering works in North China and Mongolia-Tibet. The forced conscription of labour was massive, numbering about 254,000 from North China and Mongolia-Tibet.

Part 4 comprises two chapters, which deal with labour mobilisation in Korea. The first chapter by Utsumi Aiko discusses conscription of Koreans into the Japanese army. These Korean soldiers were noted for their cruelty and fearlessness in the Pacific War. The Japanese indoctrinated the Koreans to ensure their total submission to the Japanese Emperor. After the War, Korean soldiers were repatriated by the Allied. However, some remained in Japan and some went missing. A movement was launched in the 1990s to locate them and to secure compensation for them. The second chapter by Naitou Hisako looks at other forms of Korean forced labour. It documents three methods used by the Japanese to recruit Korean labour: private hiring (September 1939 to February 1942), official mediation (March 1942 to August 1944) and national conscription (September 1944 to August 1945). It highlights the maltreatment of Korean labourers whereby many of them had to endure extreme hardship at work sites. The issue of compensation for deceased Korean forced labour was also raised.

Part 5 comprises a chapter by Hui-yu Caroline T'sai, which illustrates labour mobilisation in Taiwan. It covers industrial labourers and the labour flow in the Japanese empire, military labourers, the youth corps and the *Hokō* system (an organisation for social control and local self-rule, which performed a variety of tasks, including crime and plague prevention, construction and maintenance of highways and bridges, cultivating land, and increasing crops). Taiwan was different from other occupied territories in that it had been under Japanese rule long before

the Second World War. As an established colony of the Japanese, Taiwan served as a backdrop labour pool for the Japanese. There was a concerted effort to convert Taiwanese into loyal subjects of the Japanese Emperor through volunteer mobilisation. Taiwan was given the mission of providing military supplies by stepping up military-related industrialization as well as expanding construction of air bases. Taiwanese also served as technical supporting staff for the Japanese in occupied territories. Due to Taiwan's significant contributions to wartime labour, the author maintained that the Taiwanese masses were empowered for the first time to claim some kind of equality with the Japanese.

Part 6 comprises five chapters relating to labour mobilisation in Indonesia. The first chapter by Shigeru Sato touches on Indonesia labourers mobilised for agricultural projects in Java in which several issues including different phases of labour mobilisation, the production-increase campaign, irrigation projects, consequences of the agricultural projects and the fate of forced labourers were discussed. Although the Japanese tried to convince the Javanese that the economic measures undertaken by them were partly to create a New Java and partly to support their war effort, in the main, these measures were ill founded and counterproductive and many "economic soldiers" suffered from harsh working conditions. The co-prosperity sphere promoted by the Japanese had instead become the co-misery sphere for the general populace in Java. The second chapter by Harry A. Poeze provides detailed accounts on the construction of "the road to hell" in West Java, which had resulted in high death tolls among Javanese forced labour involved in the construction of a railway line between Saketi and Bayah to facilitate large-scale coal mining in the inhospitable region of South Banten. The third chapter by Kaori Maekawa examines the recruitment of *heicho* (auxiliary soldiers) during the Japanese Occupation in Indonesia. The deployment of indigenous military bodies by the Japanese in many parts of their occupied territories was to engage the help of the local people to strengthen their control over occupied areas. The fourth chapter by Remco Raben looks at the plight of the Javanese *rōmusha* (coolie labourers) recruited to work in the eastern part of the Indonesia Archipelago, a region administered by the Japanese naval, which includes the Celebes, the Moluccas, New Guinea and Borneo (Kalimantan). The mass recruitment and large-scale relocation of the Javanese *rōmusha* were extremely disruptive and consequently, tens of

thousands of these workers died of malnutrition, of disease, and of maltreatment. The fifth chapter by Henk Hovinga also looks at the *rōmusha* but the main focus was on the reception and repatriation of *rōmusha* outside and within the Indonesia Archipelago after the war. Between May 1946 and April 1947, more than 52,000 *rōmushas* were repatriated. However, many more never returned.

Part 7 comprises two chapters on labour mobilisation in Malaya. The first chapter by Paul H. Kratoska looks at various aspects of labour mobilisation, which include Japanese attitude toward Malayan workers, labour for military construction projects, training programs, labour shortages and tightening of labour control, and women in the workforce. In the main, the Japanese Occupation had brought hardship among farmers and workers in Malaya many of whom not only suffered from diseases but also malnutrition as they struggled to produce enough food. Interestingly, the Indians in the southern part of Province Wellesley did not find the Japanese oppressive. The second chapter by Nakahara Michiko looks specifically at the recruitment of labour to construct the Thailand-Burma Railway, popularly known as the Death Railway, as many Asian labourers and Allied prisoners of war perished in the course of constructing the railway. As the author puts it, “from its inception, the construction plan for the Thailand-Burma railway was almost impossible to realise, in terms of finance, the time necessary for completion, labour force, medical facilities, food, clothing, transportation, and all other aspects” (p. 264).

Part 8 comprises a chapter by Richardo T. Jose on labour usage and mobilisation in the Philippines. It gives a comprehensive account on Philippine labour before the Second World War and various aspects of labour mobilisation under the Japanese Military Administration (1942–1943) and the Japanese-Sponsored Republic of the Philippines (1943–1944). The author concludes that during the period under Japanese Military Administration, the Japanese-controlled economy was unable to employ all those who had been displaced by the war. As to the period under the Japanese-Sponsored Republic, the author notes that although the task of mobilizing and distributing labour had been taken over by President Laurel, the Filipinos were largely reluctant to work for the Japanese because of maltreatment and failure of the Japanese to meet their obligation. This then resulted in the Japanese resorting to forcible direct recruitment.

Part 9 comprises a chapter by Trần Mỹ-Vân on labour mobilisation in Vietnam. Like other occupied territories, many Vietnamese were dislocated, with some moving to the cities to work and others, escaping to the countryside to avoid bombing. A unique feature of the Japanese occupation in Vietnam was the collaboration between the leaders of local nationalists, the Cao Đài and Hòa Hảo (two religious-cum-political organisations) and the Japanese in pursuit of independence from the French. In return for protection from the Japanese, the local nationalists provided assistance to the Japanese in the form intelligence about local affairs and labour for Japanese construction projects. However, such collaboration did not bring about the desired outcome. Moreover, the local nationalists, as loyal supporter of the Japanese, faced retribution from others after the war.

The last part comprises two chapters. The first chapter by Chin-Sung Chung traces the origin and development of military sexual slavery in Imperial Japan. Apart from historical account on the mobilisation of Korean sex slaves, it discusses current public opinions both in Japan and in Korea on the military sex slaves as well as the issue of compensation for surviving sex slaves. The second chapter by E. Bruce Reynolds focuses on the abuse of labour for the construction of the Death Railway. Of particular importance is that it contained some personal accounts by Allied prisoners of war on the hardship that they had to endure in constructing the railway line. The issue of apology and compensation over the atrocities committed by the Japanese was also raised. However, it is the current attitude of young Japanese over the war crimes committed by the Japanese during the Second World War that merits the attention of historians as the interpretation of historical events in Japan tends to be slanted to their favour.

On the whole, this is a well-researched book. Most of the chapters in this book are based on primary as well as secondary data. A combination of these data is important to give a balanced account on the topics under researched. This book has certainly provided comprehensive account on labour mobilisation in Japan as well as in occupied territories during the Second World War. However, to claim that it contains unknown histories is perhaps an overstatement as some of the issues discussed in the book are well researched by other historians. A case in point is labour mobilisation to construct the Death Railway. Another case is the

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recruitment of military sex slaves. However, it is worthy of note that the chapters that discussed these two issues have included critical discourse on the need for the Japanese to apologise and to compensate for the atrocities that they had committed during the war. This is even more so in the case of surviving Korean sex slaves, who have, of late, come forward to demand for compensation from the Japanese government.

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