

## Japan's Dark Industrial Heritage: An Introduction

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Cultural heritage preservation is literally and metaphorically big business in Japan. Not only does the Japanese government commit considerable resources to the designation of heritage at local, national, and international levels, heritage preservation plays a central role in strategies to develop Japanese tourism on which the country's economy is increasingly reliant. Many local communities are persuaded both by the idea of tourism as a path to economic development/revitalization, and by heritage preservation's place in it, and vie to have heritage sites in their locales recognized for their cultural value. These combined local and national interests in heritage produce an ever-expanding landscape of acknowledged cultural heritage, which functions, in effect, as a circuit of state-sanctioned national history and cultural value. Not surprisingly, the narratives told in this circuit are celebratory, speaking to Japan's extraordinary cultural and aesthetic achievements, or its remarkable natural landscape. Where sites commemorate tragedy or disaster, the narratives slant towards positive attributes like resilience, peace, or a regard for nature's awesome power.<sup>1</sup>

The papers in this collection - Hiromi Mizuno's recovery of the forgotten history of Rasa's island's role in Japan's industrialization; Miyamoto Takashi's study of the use of convict labor in the Miike mines and its present-day representations; and Jung-Sun Han's examination of contemporary grassroots movements' efforts to recover the memories of wartime forced labor - offer something very different. Focusing on "dark heritage" - which Han productively defines elsewhere metaphorically as "heritage of shame" (*fu no*

*isan*) and literally as sites which are "unattractive" and "dark"- these papers not only focus attention on sites that mainstream heritage discourses and practices prefer not to address, they also probe the possibilities and limits of heritage preservation as a form of radical remembering and critique.<sup>2</sup>

The papers' collective focus on sites and heritage related to industrial development is especially timely because of the Japanese government's attention to valuing the country's industrial heritage. Beginning in earnest with the Culture Agency's survey of "modern heritage" (*kindai isan*) in 1992, there are currently more than 2500 "important cultural properties" (*jūyō bunkazai*) related to industrialization on the Agency's register.<sup>3</sup> The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) has also joined this effort, producing its own list of "Heritage Constellations of Industrial Modernization" (*kindai ka sangyō isan gun*) from 2007-08.<sup>4</sup> The Japanese state's increasing attention to industrial sites is reflected in the successful inscription of the "Sites of Japan's Meiji Industrial Revolution" into UNESCO's World Heritage List in 2015 - and this looks to continue with Japan's intention to consider nominating the Sado Mines into the List.<sup>5</sup> Mizuno's paper is a welcome examination of the larger contextual question of the Japanese state's participation in the preservation industrial sites, which she links to Japan's desire to reaffirm "its membership in the Euro-centered universality" as a way to compensate for Japan's diminished geopolitical standing.

Each of the papers embody the potential to call into question the inspirational narratives of

industrial development that the Japanese state would prefer to emphasize. Han's and Mizuno's papers show that Japan's modern industrialization is intimately tied up with its history of colonialism, imperialism, and wartime aggression, and their questions about how these histories are commemorated resonates with some of the issues that emerged in the debates over the designation of the Meiji industrialization sites. Importantly, these papers, along with Miyamoto's, remind us that the use of forced labor ran as a thread through Japan's history of industrialization and wartime mobilization.

Furthermore, while the debates over the Meiji sites rightly focused on the use of forced Korean and Chinese labor at sites like Hashima/Gunkanjima, the papers here remind us that Japan's industrialization also exacted great costs from Japanese domestic society: Japanese prison-laborers in Miike and the Japanese people who worked on Raza Island also labored in abject conditions.<sup>6</sup> Together, these papers turn a spotlight on the important question of the costs of Japan's industrialization on those located within the borders of the Japanese nation state - a question that risks being overshadowed by the attention to the role that forced labor from outside Japanese borders played in Japan's industrialization.

A key issue that emerges out of these essays is the question of which sites get commemorated and which do not. Dark heritage is about the parts of the Japanese past that many people would rather not remember; and yet, some pieces of dark heritage do succeed in making their presence felt and achieve a certain level of acknowledgement by the national community. Is there a hierarchy of dark heritage in which some sites are more accepted and acceptable than others, so that the sites and histories that the papers here examine are not part of a national circuit of memory? What accounts for the emergence and recognition of sites of dark heritage?

In the cases of the wartime underground tunnels at Matsushiro and Takashiki, and the Mitsui coal mines at Miike, local communities and individuals play essential roles with their initiative, and commitment to recovering and publicizing the histories of these sites. Closely related to this is the question of who "owns" these pieces of heritage and the right to speak about them. One level of contestation is between local communities and dominant state-backed narratives: whether it is WWII, the use of forced labor, capitalist exploitation, or history of convict labor, the Japanese state is invested in imprinting its own narrative on these issues. Han and Miyamoto demonstrate that local communities sometimes have their own agendas that not only run counter to the government's preferred narratives, but also go beyond contestations over history and become ways of intervening in contemporary social issues. In these instances, the stakes surrounding the preservation of dark heritage increase dramatically.

However, these papers remind us of the need to pay attention to the multiple ways that local groups are invested in these sites. Han shows that even local groups who act with purpose and conviction are not necessarily united in their understanding of the task of preservation or what its aims should be. Miyamoto's Omura Society for the Preservation of Prisoners' Cemetery began as a group of volunteers whose core members were affiliated with national-level political movements. The importance of a (local) community for determining whether a site is preserved also surfaces in Mizuno's study of Rasa island, which has no resident community to advocate for its history and heritage. It is doubly disadvantaged in this sense because while Okinawa prefecture (to which the island belongs administratively) is no stranger to deploying heritage in the service of its local identity and economy, the prefecture's industrial heritage is not the kind of heritage that it promotes.<sup>7</sup>

What would the appropriate preservation of “dark heritage” look like? Other than the case of Rasa island, the papers here bear witness to relatively robust efforts at local levels to recover forgotten and/or silenced histories. But is that enough? In other words, is it enough for efforts to recover dark heritage to take place within local communities or groups of individuals united by a commitment to these sites, or is it essential that these sites of dark heritage and their stories enter into the national consciousness? If a wider national understanding is important, how do these narratives contribute to this?

Miyamoto notes that in the case of the Miike mine, its inscription into the World Heritage List as part of the “Sites of Japan’s Meiji Industrial Revolution” has been accompanied by the hope for a boost in tourism to the area and he suggests that a wider appreciation for the cultural value of industrial sites is important to whether or not Miike’s dark heritage reaches a broader audience. At the same time, there is the concern noted by Han on the part of the Matsushiro community that

its dark heritage sites are being used merely as tools to promote tourism to Nagano city without necessarily contributing to an appreciation of the sites’ historical significance.

Each of the papers here is an example of a site of dark heritage and of precisely the kind of historical narrative and critiques that dark heritage can offer. At the same time, these papers go beyond an explication of their potential to challenge dominant narratives of Japanese industrialization and collectively raise questions that gesture at the complexities associated with the preservation of dark heritage sites. Importantly, by exploring these sites within conversations about the history of Japanese industrialization and how particular underclasses were mobilized and coerced into playing roles in that process, the papers here tie heritage preservation to larger processes of social justice and reconciliation. In so doing they deepen our understanding not only of what dark heritage can do, but also of what it is.

([https://apjff.org/#\\_ftnref1](https://apjff.org/#_ftnref1))

## SPECIAL FEATURE

### Remembering Japan’s Industrial Development, Preserving its Dark Heritage

Edited by Hiromi Mizuno with Tze M. Loo

Hiromi Mizuno, Rasa Island: What Industrialization To Remember and Forget  
(<https://apjff.org/2017/01/Mizuno.html>)

Miyamoto Takashi, Convict Labor and Its Commemoration: the Mitsui Miike Coal Mine Experience (<https://apjff.org/2017/01/Miyamoto.html>)

Jung-Sun Han, The Heritage of Resentment and Shame in Postwar Japan  
(<https://apjff.org/2017/01/Han.html>)

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See for instance, the Hokudan Earthquake Memorial Park (*Hokudan shinsai kinen kōen*, also known in English as Phoenix Park) that preserves the Nojima Fault line which was responsible for the 1995 Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake/Great Hanshin Earthquake. It was designated a Natural Monument (*ten'nen kinen butsu*) by the Culture Agency in 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Jung-Sun Han, "Relics of Empire Underground: The Making of Dark Heritage in Contemporary Japan," *Asian Studies Review* 40 (2016), 287-302.

<sup>3</sup> The Culture Agency maintains a searchable online database which also provides total numbers of properties in any category. See Here ([http://kunishitei.bunka.go.jp/bsys/index\\_pc.html](http://kunishitei.bunka.go.jp/bsys/index_pc.html)) (accessed 1 October 2016).

<sup>4</sup> METI identified 66 constellations over a two-year period; as the term "constellation" suggests, these referred to groups of objects or structures that made up the content of each constellation. For instance, the constellation of "properties related to Saga fief's projects" comprises the Tsuiji reverberatory furnace, objects in the Chōkokan Museum (11 sets of objects, photographs and old maps), and objects in the Saga Castle History Museum (7 sets of objects including drawings and cannon plans). METI, "Kindai sangyo isangun 33" ([http://www.meti.go.jp/policy/local\\_economy/nipponsaikoh/pdf/isangun.pdf](http://www.meti.go.jp/policy/local_economy/nipponsaikoh/pdf/isangun.pdf))," 8. See also METI, "Kindai sangyo isangun zoku 33" ([http://www.meti.go.jp/policy/local\\_economy/nipponsaikoh/pdf/isangun\\_zoku.pdf](http://www.meti.go.jp/policy/local_economy/nipponsaikoh/pdf/isangun_zoku.pdf))." The result is a list of objects that, in reality, far exceeds the relatively modest number of "66" constellations.

<sup>5</sup> Japan submitted "The Sado Complex of Heritage Mines" to its Tentative List at UNESCO's World Heritage Center in 2010. For more on UNESCO's designation of the Meiji sites, see William Underwood, "History in a Box: UNESCO and the Framing of Japan's Meiji Era," *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, Vol. 13, Issue 26, No. 1, June 29, 2015.

<sup>6</sup> On the issue of forced labor at the Meiji industrial sites, see Kim Hyo Soon and Kil Yun Hyung, "Remembering and Redressing the Forced Mobilization of Korean Laborers by Imperial Japan," *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, 7-3-10, February 15, 2010 and Takazane Yasunori translated and introduced by Tze M. Loo, "Should 'Gunkanjima' Be a World Heritage site? - The forgotten scars of Korean forced labor," *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, Vol. 13, Issue 28, No. 1, July 13, 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Okinawa prefecture makes deft use of its cultural heritage as well as its war-related heritage. See my *Heritage Politics: Shuri Castle and Okinawa's incorporation into Modern Japan, 1879-2000* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014) and Gerald Figal, *Beachheads: War, Peace, and Tourism in Postwar Okinawa* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012).