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Title: A Corridor Within the Empire: The Pusan-Shimonoseki ferry and Japanese Colonialism in Korea

Introduction

April 1st, 1908 was a day of festivities in the city of Pusan. On that day events were held throughout the city to mark a 160 meter extension of the Seoul-Pusan railroad. While previously the line's terminus had been at the Ch'oryang station, additional work had been completed that linked the port facilities in Pusan with the mainline. An article written for the *Railway Times* newspaper captured the congratulatory tone that marked the completion of the project. Starting with a description of the opening of the new train station and moving to the now connected harbor, the report is filled with lively accounts of celebrative interaction and geographic connection between people, trains and ships.¹ In the account the day starts with a ceremony for the opening of the Pusan station and the departure of the new express train to Seoul. From there the writer goes on to describe excursions on the newly complete section of track between the Pusan station and Ch'oryang stations. Following this the writer goes to the harbor there and the loading of the Japan-bound *Tsushimamaro* is observed by on-lookers in pleasure boats. In the final section of the article, the day's events are brought to a close with a description of joyous citizens forming a lantern procession (提燈行列) to send off a train bound for Sinūiju on the border with Manchuria. The author leaves the reader with an image of striking parody; two brightly lit processions, a line of humans and lanterns that advances in the darkness, mimicking the train as it proceeds northward.

In spite of the article's poetics, one feature of this scene is notably missing. At no point does the author take notice of the fact that the Seoul-Pusan railroad and the Pusan-Shimonoseki ferry to Japan had both, since time of their completion in 1905 been effectively, if not efficiently, linked. Prior to the completion line extension in 1908 the movement of goods and people over the 160 meters between the station at Ch'oryang station and the Pusan harbor had been facilitated by the labor of hundreds of the Korean porters and rickshaw pullers. From a logistical standpoint, the connection and expansion of the port and rail facilities in Pusan was an improvement. However, this technical alternation is not what the above-mentioned author focuses on. Rather it is the notion of connectivity, enabled by the technical and mechanical linking of the Seoul-Pusan line and Pusan-Shimonoseki ferry line that the article and the day's celebrations stress; a notion of connection that is seen to physically bind Japan, Korea and Manchuria.

This way of presenting the Pusan-Shimonoseki line is worth considering as it has dominated most accounts of the line. On the whole, renderings of the ferry have depended on two alternate presentations. One standard form is the image of the Pusan-Shimonoseki ferry as a gateway point between Japan and Korea. Here, two seemingly autonomous subjects are brought into interaction by means of a figurative door or entry. A standard example of this can be found in Kim Minyōng's research on the Pusan-Shimonoseki ferry and its role in the movement of Korean laborers to Japan. In this article the line is referred to as a "gateway reaching to the mainland" as

¹ Article found in Hong Yōnjin, "Pugwan yōllaksōn simal gwa Pusanpu Ilbonin in'gu pyōndong" (On Passage of Busan-Shimonoseki Cross-Channel Liner and the Change of Japanese Population in Busan). *Hanil minjok munje yōn'gu* 11 (2006): 148-150.

well as a “passage way of control of the mainland.”² A similar visualization can be found in the work of both contemporary as well as period authors who have employed anthropomorphic tools when referring to the line. One of the more common variations of this form are descriptions of the line as being the throat of the Japanese empire.³ Such devices present the ferry as part of a physical state structure that binds as well as conveys the resources and bodies needed by the state. In this sense, references to the Pusan-Shimonoseki line as the throat of the Japanese Empire are conceptually akin to Governor General Minami Jirō’s famed description of the Japanese Empire in which Japan acts as the body, Korea as the arm and Manchuria as the fist.⁴

This paper will move away from both of these descriptions of the Pusan-Shimonoseki ferry line in order to emphasize the functionality of the structure. This will be done through a consideration of the line’s formative power over the lives of Korea workers in Japan. What follows will be an examination for how the line operated to control and to shape the flow of surplus labor within the Japanese Empire. This paper will consider how the regulation the line introduced an added element of contingency into the everyday lives of Korean workers in Japan, a factor that led to greater vulnerability and which helped enable the exploitation of Korean labor in Japan during the interwar period. The following sections will provide overview of the Pusan-Shimonoseki line, the emergence of the Korean labor surplus and how this collection of individuals was shaped and controlled by the line.

Overview of the Pusan-Shimonoseki Ferry

On the eleventh of September, 1905 the *Ikimaro* (壹岐丸) completed its maiden journey from Shimonoseki to Pusan. This voyage marked the beginning of what was known at that time as the Kwanbu Yöllaksön (關釜連絡船) or Kwanbusön (關釜船). The first two ships to service this route, the *Ikimaro* and her sister ship the *Tsushimamaro* (對馬丸) could make the trip between the two cities in roughly 11 hours and 30 minutes traveling a top speed of 15 knots. Both of the steam powered ships weighed approximately 1,680 tons and could carry a total of 337 passengers as well as a cargo load of 300 tons.⁵

Neither ship, nor the ferry line that they maintained, play an integral part in the decades long process that ended with Japan’s formal annexation of Korea in 1910. Rather, the line was to play a central role throughout the occupation period that would follow. Over the course of the next forty years, the *Ikimaro* and the *Tsushimamaro* would be followed by five progressive generations of passenger ships. Through these ships, the Pusan-Shimonoseki ferry acted as a site for connection and restriction within the Japanese Empire. However, the Pusan-Shimonoseki line was by no means the only corridor for connection. The ferry was just one section within an entire array of points between the Islands of Japan and the Korean peninsula. During the span of the

² Kim Minyŏng, “Singminji sidae nomudongwŏn ūi songh’ul gwa ch’öldo, yöllaksön” (The Forcibly Mobilized Laborers Transported by Railways and Ferryboats). *Hanil minjok munje yŏn’gu* 4 (2003): 47.

³ Yu Kyoyŏl, “Cheguk gwa singminji ūi kyŏnggye wa wŏlgyŏng: Pugwan yöllaksön gwa ‘tohang chŭngmyŏngsŏ’ rŭl chungsim ūro” (Crossing the Border between Empire and Colony-Passenger Administration Policy Related with Busan-Shimonoseki Cross-channel Liner). *Hanil minjok munje yŏn’gu* 11 (2006): 213., “Pusan ūi pinmindŭl ūl pogo” (A Look at the Port of Pusan), *Tongailbo*, November 09, 1923, 4., “Pusan chibang sokaesop’an” (Introduction to the Pusan Region Edition), *Tongailbo*, January 01, 1930, 4.

⁴ Michael E. Robinson, *Korea's Twentieth-century Odyssey* (University of Hawaii Press, 2007), 84.

⁵ Hong Yŏnjin, *ibid.*, p. 146-162.

Japanese colonial period, commercial and military transport constantly being recalibrated to correspond to the economic and strategic demands of changing logistical circumstances.⁶

Nevertheless, the Pusan-Shimonoseki line did play a significant part in the transport network of the empire. During the four decades of its operation, the ferry transported over 30,000,000 people and served as one of the main points of contact between Japan and colonial Korea.⁷ In addition, the line would come to maintain two dedicated freighters that, like the ferry ships, crossed the straits between Korean and Japan daily and supplemented the cargo capacity of the passenger ships. As Kimura Genji indicates in his research on this aspect of the line, by the 1930s the vessels that operated on the Pusan-Shimonoseki line accounted for anywhere between 8.6 percent to 17.8 percent of freight shipped between Japan and Korea.⁸

Over the course of the Japanese occupation of Korea, the contact enabled by the Pusan-Shimonoseki ferries grew in scope a fact illustrated vividly in the increasing size and speed of the ships that ran the line. Just eight years after the start of the ferry line, a new pair of vessels was constructed to operate along this route. Weighing nearly twice as much as the *Ikimaro* and the *Tsushimamaro*, the *Komamaru* (高麗丸) and *Shiragimaru* (新羅丸) towered over the older generation of vessels. Launched in early 1913, the two ships could carry nearly twice the number of passengers as the *Ikimaro* and the *Shiragimaru* and three times as much cargo. On the smoke stacks of the *Komamaru* and *Shiragimaru* was painted the “工” of the Imperial Ministry of Railroads (帝國鐵路廳), which had financed the construction of the ships.⁹ The symbol spoke to the role the ships of Pusan-Shimonoseki line performed in what was becoming an increasingly interwoven transportation network. Following the passage of Railroad Nationalization Law (鐵道國有法) in 1906, the ferry came under the purview of the newly established Imperial Ministry of Railroads (帝國鐵路廳), and the Governor General’s Office of Korea. This change allowed for the integration of management as well as for a greater insertion of state directed investment in the area of transport.¹⁰ Thus, where the construction of the *Ikimaro* and the *Tsushimamaro* was privately funded, following nationalization, all ships that serviced the Pusan-Shimonoseki ferry were provided by the state, and consequently were even more responsive to the needs of the state.

The generation of ships to come next to the Pusan-Shimonoseki ferry line was even larger than the ones that came before. The *Keifukumaru* (景福丸), the *Tokujumaru* (德壽丸) and the *Shokeimaru* (昌慶丸) all entered service in during a ten-month period between 1922 and 1923. At 3,620 tons, each ship was almost 600 tons heavier than the *Komamaru* and *Shiragimaru* and could travel at speeds that reduced travel time from Pusan to Shimonoseki to roughly eight hours.

⁶ With the implemented of a multiple line (多航路主義) policy connecting Korea to Japan with the additional transit routes on the Fukuoka-Pusan line (博釜航路), the Shimonoseki-Yōsu line (關麗航路), the Yamaguchi-Ulsan line (油蔚航路). See, Kimura Genji, “Pugwanyōllaksōn i unsongsa-esō ch’aji hanūn wich’I” (The Historical Place Occupied by the Pusan-Shimonoseki Ferry), *Han’guk minjok munhwa* 28 (2006): 174-179; Yu Kyoyōl, *ibid.*, p. 214.

⁷ Yu Kyo-yōl, *ibid.*, p. 234.

⁸ Kimura Genji, *ibid.*, p. 173-174, 179., An T’aeho, “Ilcheha ūi unsuōp-e kwanhan sogo” (A Brief Examination of the Transportation Industry under the Japanese Empire), *Han’gukoegugō daehakkyo nonmunji* 5 (1972).

⁹ Pictures of the ferries of the Pusan-Shimonoseki Ferry show the ships with the “工” character of the Ministry of Railroads painted on the smoke stack. The use of character appears to be a reference to the Government Engineering Department (工部省), the state agency that preceded the Imperial Ministry of Railroads.

¹⁰ On Nationalization see: Yu Kyoyōl, *ibid.*, p. 215, Hong Yōnjin, *ibid.*, p. 141-142, Kimura Genji, *ibid.*, p. 180.

In terms of capacity, these ships also marked an increase and were able carry almost 950 passengers as well as 430 tons of freight.

This patten of rapidly breaking records of ship scale occurred again with the construction of the *Kongoumaru* (金剛丸) and her sister ship the *Kouanmaru* (興安丸) which each entered into service of the Pusan to Shimonoseki line in the fall and winter of 1936 and 1937. Plans for their construction were first proposed in 1929 when the Ministry of Railroads was considering a new series of 5,500 ton vessels for the line. Following the economic fluctuations of that year, these plans were tabled and then significantly altered. The ships that were eventually constructed were of a much larger class than those originally proposed. The *Kongoumaru* weighed 7,082 tons and could carry a ships complement of 1,384. The *Kouanmaru* weighed 7,080 tons and when full could carry 1,746 passengers. Both ships were considerably faster than any of the other ferries that had come before. What was once a trip that took the first generation of ferries 11 hours and 30 minutes to complete could now be done in just seven.¹¹

In late 1942 and early 1943 two additional ships made up the final, massive addition to the vessels comprising the ferry line. The *Tenzanmaru* (天山丸) and the *Konronmaru* (崑崙丸) were 143.4 meters long and weighed over 7,900 tons. In spite of being more than five times larger than the first generation of vessels to operate on the line, both the *Tenzanmaru* and the *Konronmaru* could reach speeds sufficient to make the passage between Japan and Korea in just seven hours.¹² The two ships' increased size enabled them to carry roughly 2,050 passengers in addition to 2,223 tons of freight. Compared to the *Kongoumaru* and the *Kouanmaru*, these new ships carried less freight however this design change was reflective of the so-called Passenger and Freight Division Theory (客貨分離論) which sought to simplify docking procedures and increase the rate and amount of passenger transport by employing freighters to operate on the line daily.¹³

By the time the *Tenzanmaru* and the *Konronmaru* went into service, the ships that crossed between Pusan and Shimonoseki reflected the growing militarization that had advanced into nearly every corner of life within the Japanese empire. The ships were painted a bluish-grey to help camouflage them while at sea. On their decks were placed anti-aircraft gun stations where crewmembers would scan the sky and the waves for threats. The possibility of drowning almost certainly crossed the minds of both the crew and passengers of those ships as they made their passage at that time. In the early morning hours of October 5th of 1943, those fears where realized by the 583 who died when the *Konronmaru* was torpedoed by an American submarine.¹⁴

Regular operation of the Pusan-Shimonoseki line finally ended in June of 1945. American air-attacks, submarine patrols and the planting of underwater mines around the waters around Shimonoseki forced the harbor and the ferry line to close. What remained of the ships that had maintained the forty-year tradition of tracing the line was diverted to the harbor at Fukuoka.¹⁵ Less than two months later, the Pacific War came to a close and the boats of the Pusan-Shimonoseki ferry went to work at facilitating part of the massive global population transfers that characterized the end of the second world war. The line was briefly reopened in July of 1947 and again in March of 1948 in order to participate in the continued repatriation process. However, by April of 1949 the ferry line was finally terminated.

¹¹ Yu Kyoyöl, *ibid.*, p. 228.

¹² Hong Yŏnjin, *ibid.*, p. 153, Kim Minyŏng, *ibid.*, p. 227-228.

¹³ Kimura Genji, *ibid.*, p. 173.

¹⁴ Hong Yŏnjin, *ibid.*, p. 153.

¹⁵ Ch'oe Yŏnggho, , "Ilbon ũi p'aejŏn kwa Pugwan yŏllaksŏn: Pugwan hangno ũi Kwihwanjadŭl" (Defeat of Japan and the Busan-Shimonoseki cross-channel Liner: Repatriates on this channel Liner). *Hanil Minjok munje yŏn'gu* 11 (2006).

The Pusan-Shimonoseki Ferry and Korean Labor in Japan

Throughout the colonial period, the movement of Korean migrants to labor markets in Japan was an issue of profound concern. In both Japan and Korea bureaucrats and pundits produced a sizable discourse on what would become termed the “Korean Problem” (朝鮮人問題). In the eyes the Japanese, this problem was in short, the seemingly endless flow of economically displaced Korean laborers who traveled through the empire in search of work. Due to this perceived crisis, Korean migrants in Japan became the subject of a range of policies and programs meant to control but also to facilitate the appropriation of their labor. The following section will consider the role played by transportation networks like the Pusan-Shimonoseki ferry in the management of the flow of Korean migrants into Japan. This section also considers how Pusan-Shimonoseki ferry played an active from in the production of even greater contingency and instability in the lives of Korea migrants in Japan. To do this the ferry will be considered not simply as a barrier separating the migrant in Korea from employment in Japan. Instead, the line and the system of smuggling that emerged around it will be examined in order to cast light on the formative features the act of migration had on determining the conditions under which Korean laborers worked once inside Japan.

The emergence of an ethnically Korean pool of surplus labor has its roots in Japan’s first land policies in Korea. Following annexation in 1910 the Japanese state, by means Governor Generals Office of Choson and the Oriental Development Company (東洋拓殖株式會社), completed a cadastral survey (土地調査事業) of the entire nation. While a similar project had been launched during the short-lived Korean Empire, a lack of funds prevented the project from being completed.¹⁶ The Japanese survey took a total of eight years resulting in a new system of organization and commoditization to structure the Korean agricultural sector. This process can be taken as a standard example of state-directed primitive accumulation in which land holdings are explicitly standardized and commoditized thereby becoming a basis for taxation and exchange. In Korea, this restructuring worked largely in favor of the Japanese state and holders of capital. Through the survey, huge tracks of public land came under state control. At the same, a time newly instituted tax system increasingly led to the displacement of economically vulnerable peasants who in turn became available to Japanese markets.¹⁷

The Pusan-Shimonoseki ferry helped shaped how this body of surplus labor was not only controlled, but also configured once inside of Japan. One of the most explicit modes by which laborers were curtailed was by means of an array of immigration policies that were introduced and modified throughout the interwar period. These polices worked on the one hand, to meet the demands of the Japanese economy, and on the other to control the population of workers who enabled interwar economic growth. Through recruitment methods and migration policies the state introduced a huge amount of instability into both the movement and daily life of the Korean laborer in Japan. A threat of deportation for those of failed to conform to migration patters was a major source of uncertainty. This instability resulted in the degradation of the Korean migrant’s ability to sell his or her labor inside Japan.

When the Pusan-Shimonoseki ferry was established, Japanese immigration policy was still guided by the 1899 Foreign Workers Exclusionary Law (外國人労働者入國制限法) which, with the exception of diplomats and students, restricted Korean laborers or farmers from entering Japan.¹⁸ Formal annexation of Koran in 1910 brought imperial citizenship the people of Korea

¹⁶ Jung T’aehŏn, *20-Segi Han’guk kyŏngjesa* (20th Century Korean Economic History) (Yŏksa munje yŏn’guso, 2010), 91-103.

¹⁷ Yu Kyoyŏl, *ibid.*, p. 215., Ken Kawashima, *The Proletarian Gamble: Korean Workers in Interwar Japan* (Duke University Press, 2009), 6.

¹⁸ Yu Kyoyŏl, *ibid.*, p. 215.

and with it the ability to enter Japan. However, only one month after the signing of an annexation treaty with Korea, the Japanese passed bylaws concerning the inspection of Koreans entering Japan (要視察朝鮮人視察內規).¹⁹ This legislation was the first in a series of laws that worked to both create as well as control a new class of imperial citizens who, for the next forty years, would play a key role in the economic structure of Imperial Japan.

At the same time that the cadastral survey was coming to a close, the First World War delivered to Japan a short and intense phase of economic growth. Decreased European production along with greater demand for manufactured goods and raw materials led to a boom in Japanese manufacturing. Between 1914 and 1920, the number of Japanese factories increased from 31,717 to 45,806 and the population of workers increased from 948,000 to 1,612,000. During the same span of time, global financial markets trends allowed Japan to go from being a borrower nation of 1.1 billion yen to a creditor nation of 2.77 billion yen.²⁰

In response to both the increasing price of labor and to the increasingly politicized and unionized Japanese working class, manufacturers turned to the Korean migrants as a solution to wartime labor needs.²¹ Through a system of recruiting done in conjunction with the Governor-General of Korea, company recruiters would go through villages in the southern provinces of Korea in search of workers who could be hired in mass. Under this arrangement, groups of workers would conclude a contract, often by means of a group representative, with a company recruiter. Generally the terms of the contract would establish the Koreans as temporary workers for a time span of two to three years. This provision would enable migrants to legally enter Japan, however it also stipulated these workers would reside temporarily. Recruiting more than ten workers required pre-approval from the Governor-General and include contract information about the type of work, hours, methods of payment and savings, expenses, travel fees in case of accident and approval for underage workers.²² Colonial police would often accompany recruiters in their travels through rural areas and also serve as mediators and facilitators in negotiations. However, by far one of the most pivotal roles played by the colonial authorities throughout this process was concerning the questions of wages. During the process of hiring workers the colonial state would circulate wage charts to prospective employers recommending rates of pay that were 30 to 50 percent less than that paid to Japanese workers in the same occupation. Following the conclusion of negotiations and the signing of the contract, Korean workers would be given a departure date in addition to a date by which they were required to report their employment with authorities at the port.²³

Policies relating to the movement of Korean labor continued to change in tandem with the fortunes of the Japanese economy and the needs of the colonial state. Following the end of the First World War, Japanese factory owners, seeking to manage the losses of the post-war recession targeted Korean workers as some of the first to lay off. Moreover growing anti-colonial sentiment in Korea gave rise to unease about the migrants. For the Pusan-Shimonoseki ferry, unrest in Korea that emerged in conjunction with March 1st 1919 protests eventually led to further restriction of key connecting lines between Korea and Japan. In April of 1919, the Governor-General's office issued new rules concerning the travel of Koreans overseas. In keeping with the Third Order by the Office of the Superintendent of Police Affairs (警務總監部令第3號), all Koreans outside of the peninsula were to carry police issued travel certificate (渡航證明書). Such documents established not only the holders identity, but also workplace and place of

¹⁹ Yu Kyoyŏl, *ibid.*, p. 216-217.

²⁰ Kawashima, *ibid.*, p 27.

²¹ Kawashima, *ibid.*, p 27.

²² Kawashima, *ibid.*, p 32-33.

²³ Kawashima, *ibid.*, p 34,

residence.²⁴ Korean migrants heading to Japan by means of the Pusan-Shimonoseki line had to present these documents to the Pusan harbor police at which point they would receive a boarding examination (乗船審査) in order to determine if they were physically suitable to travel.²⁵

Throughout most of the 1920s and into the mid-1930s, policies relating to the movement of Korean migrants to Japan followed a pattern of increased control. With the exception of a six-month period in 1922 of unrestricted movement known as the “Free Passage System” (自由渡航制), movement to Japan was characterized by regulatory systems of observation and documentation. The travel documents sought to ensure that migrants had basic Japanese language skills, employment and an amount of money sufficient to pay for housing.²⁶ Workers operate through this system would receive the advocacy of firms seeking to recruit workers for employment in Japan.²⁷ However, these workers would also be compelled to tolerate substantially lower wages than their Japanese counterparts.

The ability of the colonial government to effectively implement this registration system to curtail the movement of Korean labor can be seen in the Japan by 40 percent drop in migrants who arrived in Japan between 1925 and 1926.²⁸ Redirection of the Korean labor force at this time was pursued both to address the growing concerns about labor migration within Japan as well to force a resolution to labor needs within the colony. The mid-1920s witness the start of a series of works projects on the peninsula such as transpiration related development plans (鐵道港灣計劃), irrigation development projects (土地改良事業) and the construction of hydroelectric dams in the north. In the years that followed, these projects would continue to offer an incentive for the colonial government in Korea to redirect migrant labor away from Japan.²⁹

Similar tightening of policies relating to the transit of labor to Japan occurred during the first half of the 1930s. The onset of the global depression in late 1929 resulted in an increase in unemployment across the imperial economy. In Japan policymakers attempted to insulate the island economy from this trend by further reducing the supply of Korean labor. This coincided with the tendency of Japanese business owners to target Korea labor for termination. The discrimination that existed at this time is demonstrated through statistics from the period: unemployment rate on the Japanese Islands one year after the start of the recession at 13.30 percent for Korean labor and 4.07 percent for Japanese.³⁰ The combination of discrimination in hiring practices and restraints on the mobility of Korean labor was effective in limiting the number of Korean migrants who went to Japan, reducing the flow by 60 percent between 1932 and 1934.³¹

Additional constraints on the movement of Korean migrants to Japan were also encouraged by the changing diplomatic climate of the period. Following the onset of conflict in Manchuria in 1931 and the eventual establishment of a Japanese sponsored state in the region in 1932, interest in directing Korean migration to Manchuria grew. This effort took central stage with the introduction of the Korean Migration and Settlement Policy (朝鮮人移住對策), an initiative formulated by central cabinet ministries to orient migrants towards the Chinese

²⁴ Kawashima, *ibid.*, p. 39.

²⁵ Yu Kyoyŏl, *ibid.*, p. 220.

²⁶ Yu Kyoyŏl, *ibid.*, p. 221.

²⁷ “Chigŏp Sokaeũinsa Sangdam yŏnhap‘oe” (Job Recruiting Personnel’s Consultative Union), *Tongailbo*, May 31, 1925, 5. “Tohangnodongja wihea yŏllaksŏnto halin yogu” (Discount for Ferry Demanded for Migrant Workers), *Tongailbo*, April 04, 1928, 4.

²⁸ Yu Kyoyŏl, *ibid.*, p. 224-225.

²⁹ Yu Kyoyŏl, *ibid.*, p. 224-225., “Manyŏnhang chochi ganinkiŏp songyong” (Prevention of Migration for Use in Private Industry), *Tongailbo*, May 27, 1927, 3.

³⁰ Yu Kyoyŏl, *ibid.*, p. 226.

³¹ Yu Kyoyŏl, *ibid.*, p. 227.

Northeast. To a degree, the effectiveness of the aforementioned polices can be seen in statistics from the Pusan-Shimonoseki ferry. Whereas in 1933 there were over 146,000 Korean passengers on the line bound for Japan, the following years saw that number reduce to 103,700 in 1934, 83,000 in 1935 and 86,000 in 1936.³²

However, when the needs of the imperial economy again shifted the policies towards Korean workers were also transformed. The tendency towards increased control over the movement of Korean migrants to Japan was rapidly reversed with the onset of the Pacific War. Conflict, first with China and then with the British Empire and the United States, created an enormous demand for Korean labor in Japan. This was reflected in the passage of the National Mobilization Law (國家總動員法) in 1938 which, along with further legislation the following year, eased restrictions on the movement of Korean migrants.³³ As wartime production needs increased, additional methods were employed to access migrant labor. This process that culminated with the programs of mass wartime mobilization (戰時動員).³⁴

The Smuggling and the Marginalization of Korean Labor

The systems of migration control that were employed at transit points like the Pusan-Shimonoseki ferry had two distinct outcomes that directly effected Korean migrants headed to Japan. For some, this system of control meant that if able to fulfill the requirements migrants could find underpaid work in Japan for a strictly delineated period of time. For many others, these policies necessitated the use of smuggling networks for entry into a world of undocumented labor. With an increasingly narrow course of options available to them, migrants in the interwar period frequently turned to illegal transit routes to enter Japan in search of work. However, even for those migrants who entered Japan legally, employment through the state mediated recruitment programs would not exclude migrants from assuming a marginalized position in the interwar economy of Japan.

Already by the early 1920s, more stringent restrictions on travel to Japan by means of official points of entry like the Pusan-Shimonoseki line forced Korean workers to depend on smuggling networks for entry into Japan. This mode of transportation was often expensive, unreliable and at times dangerous. For some, buying forgeries of the travel documents required at transit offices was one means by which to enter Japan.³⁵ However, an overview of articles on the subject from the *Dongan Daily News* suggests that rides on private vessels were by far the most common means of conveyance for Korean migrants to sidestep regulations prohibiting them from entry to Japan.

Throughout the interwar period, the transit of Korean workers to Japan through smuggling persisted as a challenge to state approved transit points. Port police overseeing the Pusan-Shimonoseki line were often overwhelmed by harbor traffic in their attempt to rein in the problem. On any given day the docks at Pusan were full of people; and officials charged with monitoring the passengers of the ferry were limited when it came to preventing stowaways from mingling with other passengers and workers on the docks.³⁶ This unmonitored setting could have harmful consequences for the migrants seeking a way to Japan. There are several reports from the period of scams being conducted on migrants in which perspective passengers would pay for

³² Hong Yŏnjin, *ibid.*, p. 156-157.

³³ Yu Kyoyŏl, *ibid.*, p. 229.

³⁴ Yu Kyoyŏl, *ibid.*, p. 230-233.

³⁵ “Toilchŭngmyŏngwicho susangsŏe p’ich’ak” (Maker of Permits for Passage to Japan Captured by Police), *Tongailbo*, January 17, 1928, 5.

³⁶ “Kujŏngput’ŏ tohangkyŏkchŭng maeil p’yŏngkyun ch’ŏnyŏjung” (Rapid Increase in Passengers Since the New Year, Daily Average of Thousands), *Tongailbo*, February 19, 1928, 2.

passage only to find no ship at the embarkation point. In one case from the fall of 1929 a group of fifty migrants were later arrested after their arranged transport failed to arrive.³⁷ In other cases migrants are left in an equally precarious position when the police raided their ships and the owners of the vessels were arrested.³⁸

Once aboard, migrants were exposed to even more dangers. Passage to Japan was often on small sailboats, fishing vessel craft or in the holds of freighters. Ships would frequently load and travel at night with overcrowding being a consistent problem.³⁹ Moreover, the smugglers lack of coordination with state officials led to even greater vulnerability to accident while at sea. In one case a capsized ship drifted for three days before its survivors were discovered and rescued.⁴⁰ An even worst accident occurred when the ship the *Yongkonggu* (龍宮丸) sank in a storm at sea. The vessel had been traveling to Japan with a group of Korean migrants on board when it capsized in a storm. Only five of the fifty-nine people onboard were rescued.⁴¹

The legal and illegal movement of Korean migrants to Japan during the interwar period was not just a temporary exposure to difficulty, danger and bureaucratic submission. Migration both inside and outside of the officially sanctioned routes of transport had the effect of configuring the Korean worker as an individual who operated also outside the normative system of labor exchange. This larger process of configuration of migrant labor in interwar Japan has been explored in Ken Kawashima's research on the Korean day-laborer market. In his work, Kawashima examines how worker recruitment, bureaucratic constraints, racial rhetoric, wages, housing, as well as hiring and firing practices, introduce a range of contingencies that colour and enclose the workers necessitated search for employment. By mean of a more broad understanding of what constitutes the proletariat, Kawashima identifies the Korean day-laborers as members of the class by virtue of the a fact that Korea migrants were both systemically necessitated to work as well as systemically constrained in the search for such employment. This broad definition of the proletariat places greater emphasis on the social processes that frame the migrants search for employment. Such an approach enables Kawashima to assert that rather than an exclusive focus on exploitation within the process of production, attention also must be directed to what he calls, "the contingent terrain of passage that mediates, connects and disconnects surplus populations of workers from the laboring process."⁴² From this position the fact that most Korean migrants did not work stable jobs in factories during the interwar period is of little concern. To the contrary, that such work was systemically out of reach for Koreans points to the degree to which they were pushed into systemic exploitation.

The forms of transport used to deliver Korean workers to the labor markets in Japan are an added piece of the "contingent terrain" which Kawashima describes. For Korean migrants to Japan, the Pusan-Shimonoseki had much the same affect as the myriad of other constraints imposed on the everyday lives of Korean workers. Like the social features explored by Kawashima, the mode of transportation employed by Korean migrants configured their ability to locate work and to negotiate the terms of exchange. Throughout the interwar period, Korean

³⁷ "Nodongja milhangk'ojō sambaekyōwōn p'yōnch'wi" (Migrant Smuggling Case, 300won Defrauded), *Tongailbo*, September 01, 1929, 4.

³⁸ "Iyōkmalli-esō baekyō tongp'o oanghwang" (Far From Home a Hundred Migrants Wander), *Tongailbo*, May 20, 1927, 5.

³⁹ "Pōmsōn, baldongsōn ūro mohōm milhang" (Risky Smuggling Voyages with Sailboats and Motorized Vessels), *Tongailbo*, May 17, 1927, 2.

⁴⁰ "Milhang baldongsōn chōnboktoeō samilgan haegangp'yoryu" (Smuggling Motorboat Capsizes, Floats on Sea for Three Days), *Tongailbo*, January 31, 1935, 5.

⁴¹ "Milhangsōn i P'ongp'ung e chōnbok osipsamyōng i chōnmol" (Smuggling Vessel Capsizes in Storm, Fifty-four Drown), *Tongailbo*, November 20, 1934, 1.

⁴² Kawashima, *ibid.*, p12.

workers seeking work in Japan were systemically compelled to operate either through the bureaucratic pathways that controlled passage on the official ferries, or by means of the smuggling operations that grew up around the line. Either choice significantly configured how each worker entered the labor markets of Japan. If a made use of state sponsored system of transportation, wages would be significantly lower. If official systems of transport were rejected in favor of smuggling a similar problem would emerge as illegal migrants were also at a significant disadvantage when negotiating wages. In this was the act of passage helped to delineate cleavages along ethnic and legal lines and exposed the Korean migrants to a much greater degree of exploitation. This constructive feature of both the standardized process of migration and illegal migration is lost if the view of transport links as simply gateways or economic veins for bodies, products and material is maintained.