

Japan and the Hanaoka Massacre of Chinese Forced Laborers, Summer 1945

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Introduction by Franziska Seraphim

The Hanaoka Massacre

When U.S. occupation forces liberated Allied POW camps in the Akita area in northern Japan in the early fall 1945, they came across piles of unburied dead bodies, mass graves, and a labor camp of emaciated Chinese men living in appalling conditions.



This was Chūsan Dormitory near the Hanaoka copper mine and river diversion project run by Kajima Corporation, one of Japan's biggest construction and public works companies. Kajima-gumi, as it was then known, was headquartered in Tokyo with branches throughout Japan and Manchuria. The company had built Japan's first hydroelectric dam in the 1920s and would remain at the forefront of innovative engineering projects in Japan and Asia throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century.¹

In the closing years of the war, Kajima participated in a nation-wide system of forced labor from northern China and Korea ostensibly to offset labor shortages in Japan and to maximize industrial and mining production, including at the Hanaoka mine. Mitsui, Mitsubishi, and most other industrial combines used forced labor as well.

In the bowels of the earth, where treasure's to find,
the bones cry out: the copper mine.

Every time there's war, the miners' ranks grow,
and so does the mine-owner's purse.

The Hanaoka copper mine: Hell's very worst.

** Titles link to the respective original Japanese text below.*



Metal Shit

It's Hell, really, this mine.

Metal shit from the mine

buries paddy in metal shit;

angry farmers raised banners, of course,

protested the mine.

In the words of the song,

when they see paddy buried in metal shit,

wives and wild crows cry,

“All is woe!”

As I look at dead fields,

it burns inside,

boils up inside—the anger!



Tottering

Time and again bosses beat the men
and shout their mantra—"More coal!" "More coal!"
But a man's strength has its limits.
If you rake off rations in the mess hall
and don't feed the men enough,
then of course they'll totter.
All the more so the women, not up to this,
not to mention the pasty-faced merchants.



The Naked Girls

What's more, girls dragged off
"For the country,"
naked, bare to the navel,
one small cloth hiding their fronts,
pushed ore carts in the mine:
How embarrassing!
How hateful!
Yet no matter how embarrassing, how hateful,
they couldn't complain.

Behind them, the six-foot cudgels of the bosses.

The bosses didn't have the feelings

human beings do.



Even the Sick

Even the sick, home in bed,

were led off, tottering:

"Army orders,"

"Holy war."

They gnashed their teeth in anger,

but for war profiteers

hot to make money,

it was water off a duck's back.



Cave-in at Pit #7

Cave-in!

Cave-in at Pit #7!

Like balls rolling, miners came racing.

Weeping and wailing, families pleaded:

"I want my father's body!"

“I want my son’s bones!”

What did the company men do?

The same as always:

at the memorial service, they doled out mere pennies.

The twenty-four men buried alive:

their bones are still underground.

May 1944, it was.

Yes, that’s when it was.

Even as the mine turns a profit,

bones long underground

cry out.



The Fighting Koreans

Korean workers—

farmers, too—were dragooned and brought here.

The Koreans

simply couldn’t keep silent any longer,

stormed *en masse* into the office:

“Raise our wages!”

“Give us full rations!”

In our hearts we really cheered for them:

Wow! Those Koreans sure are brave!

This when the rest of us couldn’t do a thing.

Treated so brutally, under cover of darkness
even the drafted workers*
began to run away.

** Presumably the Japanese workers drafted into mine work were the most experienced and capable and should have led the way.*



Patriotic Work Brigade*

This mine that produced copper,
that produced, too, the makings of gunpowder—
it was wartime, see, crazy,
Everything in turmoil.
Girls were dragged off,
students dragged off,
even town merchants dragged off:
All dragged off, their livelihoods wrecked,
and terrified by voices thundering:
“Expect to die ‘For the country!’”

** Not Korean or Chinese, but Japanese.*



Three Trains

Day after day the trains carried ore from the bowels of Hanaoka,
and in the opposite direction, to the bowels of Hanaoka,

the trains carried people:

Farmers whose land had been stolen,

merchants whose businesses had failed,

people who toiled and toiled but couldn't put food on the table.

The trains came, transporting them

to the bowels of Hanaoka

to work them 'til they dropped.

Among them all, we can never forget

the three trains

that brought the Chinese prisoners:

the first: July 1944

the second: May 1945

the third: June 1945.



How did Chinese get to Hanaoka? (1)

A Chinese prisoner speaks:

I was caught by the Japanese army

doing sabotage work.

At the internment camp they threw me into,

three thousand comrades, from kids to old men,

were bullied to within an inch of our lives

by the traitors who'd stolen our country.

Each day twenty comrades died.

Japanese devils raped every last female.

Two meals a day—sorghum;

a single well for all those people.

The hunger!

In the sizzling heat, the thirst!



How did Chinese get to Hanaoka? (2)

One day we were packed into freight cars—

cars labeled Beijing-bound.

We were packed so tight we couldn't breathe,

and the weak comrades died before we got there.

Like fish out of water, we sucked air

through cracks in the car walls.

We drank our own piss.



How did Chinese get to Hanaoka? (3)

From our Qingdao—the port stolen earlier by Germany,

stolen now by the Japanese devils—

we were loaded aboard ship.

We were still hungry and thirsty,
but those who begged for water got booted overboard.
We licked moisture off the ship's pipes.
Gasping for breath, we were brought to Japan.

This is the tale of the prisoners.
Bones rattling, wobbly,
they were brought here,
into the depths of northern Akita—to Hanaoka,
then thrown into
Kajima Construction's Chūzan Dorm.



[Kajima Construction](#)

'Chūzan Dorm' may not sound bad,
but it was the Main Street of Hell.
There began the treatment, painful to watch,
of the nine hundred Chinese.
Day after day we averted our eyes.
If their ranks were a bit sloppy
on the road to the worksite,
they'd be abused, knocked down with cudgels yea thick,
half-murdered.
They were led by veterans of the anti-Japan war,
men of the Eighth Route Army, cream of the cream,
so Japanese militarists and the Wang regime agreed
to bring them here

to kill their morale.*

* *Eighth Route Army: the forces of Communist leader Mao Zedong; Wang regime: the regime of Wang Jingwei, sponsored by the Japanese.*



On the Job in Hell

Going outside at night—strictly forbidden;
same clothes, summer and winter,
working barefoot in icy mud
in the bone-chilling cold here in the north;
starving to death with a rattle, freezing to death;
no longer able to move but given a shovel—
take a moment's breather and get knocked to the ground;
once down, they're goners.

Until nine at night,
sometimes till midnight,
we could hear them driven on
by swords, cudgels, shouts.



One Gulp of Water

No matter how parched their throats,
they weren't allowed even one gulp of water on the job.
No matter how they begged, it wasn't allowed.

Working on hands and knees here
along the Hanaoka River,
under eagle-eyed guards watching lest he drink,
utterly unable to resist, he swallows one gulp,
and suddenly cudgel, boot, scabbard
hit, kick, strike all over—
shoulders, hips, back.
They're gonna kill him:
that's what everyone thought who saw it.



Breaking the Valley to the Hoe

Even those who'd fallen sick
were given shovels and sent off
to break barren Ubasawa to the hoe.
Look! Even if for a moment, exhausted,
he rests on his shovel, from behind—
Whack! Whack!—
the cudgel snarls.

Fields bloomed fresh and green,
but what a shame!

They worked for dear life to grow the food

but got not a bite of it to eat.



Poisonweed

Ground-up acorns, apple peels, rice bran, water:

even horses wouldn't eat the stuff

they gave these men to eat.

What on earth did the bosses do with the rations?

Seems the Kajima Construction bigwigs sold them on the black market.

So the men ate trampled apple peels,

ate up all the roadside weeds;

some ate poisonweed and died.

Those still, amazingly, on their feet,

utterly malnourished,

clenched their teeth

held on, survived.

To what end?

Ah, to what end?



Traitors

There were bad guys here, too—

while their buddies all suffered,

while their buddies all held on,
they were like thieves.
They curried favor with the bosses, read their moods,
grew fat from the leavings
of those who took a rake-off
from the *sake* and rice rations,
made their buddies suffer, strutted about.



[Willow Leaves](#)

“Never seen it so bad!”—
Father gave them willow leaves.
Everyone was eating weed dumplings.
Father, too,
must have been eating willow leaves.
Those who labor are all one;
poor people are all brothers.
Others avoided the super’s watchful eye
to bring them weed dumplings.
Miners shared their ration of hardtack with them,
and even the students gave them tea.
And
we learned Chinese words and songs
—at a time when the company men were eating meat

and pouring into the ditch
the hooch they couldn't drink up.



Joining Hands

A song the Chinese taught us:

Arise, the people that won't become slaves!
Build the Great Wall with the blood of the people—
the Chinese nation is in danger.
Raise the cry!
Arise! Arise! Arise!
(tune: Brave Soldier March)*

** This is now the Chinese national anthem. I have stuck close to the Japanese for the first five (of nine) lines; this translation is from nationalanthems.us:*

*Arise, ye who refuse to be slaves!
With our flesh and blood, let us build our new Great Wall!
The Chinese nation faces its greatest danger.
From each one the urgent call for action comes forth.
Arise! Arise! Arise!
Millions with but one heart,
Braving the enemy's fire.
March on!
Braving the enemy's fire.
March on! March on! March on!*



Fight Songs

Despite everything—
they didn't lose heart.
Though hungry, starved, murdered,
they didn't lose heart.
So thin their bones showed, they all sang
from throat, from chest.
They all sang, with power,
songs of changing the world,
of the hardships of working people,
of liberation.



The Sound

The sound that day—
what did they think when they heard it?
Summer 1945:
B-29s flew over the mine and off,
trailing their piercing whine.
The men of the Eighth Route Army

who led the Chinese prisoners—
cream of the cream, whose task was to root out
the suffering of laborers, farmers:
their bright eyes glinted
as they followed the sound—
“The time has come!”



Secret Gatherings

Psst: The time has come!
This is why we've put up with
being reviled, called horses, cows, beasts,
being kicked, beaten.
Now's the time
“To overthrow Japan's emperor system,
stop aggressive war,
set the people of Japan free—
for world peace,
for human happiness.”
They must have remembered
the battles they'd fought in their own country,
then—
made battle plans, I hear,
in secret gatherings nightly.



The Main Force

First of all,
they organized a main force,
cream of the cream,
with bodies able to take the worst
and fighting wills of steel,
and appealed, too, to the workers of Japan
to join hands and rise up in final struggle
against the common enemy.
We all gathered what little food we had
to give them.



The Pledge of Victory

Why have we crossed the ocean to Japan?
Why have we put up with being treated
worse than dogs?
To rid this world of those who would destroy us Chinese,
who feed on our Japanese brothers,
who drench the world in blood:
Hitler, Tōjō, and their ilk—Fascism's gods of death.
That's why.

Let's light a beacon fire for the new Japan!

Let's herald the dawn to laborers and farmers!

Let's awaken them to their own strength!

In order to stop the war, overthrow the moneybags and the military clique,
and make this a peaceful, happy land.

Hitler is beaten.

The time is near when the mighty aid of the Soviet Union
will appear in the East, too.

The bright day of victory is near.

That's how they encouraged their comrades
and brought life to sunken eyes.



The Spy

Look out!

At this eleventh hour, with lives on the line,
one guy just snuck off!

Do in that worm!

That rotten traitor,
scared to die,

has sold out the group's admirable plan.

The cat's out of the bag!



Time to Act

Not a moment to lose!

Everyone, on your guard!

No more planning. Time to act!

Raise the anti-Japan flag of the Chinese people!



Blood Sacrifice on the Street Corner

We'll show you! This is the moment for blood sacrifice—

first, the traitor to the people,

who kicked and beat our buddies,

even sold out our noble calling!

Eat this pick!

And next?

The bosses, running dogs of the military clique,

who stole our food and killed our buddies!



The Good Boss

Still,

among the Kajima bosses
was one
a bit better,
a bit more human,
and the prisoners singled out
that boss
and let him flee.



At the Mine

The company bosses rolled their eyes, absolutely astonished
at the whispered report of the traitor.
In a fright
the prefecture's chief of the special police worked the phone
and went to the site on the double.
In the middle of the night, orders flew
to the prefectural police.*

** The "special police" (Tokkō) were national police, in charge of ideological purity; the prefectural police were ordinary police.*



Bamboo Spears

"They're armed!"

“They’re uppity, those Chinks.”

“Kill ‘em!”

Aping the officers,
officials and landlords filled our minds
with malice.

Wholly taken in by their glib talk,
you and I
took bamboo spears, drew swords,
swaggered into the woods,
took our stations.



The Koreans

Officers and company bosses
rounded up Japanese laborers
to comb the hills.

The Koreans they locked up
in the pit, willy-nilly.

To those no-good types,
the Koreans were
“malcontents.”

When will it explode?
—the bomb of liberation!



Instructions for the Manhunt

We stood at attention as we were trained to do:

reservists, *Yokusan* young adults brigade,

women's association, air raid wardens.

The officer drew his sword, bellowed,

"Just like those dirty Koreans in the Kantō earthquake,

the Chinese prisoners plan violence.

They've already massacred children of the emperor.*

Looting, arson, murder—

they're violent troublemakers who'll stop at nothing.

Take your stations!"

** Reservists (zaigo gunjinkai): the single most influential local organization of males between the ages of 20 and 40, including veterans and those who had not served; "Home Military Association might be a more accurate translation. See Richard J. Smethurst, A Social Basis for Prewar Japanese Militarism: The Army and the Rural Community (Berkeley: University of California, 1974). Yokusan: the youth offshoot of the one-party party, the wartime Imperial Rule Assistance Association. In 1923, at the time of the great Kantō earthquake, Japanese vigilantes massacred Korean residents on rumors—inaccurate—that Koreans were looting, poisoning wells, and killing Japanese. Children of the emperor: wartime language for "Japanese."*



Setting Out

The Chinese tore down phone lines,

seized weapons,
and set off.

Scattering for now

to bide their time:

Head for the woods! For the shelter of the woods!

In the pitch black, feet feeling their way,

voices raised in liberation songs like a far-off ocean's roar,

they dispersed.



To Shishigamori

Main force: to the south, to Ōdate:

Tramp, tramp, tramp, tramp

Tramp, tramp, tramp, tramp

Gunbarrels reflecting the stars,

spades glistening with dew.

eyes open wide,

steely:

to Shishigamori.

to Shishigamori.



The Rock Fight at Shishigamori

Shishigamori: the waves and the shouts of the Chinese
as they made their way into the woods,
signals—were they not?—
to us workers, farmers:
“Rise up together for the liberation of the Japanese people!”

Egged on by *kempei*, cops, capitalists, landlords,
we pelted them with rocks:
Rat-a-tat-tat-tat.
From the woods, too, rocks came flying,
and we were no longer brothers:
“Damn you! Chinks, go to Hell!”

Amazingly, the rock fight went on for two days.
The poor Chinese.
The sick Chinese.
The songs of liberation at the top of their lungs didn't stop,
but the rocks that came flying gradually lost their force,
and the midsummer ruckus at Shishigamori weakened and died.



That Leader and His Men

Ah, that leader—
even reduced to skin and bones,
that steely leader knew no fear.
Still—he couldn't win.
On that pathetic battlefield,
the men dropped, were captured one by one.
He fought, fell back, finally disappeared from sight.



Dogmeat Stew

We saw it all—
the young Chinese brought in
like game on a pole,
bones broken, arms wrenched off:
not a single one groaned.
The men who brought them to the police station in Ōdate
boasted, “You’re dogmeat stew.”
The landlords’ fear, their hateful looks,
the derision of the *kempei*.
Tied up, unable to resist, again and again
they were stabbed with bamboo spears, struck with cudgels.
The gleam in their eyes then,
their defiance,
their contempt, as if for dogs,
their silent, shining eyes.



Interrogation in the Square

Community Hall square:

this-worldly Hell.

Barely alive, the Chinese

were forced to kneel on triangular rods,

bound two by two in the shit and urine;

in the burning noonday sun

struck by rifle butts, cudgels, the sheaths of swords!

Three days with no food or drink:

we watched

with unseeing eyes.



Pools of Blood

Were they rotten fish?

Dead horses?

Still bound in twos,

they were kicked off the trucks in a heap.

Hanaoka Community Hall square

is stained even now with their blood.

Their blood will never be wiped away.

So long as two-legged beasts still exist in this world,
even now, in that square the stains remain.



Weed Dumplings

Taking pity,
stealthily, a woman rolled weed dumplings
toward their knees.

One Chinese gathered them
with his knees.

Suddenly a *kempei* kicked him over,
struck her—Pow!—in the face.



The Wire

From inside Community Hall,
blood-curdling groans.

Dull thuds.

Strung up by their thumbs
from wire that twisted and twanged.

Flesh peeled off, finger bones remained.

When we asked them later,

they said their bodies went numb.



The Corpses

The corpses of the murdered, over three hundred of them:

after three straight days of interrogation

in bright midsummer sun—

covered with pitch-black flies

so heavy with blood they couldn't fly;

At night ravenous dogs

sniffed, nosed about the bodies.



Bleached Bones

In the fields of Ubasawa, even now,

bones surface all the time.

As rain erodes the dirt,

bones surface, flesh rotted off.

The bones of those who died

at the hands of Tōjō, Hirohito, their underlings
are exposed to rain, to wind—
as if to say, “This country never lacks
for those who torment and exploit the people.”
We’re still finding
evidence of the cruelty
of capitalists, landlords, police.



The War Ended

The crazy war ended.
Japan’s military and emperor
who’d kept deceiving us—“Victory! Victory!”—
finally went belly-up.
B-29s dropped goods
to American prisoners
and whined off.
Then for the first time the prisoners
looked alive.

Yet: as always,
the Chinese prisoners got nothing,
still used grass thread
to sew up their rags.



Standing Up

Kajima Construction: brazen and cruel to the very last,
greedy to the very last.

The war ended.

Japan lost.

Those guys put on know-nothing faces,
trying now as before
to trick the Chinese.

They won't get away with it!

The Chinese stood up.

They stormed Kajima Construction.

"Stop this nonsense!

Treat us like human beings!

Send us back to China right away!

Hand over the war criminals who bullied us,
and have the blood of our brothers on their hands!"



Those Who Plan War

White with fear, the dogs—capitalists, landlords—
went crying to Mr. America.

Kajima bosses, chief of the *Kempeitai*,
governor, police chief, chief of the thought police,
leaders of the reservists' association and the *yokusan* youth group—
all alike bloody murderers:

they did it, but what happened to them?

Underlings were punished only for minor war crimes;
big-shot war criminals made big bucks once again.

Hanaoka today is the military base of a foreign country.

Those guys are already preparing
for the next war,
planning to turn us laborers and farm people
into slaves, human bullets.



Song of Awakening

The song to the noble sacrifice of those Chinese
who made the bowels of the earth tremble
shook us to our very souls.

Finally we woke up,
we laborers and farmers raged,
and terror-stricken, the war criminals—
the Kajima bigwigs—

put on pious faces.
furtively collected the bones—
like gravel—into gas cans,
and erected a flimsy gravemarker
at the edge of the field.



Learning from The Example of Those Who Went Before

Songs of liberation were sung loud and clear.

They were sung
from the bottom of the hearts
of surviving Chinese and Koreans.

We too sang,
joining our voices to theirs.

From that point on
we began to fight
company, landlords, government.

In both the February first fight
and the bloody fight over Imperial Oil,*
our martyrs learned from their example
and fought.

Dig up the bones of all the martyrs;
charge and punish every last war criminal;

preserve and tell the heroic deeds of those who died:

that's our job.

** February 1, 1946, was the date of a scheduled general strike that the American Occupation forced Japanese labor to call off.*



Boxes of Ashes

One wife wept:

“They gave me

a box of my husband’s ashes,

but it held no ashes.

The Chinese were lucky—

they actually got ashes.”

On the train,

she looked at the boxes of Chinese ashes

and wept.



Mourning

It's true—

people from the country where working people hold power

searched diligently

and gathered up the bones of their brothers.

But look: with mere slips of paper, Japan's emperor and military

drafted men off to war,

then left their bones to the elements, to bleach.

You! Tell your wife—

“The Chinese held strong

right through the funeral.”

Yes, you and we

must follow their example!

The spirit of the murdered

must be transmitted to all of us Japanese

And we must rise up!

The time has come to strike off the shackles of reaction

and let the sun shine

on the people of this land.



Pistols and Cudgels

Who were the chief mourners at the funeral?

The surviving Chinese brethren.

Hanaoka parents and wives who had had to eat weed dumplings.

But not only they—the true chief mourners
were five hundred million Chinese compatriots
and eighty million working people of Japan.
And not only they—
but the people of all Asia, the whole world,
who defend peace and hate war,
united, fighting to prevent them from making Japan
a springboard for aggressive war and the source of Asia’s disaster!
Such cruel events must not happen again!
Follow their example and fight!

Two-legged dogs rose up in anger at their voices,
wouldn’t let them sing the anthem at the funeral,
wouldn’t let them talk about the Chinese.
With pistols and cudgels
they chased off laborers
pledged to the Red Flag.



Words of Mourning, Stifled

When surviving Chinese comrades
who’d suffered together
and fought together
tried to speak of their murdered brethren,

Chiang Kai-shek's hirelings lunged

and suppressed them.

Following the example of those who went before,

Japanese and Chinese struggled, weeping, trembling in fear,

but the bullies shoved them away,

did not let them speak.

Who made them do it?

We know!

See—they're all in cahoots!

We know!



The Rage of the Chinese People

Learning of the martyrs of Hanaoka,

the Chinese people shook with rage,

struck the ground, rose up.

Guo Moro cried out,

“The four hundred martyrs of Hanaoka are only a fraction of the total.

The martyrs number ten times four hundred,

a hundred times four hundred! ...

Leave no stone unturned in searching out the criminals

who murdered our comrades.

They must be punished.

Repay blood with blood to root out militarism,

the enemy even now of world peace....”

Note: The writer Guo Moro was Vice-Chair of the Chinese Peoples’ Republic and Vice-Chair of the World Peace Association Committee



Never Forget!

Wives, parents—never forget!

Children—engrave this on your hearts!

From olden times to now, the bones of our brethren
have lain in Pit #7.

We still see them even now—brethren whose voices are blocked,
whose hands are bound,
who totter, consumptive,
adrift in Akita, in the depths of the north,
and one after another are murdered.

Who’s murdering us?

We know who!

We’re prisoners, too—it’s our own country,
but we can’t get out of line,
are forced to eat weeds,
are ill-treated by a foreign country—
just like the Chinese who died.

Learn from their example!

Never forget Hanaoka!

Afterword

The Hanaoka Incident is an incarnation, as it were, of the evils of militarist Japan. To investigate it thoroughly and to extirpate the rotten dregs of old Japan unearthed in the process is to lay the *cornerstone* of true friendship between Japan and China. To leave the incident vague is to nourish the *germ* of militarism; doing so will become the *cause* of another fierce war.

This illustrated book has been created, by people who love peace, love Japan, and aim for eternal Japanese-Chinese friendship, to create a great people's movement. In seeking the truth about this incident, which caused so much hardship and seemed about to be buried in oblivion, we studied it and studied it; in the effort to give it expression as a truly living work of art, we argued and revised for all we were worth. This book was supported by the power of the Japan-China friendship movement that has arisen between the 40,000 Chinese who reside in Japan and the Japanese people; it has been supported also by miners, woodsmen, farmers, and democratic groups in Akita, where the incident took place, and by their activism; it is the result of a group effort by friendship movement people, artists, poets, writers, musicians, and others. A project that opens up a new direction in the world of art movements, it adorns one page of the art history of Japan.

We wish to thank each person who took part in bringing this difficult, epochal undertaking to fruition, and we hope fervently that each and every reader will participate in a great people's movement that will carry this illustrated book into every nook and cranny of Japan.

May 30, 1951 Literary Section, Japan-China Friendship Association



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