To Discover Hashima Island

by

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ABSTRACT

From 1916 to 1945, Japanese governments recruited Korean laborers from South Korea for coal mining. The laborers ranged from thirteen to nineteen years old—most of them were still middle school or high school students. Hoping to earn money as the government promised, but unaware of the hostility and danger to which they would be exposed, 600 young Korean laborers were sent to an island called Hashima Island.

Hashima Island has been desolate since 1974 after its coal resources were depleted. Although the island is no longer in use, the current condition of the architecture of Hashima Island speaks the truth of the history. The perimeter of the island is surrounded by walls; the laborers were never able to escape the hostile situation nor had a chance look at the world outside of the island. The wall is composed of three different layers: pre-cast concrete, rocks, and noise barrier; the wall as a whole is three-meters thick. Although the physical distance between the interior and exterior of the island is only three meters, the historical distance stopped in the thickness of the wall. The wall, which is the most problematic yet potentially useful component of the island, has to be interrupted architecturally in order to re-vitalize the timeline of the Korean laborers.

My thesis is to reveal the neglected and hidden histories of Korean forced laborers in Hashima Island through intervention upon the existing walls. By creating an outdoor city museum by transforming the wall, the architecture of the island is re-discovered. The wall is punctured, chiseled, carved, and shaped to create an episodic and linear path along the wall and to be in communication with the surrounding water, mountains, and ultimately the users. The wall allows water to overflow into the site, delineating the lowest topography, and provides access to the underground basement dormitories of the Korean laborers. The wall is no longer a static barricade; it performs as a moving network among the existing materials of the island and the visitors.

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To Discover Hashima Island

A City Wall Museum Remembering Korean Laborers in Hashima Island
Introduction:

Hashima Island was a coal mining facility between 1887 and 1974. Located in southern Japan lying about 9 miles from Nakasaki, Hashima Island was purchased by Mitsubishi in 1890.

The coal mining required specific body types for workers: skinny and small. From 1916 to 1945, Japanese governments recruited Korean laborers from South Korea for coal mining in Hashima Island. The laborers ranged from thirteen to nineteen years old, skinny, small, yet strong and brave.

The Korean laborers worked in an unbelievably hostile environment. They worked for twelve hours every day not on the land, but inside the underground as deep as one kilometer. The temperature of the underground tunnels was as high as 113 Fahrenheit so that they had to wear underwear only during the work. The casualty was extremely high—out of 600 workers, 122 died. But, what's more tragic is that the number of the victims committing suicide was 10, and that drowned to death was 24.
figure 1 | images of Korean laborers in Hashima Island
figure 2 | scribbles on the coal mining tunnel
translated as, "Mom I miss you, I am hungry. I want to go home." (from right to left)
"enjoys a life of luxury and elegance thanks to his idleness or his inessential services, while at the same time a labourer, a wagoner, an artisan or a farmworker sweats so hard and so long that a beast of burden could scarcely bear it" (119)
"the island [is] the appearance of crescent moon" (57)
"rocks lie under the surface and are treacherous" (58)
"The town is defended by a high, thick wall with numerous towers and bastions" (61)

"sole function of the syphogrants is to oversee and ensure that no one sits around idle" (64)

"another class of slaves is made up of hard-working but impoverished drudges from other nations" (91)
"The slaves stay behind. They are free, but trapped as never before, slaves now to their desire to survive." (66)³
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Figure 5: An image of Hashima Island in the 2000s.
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Although the main purpose of the island was coal mining, Japan’s proposal for Hashima Island does not reveal any information about the coal mining tunnel.

The ground and mountain are hatched black, providing no information about their materiality, depth, or space.

However, building details are elaborated, expressing their luxurious environment.
The architectural interaction among the buildings, ground, tunnels, water, and walls are revealed.

The difference in scale of each element of the site is crucial for understanding historical information of Hashima Island.

The wall becomes the threshold of the site. Its location and dimension have architectural potential to connect different existing elements of the site.
The dimension of the walls are highly elaborated. The layers of materials within the wall are revealed.

The wall is composed of three different layers: pre-cast concrete, rocks, and noise barrier; the wall as a whole is three-meters thick.

Although the physical distance between the interior and exterior of the island is only three meters, the historical distance stopped in the thickness of the wall.
Site Intervention: A City Wall Museum Remembering the Korean Laborers

'The wall, which is the most problematic yet potentially useful component of the island, has to be interrupted architecturally in order to re-vitalize the timeline of the Korean laborers.'
'I am approaching Hashima Island by a boat. Along the way, I am welcomed by a series of openings of the wall that specifically show five buildings on the highest hierarchy.'
I dock my boat and turn right to immediately interact with the wall.
'As I am walking along the wall, now I am looking back to the ocean through the same wall. On the island, all I can see is the ocean.'
'The pre-cast part of the wall has been taken away, and now I can see rocks of the wall. The wall started to reveal different layers.'
'I am underneath the wall.'
'Now I enter into the wall, and I am completely encased by the wall. I am unable to distinguish where I am.'
‘I sometimes pop out of the wall and witness that the lowest topography of the island is flooded.’
'I keep walking inside the wall, guided by light filtered through water. The excess of flood was spitted out of the wall, and now I see seascapes through the lens of flood.'
‘I walk along the wall, squeezed by the buildings.’
'I found another opening on the wall that allows me to enter the underground.'
'The path underground is guiding me up to the mountains.'
'I am unable to distinguish where I am.'
'I can enter several basements that are partially flooded; I witness that the mountain is flooding too.'
'I eventually found the basement where the Korean victims used to live.'
‘The space is dimly lit through the cracks above the ceiling where water is dripping into the space. I found stairs that leads me up to the land.’
'But I am still underground, as dripping water continues on the land.'
'The path is leading me toward the existing mountain road.'
'I walk along, squeezed by buildings.'
'Dripping water started to decrease, and I am able to look at the island from the mountains. Water is now flooding from the top of the mountains into holes through which I can see the coal mining tunnel.'
'The tunnel is flooding. The water will reach as deep as one kilometer. The distance that the water will travel is two kilometers, first dripping down, and second filling up.'
'At some point, the island will be completely flooded. I walk down the mountain and arrive at my boat.'
‘The city museum tour was two kilometers, yet it took me only thirty minutes.’
Figure 12-20 (from left to right) | Intervention upon the existing images
Appendices
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