Labour recruitment and workplace abuse in Japan’s far north: the takobeya of colonial Karafuto (Southern Sakhalin)

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Who ended up in tako-beya and what does this tell us about the labour market for Japan’s far north?

Approach

- Examines “incidents” of workplace abuse in the forestry and construction industries reported in the Karafuto press 1910-1917, as well as contemporary social research.
- In total there were 112 such reports in the Karafuto Nippon Yoko Shinbun.

These reports and others give an outline of the scale of the labour market for migratory labourers in Karafuto, how it functioned, and who ended up in tako-beya.

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Work in Karafuto was hard and dangerous, but well-paid. Labourers received an advance payment and final wages paid on completion. This system worked when both labour and management had trust, but otherwise gave an incentive to cheat (i.e. to flee the workplace or use violence to enforce contracts). When is there (not) trust?

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