

**Z.G. Sengirbayeva** K.A. Yassawi International Kazakh-Turkish University, Turkestan, Kazakhstan  
e-mail: zaure.sengirbaeva@gmail.com**THE CONTRIBUTION OF PRISONERS OF WAR  
TO THE ECONOMY OF SOUTHERN KAZAKHSTAN (1941-1945):  
ANALYSIS OF ARCHIVAL SOURCES**

The article examines the fate of prisoners of war who were held in the territory of Southern Kazakhstan during the Second World War, as well as in the post-war period. The purpose of the study is to identify the contribution of these people to the socio-economic development of the region and fill in the gaps in historical knowledge related to the repressive policies of the Soviet state. For a long time, this topic was hushed up, and documents reflecting the real picture of what was happening were classified as "Top secret." It was only after the independence of Kazakhstan that an opportunity arose for a comprehensive study of this historical stratum.

The work uses a comprehensive historical and analytical approach based on archival materials, official documentation, memoirs, as well as oral eyewitness accounts. A comparative analysis of the conditions of detention of prisoners of war and deported peoples exiled to the region in the same years was carried out, which made it possible to establish common features of their situation and interaction with the local population.

The scientific novelty of the article lies in the use of previously unpublished sources and in identifying the role of prisoners of war in the restoration and construction of key infrastructure facilities in Southern Kazakhstan. As a result of the study, for the first time the scale of their participation in the development of the region is documented, the consequences of Stalin's policy towards this category of citizens are assessed, and the need to rethink and preserve the memory of those whose destinies were under the yoke of the totalitarian system is emphasized.

The results obtained expand the understanding of the social history of Kazakhstan in the middle of the 20th century and can serve as a basis for further scientific research in the field of historical memory and political repression.

**Keywords:** prisoners of War, special settlers, Germans, Japanese troops, USSR.

З.Ж. Сенгирбаева

К.А. Ясауи атындағы Халықаралық қазақ-түрік университеті, Түркістан, Қазақстан  
e-mail: zaure.sengirbaeva@gmail.com**Оңтүстік Қазақстан экономикасына әскери тұтқындардың  
қосқан үлесі (1941–1950 ж.): архивтік дереккөздерді талдау**

Мақалада екінші дүниежүзілік соғысы жылдарында, сондай-ақ соғыстан кейінгі кезеңде Оңтүстік Қазақстан аумағында болған әскери тұтқындардың тағдыры туралы мәселе қарастырылады. Зерттеудің мақсаты-бұл әскери тұтқындардың аймақтың әлеуметтік-экономикалық дамуына қосқан үлесін анықтау және Кеңес мемлекетінің репрессиялық саясатымен байланысты тарихи білімдегі олқылықтардың орнын толтыру. Ұзақ уақыт бойы бұл тақырып зерттелмеді, өйткені болған оқиғаның нақты бейнесін көрсететін құжаттар «өте құпия» деген белгінің астында болды. Қазақстан тәуелсіздік алғаннан кейін ғана осы тарихи қабатты жан-жақты зерттеуге мүмкіндік туды.

Жұмыста мұрағат материалдарына, ресми құжаттамаға, естеліктерге, сондай-ақ куәгерлердің ауызша куәліктеріне сүйене отырып, кешенді тарихи-аналитикалық әдіс қолданылды. Сол жылдары аймаққа жер аударылған әскери тұтқындар мен жер аударылған халықтарды ұстау шарттарына салыстырмалы талдау жүргізілді, бұл олардың жағдайына және жергілікті тұрғындармен өзара әрекеттесуіне ортақ белгілер орнатуға мүмкіндік берді.

Мақаланың ғылыми жаңалығы бұрын жарияланбаған дереккөздерді пайдалану және Оңтүстік Қазақстан инфрақұрылымының негізгі объектілерін қалпына келтіру мен салудағы әскери тұтқындардың рөлін анықтау болып табылады. Зерттеу нәтижесінде алғаш рет олардың аймақты дамытуға қатысу ауқымы құжатталды, Сталиннің азаматтардың осы санатына қатысты саясатының салдарына баға берілді, сондай-ақ тағдырлары тоталитарлық жүйенің қысымына ұшырағандардың жадын қайта қарау және сақтау қажеттілігі атап өтілді.



torians' own research under sovereignty is in a completely different direction. Today, it is known that changes have taken place in the laws of Kazakh spiritual heritage, traditions and Customs. And the use of it as a differentiated today requires special meaning (Baidolda, 2005).

Despite the growing body of literature on prisoners of war, existing studies rarely focus on their concrete economic contribution at the regional level. This article seeks to fill this gap by analyzing archival materials from South Kazakhstan, which allow for a more precise assessment of the role of POW labor in the regional economy.

### Materials and methods

The article employed comparative-historical, problem-based, prospective, and retrospective methods. Attention was given to the ways in which scholars have studied the issue of Japanese prisoners of war, their proposed conclusions, and how the topic has developed over time. As a historiographical basis, the works of scholars from Kazakhstan, Russia, and abroad were examined. By analyzing these studies, the main directions and conclusions regarding the topic of Japanese prisoners of war were identified.

In general, a prisoner of war is a soldier who has fallen into the hands of the enemy or a participant in other combat actions. He was under the control of the enemy and was deprived of the opportunity to fulfill his military duties. The status of a prisoner of war is regulated by international humanitarian law, in particular, the Geneva Convention, which establishes their rights and protection. They are guaranteed protection from siege, cruelty, humiliation and other illegal actions. The status of prisoners of war indicates that they have lost their active combat capability and means that they need special legal and humanitarian protection.

From this perspective, the issue of prisoners during the Second World War is considered one of the broadest and most tragic topics. He was involved in the fate of millions of people for both sides, Germany and the Soviet states. They can be divided into three large groups:

- Prisoners of the Soviet Union, soldiers and officers of the Soviet Army, who fell into the hands of Germany and its allies, as well as Soviet citizens who did not go to the front of ordinary war. The fate of them, who were prisoners, was very difficult at this time, that is, a miserable fate befell the party. Many of them were killed by various methods, died

of hunger without food, water, sometimes from various diseases, torture, or were ridiculed.

Prisoners, of course, were sent to punitive camps. There, their situation was very poor due to the current political situation in different camps, that is, they did not observe the norms inherent in morality. The Soviet prisoners were subjected to cruelty, torture, torture. A serious blow was dealt to their health and psyche. In many cases, torture was used for the purpose of obtaining information or morally breaking prisoners. The vast majority of prisoners suffered from hunger and disease. They were undernourished, medical care was not provided, and sanitary conditions were very poor. This led to the spread of TF, dysentery and other diseases. Prisoners experienced a lack of moral norms. They were humiliated and ridiculed, they were not treated as human beings. On the basis of racial theories, many prisoners were forcibly destroyed. Violations of the norms inherent in morality were part of German state policy, and not just individual cases. Prisoners were treated as tools, not as people (Tuleubaev, 2014). Prisoners were forcibly used for Labor. They worked in harsh conditions and suffered severely in their health.

- German prisoners. Troops and officers of the German army who fell into the hands of the Soviet army. Their fate was also not easy, but in comparison with the Soviet prisoners, the situation was somewhat better. But, they also suffered from diseases, hunger and difficult conditions. The situation of German prisoners of war during and after World War II was very complex and heterogeneous. The situation of prisoners in the Soviet Union was significantly different from that in the camps under the control of the Western allies. The situation in the Soviet camps was very difficult, hunger, diseases, torture were widespread. In some cases, prisoners were systematically destroyed. The situation of prisoners at the beginning of the war was different from those at the end of the war. At the beginning of the war, there was often cruelty and harsh discipline in relation to prisoners, but at the end of the war, their situation improved somewhat. The situation varied depending on the nationality, social status and other factors of the prisoner. Officers and high-ranking people were often subjected to a system of enhanced control and humiliation. The personal experiences of the prisoners differed significantly from each other. While some lived in severe conditions and experienced many difficulties, others were in relatively good shape.

- Prisoners of other countries. The troops of other countries participating in the war were also cap-

tured. Their fate depended on the state that captured them. During the Second World War of 1941-1945, the fate of the prisoners of Germany, Japan and their allies, as well as the Soviet Union and other countries that fell into the hands of the Allies, was very heterogeneous and tragic. Several factors influenced their condition. The situation of the prisoners directly depended on the policy and ideology of the state that captured them. For example, Nazi Germany's policy towards prisoners was particularly cruel and inhuman. Japan also pursued a tough policy towards prisoners. And in the Soviet Union and the Allies, the situation was much better, but even in them the prisoners experienced difficulties. Representatives of some nationalities were subjected to more cruel persecution than others. For example, nationalists systematically exterminated Jews, Gypsies, Slavs and other peoples.

The study employed a historical-analytical methodology, utilizing comparative and problem-chronological methods. The sources included declassified archival documents obtained from central and regional archives, specifically from the Tolebi District State Archive (TD SA), Shymkent City State Archive (Sh.C SA) and the Archive of Socio-Political History of the Turkistan Region (ASP HTR). Specifically, materials were used from Fund No. 291 of the Shymkent City State Archive (personal files), Fund No. 124 of the Tolebi District State Archive (personal records of prisoners of war), and Fund No. 212 of the Archive of Socio-Political History of the Turkistan Region (locations of prisoners of war). Additionally, published historical and statistical materials, memoir literature, and oral testimonies of witnesses were incorporated. These materials provided a comprehensive description of the living conditions of prisoners of war and deported populations, their interactions with the local community, and their contributions to the development of the region.

The methodological framework of this study is based on a source-centered approach, combining archival analysis with problem-chronological and comparative methods. Archival documents were used not only to reconstruct the living conditions of prisoners of war, but also to identify their concrete participation in key economic sectors of South Kazakhstan, including coal mining, infrastructure construction, railway maintenance, and agricultural production.

Millions of people were captured during the war. The exact number is still being discussed. The situation of the prisoners was very serious, hunger,

illness, torture and humiliation were widespread. Most of the prisoners died of hunger, illness, or torture. After the war, some prisoners returned to their homeland, and some remained in their homeland or went to other countries. Many suffered greatly, both mentally and health. The fate of the prisoners of 1941-1945 is one of the most tragic pages of the Great Patriotic War, and its consequences are felt to this day. The study of this topic contributes to the understanding of the terrible consequences of the war and the non-repetition of such tragedies.

### Discussion

The legal situation of Japanese prisoners of war (POWs) held on Soviet territory remains one of the most debated issues in historiography. Some scholars, particularly Japanese historians, argue that the Soviet Union violated international humanitarian norms in its treatment of POWs. In contrast, Soviet and Russian historiography maintains that although the POWs were involved in labor activities, they were provided with adequate humanitarian conditions. This controversy is further complicated by the fact that the Soviet Union had not officially ratified the Geneva Conventions at that time.

The contribution of Japanese POWs to the post-war economic and infrastructural reconstruction of the Soviet Union is also subject to differing interpretations. Soviet and Kazakh historians often regard their labor as a significant factor in the country's recovery after the war. Meanwhile, many Western scholars view it as a form of forced labor or an implicit reparation payment. Quantitative and qualitative assessments of this labor activity remain insufficiently developed in the existing scholarship.

Archival sources and eyewitness testimonies confirm the harsh conditions within the POW camps. However, historians have not reached a consensus on whether the camps were primarily punitive institutions or necessary wartime administrative structures. Soviet sources emphasize order and productivity, whereas Japanese and Western scholars describe the system as repressive and punitive in nature.

Discrepancies persist regarding the geographical accuracy and authenticity of burial sites mentioned in archival records from the 1940s–1950s. The data contained in official reports from 1950 and 1959 often do not correspond with the results of later field investigations. Consequently, historians continue to debate whether the burial documentation was compiled retrospectively or in a merely formal manner,

rather than reflecting the true historical circumstances. For example, in the Yangishahar area of Shymkent city, there is a cemetery where six Japanese prisoners are buried in the territory of Section No. 3 of Military Camp No. 348 (burial site No. 9076). Additionally, in the Keltémashat cemetery in the Tulkibas district, five prisoners are buried (burial site No. 9087) (Sh.C SA F.291, Op.1n, D.2, Ls.5-6).

Additionally, Military Camp No. 29, where the prisoners of war were held, was located in the territory of the “Pakhta-Aral” state farm at that time. The Historical Museum of Cotton Farming preserves the memoirs of NKVD officer Yakov Zhivoglyadov, who worked at this state farm, in which a number of details regarding the prisoners are carefully described. In particular, on July 7, 1950, the director of the state farm issued Order No. 337, which stipulated, in accordance with the requirements of the administration of Camp No. 29 of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the need to allocate a special plot of land for the burial of prisoners of war and to officially approve it (ASP HTR F.212, Op.1, D.10, Ls.4-6).

Another contentious topic in historiography concerns the timing and procedures of Japanese POW repatriation. Soviet sources describe the process as humanitarian and consistent with international agreements, whereas Japanese historians argue that it was delayed and politically motivated. This issue remains a subject of academic and diplomatic discussion between Russia and Japan to this day.

In the history of Kazakhstani scholarship, the issue of military prisoners is a relatively new topic. Domestic historiography began to take shape in the early 1990s, in connection with the rise of public awareness and the liberalization of the political regime. From that period onward, researchers gained access to previously classified archival documents and statistical data, as well as studies by foreign authors. During this time, Zh.K. Kasymbek (Kasymbek, 1992) and K.S. Aldazhumanov published articles examining the conditions of military prisoners in Kazakhstan, their involvement in labor, and the repatriation of prisoners and civilians (Aldazhumanov, 1998). In addition, Zh.B. Abylkhodzhin’s works analyzed the economic development of Kazakhstan during the specified period and the particular features of the camp economy based on forced labor (Abylkhodzhin, 1998).

To gain a deeper understanding of Kazakhstan’s history during World War II, the studies of M.K. Kozybayev were utilized. In his works, Kozybayev presents concrete facts and statistical data concerning the state of the national economy and

the economic potential of the republic, while also addressing the issue of forced labor (Kozybayev, 2000). Additionally, in the works of M.Kh. Asylbekov, important information is provided regarding the role of Kazakh railway workers during the Great Patriotic War in evacuating industrial facilities within the republic and delivering products from Kazakh enterprises to the front (Asylbekov, 1973).

S.D. Dilmanov is considered one of the first Kazakhstani scholars to study the history of labor correctional camps. His works provide information on the establishment and operation of the USSR ITK–MVD labor correctional camps located in the territory of Kazakhstan. A part of his research is devoted to the issue of employing camp prisoners in labor, in which the author highlights the low efficiency of camp production and presents a well-founded conclusion about the ineffectiveness of forced labor (Dilmanov, 2004).

Among Russian historians, V.P. Galitsky was one of the first to study the issue of employing Japanese prisoners of war in the national economy. In one of his early works on Japanese military prisoners, he noted that “the economic crisis in the country necessitated the use of a new cheap labor force instead of the GULAG contingent” (Galitsky, 1990). In the 1980s–1990s, the issues of employing Japanese prisoners of war were further studied by S.I. Kuznetsov (Kuznetsov, 1994) and E.Yu. Bondarenko (Bondarenko, 2002).

Several stories from Varlam Shalamov’s collection *Kolyma Tales* depict the life and conditions of prisoners during the war. Shalamov’s works portray the tests of morality, hunger, cunning, and the strength of the human spirit. His collection *Kolyma Tales* is a series of short stories across several volumes, depicting his life in the Kolyma camps (Shalamov, 2018). This work is not only about prisoners of war but also describes the harsh reality of camp life during the Stalinist repressions in the Soviet Union.

The next work by Alexander Solzhenitsyn “Archipelago gulag” fully reflects the life of prisoners in the camp, but it is not directly devoted to the Great Patriotic War (Solzhenitsyn, 1973). Also depends on the fate of the prisoners after the war. The work of Alexander Solzhenitsyn “archipelago Gulag” is an overview of the repressive system in the Soviet Union, in particular, the gulag camps. This is not only a historical study, but also a combination of artistic and documentary work. Its significance lies in the fact that in his work Solzhenitsyn fully reflects the history of the emergence of the gulag system, its structure, functions and influence on people’s lives.

He relies on numerous testimonies, his own personal experiences and archival data.

Mikhail Sholokhov's novel "The Fate of a man" tells about the fate of a prisoner of war. Mikhail Sholokhov's novel "The Fate of a man" reflects the life of Soviet people in the period after the Great Patriotic War (Sholokhov, 1976). In the novel, at the center of the main events is the fate of a simple worker named Andrei Sokolov. The novel depicts the life of a prisoner of war: Sokolov's capture during the war, the harsh conditions in the German camp, hunger, torture and the threat of death. The author describes the suffering of the souls of prisoners and the struggle for survival. The events that Sokolov experienced reflect the terrible reality of the war. Fortitude and firmness: Sokolov's behavior in a prisoner's position, coping with difficulties and not losing faith in life are depicted. He retains his humanity even in harsh conditions.

In many of his stories and novels, Konstantin Simonov reflects various situations during the war, including the fates of prisoners. Yes, in the work of Konstantin Simonov, various situations during the Great Patriotic War are widely depicted, including the fate of prisoners of war (Simonov, 2005). However, in his works, the fate of prisoners is often mixed with other events and is part of the main storyline. Simonov's works do not have a complete picture of the life of prisoners, but their fate is shown in different artistic forms. It reflects the mental and moral suffering of the prisoners, their struggle for survival and the impact of the war on them. In his works, the situation of prisoners is often reflected in the context of the general state of the war and the fate of people. In order to determine exactly in which works the fate of prisoners is depicted in detail, it is necessary to analyze all his works.

Foreign researchers interest in the history of Japanese prisoners of war has been driven by several factors. These include historical events involving Japanese soldiers and the existence of Japanese prisoner-of-war camps. In particular, foreign scholars were especially interested in the events of World War II involving Japanese military personnel. In this context, Charlotte Carr-Gregg's 1977 study, *Japanese Prisoners of War in Australia and New Zealand: The Role of Japanese Officers in the Featherston and Cowra Incidents* (Carr-Gregg, Charlotte 1977), analyzed the events that took place on February 25, 1943, in Featherston, New Zealand, and on August 5, 1944, in Cowra, Australia.

One of the scholars who studied the repatriation of Japanese prisoners held by the Soviet Union

and their fates is Jacob Frank. In his work *Japanese Prisoners of War, the American-Soviet Conflict, and the Role of Repatriated War Veterans in the Early Cold War in East Asia*, he provides a comprehensive analysis of the impact of diplomatic struggles on the fate of Japanese military prisoners (Jacob Frank, 2021).

Prisoners of war were engaged in harvest work from 1943 until the end of 1945. The conditions for military prisoners in the United States were considerably better compared to those in the USSR.

For example, life in military prisoner camps in the United States was relatively free: they interacted with farming families, participated in work, organized theater performances and concerts, and took part in discussions about democracy.

## Results

In the 1940s–1950s, various ethnic groups, including prisoners of war, as well as other populations compelled to migrate due to historical, political, and social reasons, settled in the territory of Kazakhstan and made a significant contribution to the country's socio-economic development. During this period, the social structure and economic conditions of the country were shaped within a complex historical context. In particular, it is important to study the composition of these groups who were involved in agricultural, industrial, and infrastructural work in the Southern Kazakhstan region. Therefore, in order to fully understand the dynamics of economic and social development in the northern, central, and especially southern regions of Kazakhstan, it is necessary to comprehensively analyze the structure of this historical contingent, their socio-economic and living conditions, participation in labor, as well as their geographic origins and the social, economic, and political factors influencing their migration. From this perspective, a central research question arises: who exactly were these ethnic groups, including prisoners of war, who migrated to Kazakhstan, from which geographic regions and ethnic or social groups did they originate, and what impact did their arrival have on local economic, social, and industrial processes? To study this issue thoroughly, a comparative analysis of historical documents, archival materials, prominent research, and expert studies is required.

If we delve deeply into history, we can observe that political migration during the mid-20th century was extensive and systematically organized. During this period, a significant number of people,

including representatives of various ethnic groups and prisoners of war from the Second World War, were relocated to the territory of Kazakhstan. These groups were predominantly utilized as cheap labor, and their work played a crucial role in supporting the socio-economic structure and facilitating infrastructure development. The deportees and military prisoners were engaged in physically demanding labor, and the nature and severity of this work varied depending on the policies of the state holding them, the wartime conditions, and the individual circumstances of each prisoner.

In reality, the majority of prisoners were involved in extremely strenuous and hazardous daily labor. They worked in mining operations, quarries, forestry and timber processing, transportation of materials, agricultural tasks, as well as in the construction of military installations and other infrastructure projects. All these forms of labor were physically exhausting and, in many cases, posed significant risks to health. For instance, working in mines exposed prisoners to oxygen deficiency, lack of light, structural collapse hazards, injuries, and exposure to toxic gases. Tasks in forests and agricultural fields often required long hours under adverse weather conditions. Prisoners were compelled to work under strict deadlines, and safety measures were typically absent or insufficient.

Furthermore, the impact of such labor extended beyond the physical realm, affecting prisoners morally and psychologically. Starvation was a significant factor contributing to their suffering. The food provided was inadequate in both quantity and nutritional value, insufficient to sustain the health and strength of the prisoners. The combination of these factors – hunger, disease, hard labor, moral pressure, and an unsystematic work regime – led to the mass mortality of the prisoners of war.

The daily labor of war prisoners was not only a means to satisfy economic needs, but also served as a tool for carrying out political and social objectives. The death of war prisoners from hard labor was a tragedy that often occurred in conflicts such as World War II. The causes of these deaths were many and can be divided into several groups. They are:

**Hunger:** One of the most serious threats to the lives of prisoners of war was inadequate nutrition and the lack of essential nutrients. The amount of food provided to prisoners was very small, and their diet lacked the vitamins and nutrients necessary for maintaining health. This situation was especially evident in the camps. Hunger not only led to physical weakness but also weakened the immune system,

reducing resistance to infectious diseases. Combined with hard labor, this hunger became a direct cause of death. The daily food supply in the camps was insufficient to sustain life, and each day of labor increased the risk of death.

**Hard Labor:** The work assigned to prisoners was not only physically demanding but also harmful to their health and placed an excessive burden on their bodies. They were forced to work continuously for long hours, with insufficient rest periods. Working conditions were often poorly organized, and tools and protective equipment were inadequate or completely absent. When combined with insufficient nutrition, this labor overstrained prisoners' bodies, causing illness and physical weakness. Such work not only harmed health but also directly led to death, as prolonged physical exhaustion disrupted the body's vital functions.

**Diseases:** Another major threat to prisoners' health was poor sanitary conditions and inadequate medical care. Hygiene standards in the camps were often completely neglected, and personal hygiene conditions were extremely poor. These factors contributed to the rapid spread of infectious diseases and uncontrolled epidemics. When combined with poor nutrition and hard labor, the risk of death from illness increased significantly. Many prisoners lost their lives as a result of this combination of factors.

**Harshness and Moral Violations:** Some prisoners were subjected to systematic torture, violence, psychological pressure, and other severe disciplinary measures. Such moral and psychological pressure caused not only mental trauma but also physical weakening and increased the risk of death. Many prisoner deaths resulted from these moral and psychological pressures, as they lived under constant fear, intimidation, and suffering.

**Working Hours and Labor Regime:** The state mercilessly extended working hours, and prisoners were sometimes forced to work for prolonged periods, including through the night. This caused extreme physical and mental strain, exhaustion, nervous disorders, and even death. Long working hours, lack of rest, and harsh labor regimes systematically deteriorated prisoners' health.

**Overall Impact:** The combination of these factors—hunger, hard labor, hazardous and harmful conditions, moral pressure, and long working hours—led to the general, mass, and systematic deaths of prisoners. Many prisoners died during the war due to violations of moral standards and political or ethnic reasons. These historical circumstances highlight the importance of international law and humanitar-

ian principles. International norms and principles play a key role in protecting prisoners from such severe deaths and in safeguarding human rights.

During the period of World War II, the role of rear workers, including prisoners of war, in supporting the front line was considered one of the critical and decisive aspects of the war economy. Prisoners were engaged in a wide range of labor tasks, and their work was aimed not only at meeting economic needs but also at implementing strategic military objectives and achieving wartime goals.

The construction of new military factories and industrial plants was of particular importance during the war. These facilities were established to produce weapons, ammunition, military equipment, technical devices, and other essential materials required for the front. Prisoners were compelled to perform physically demanding labor on these construction projects. The nature of the work was extremely challenging and hazardous: long working hours, insufficient rest periods, and the lack of proper tools and protective equipment placed a heavy burden on both their physical and psychological well-being. In addition, the strict deadlines for completing these constructions subjected prisoners to immense time pressure, directly endangering their health and lives.

The construction and repair of railway infrastructure also held significant importance. To deliver military supplies, food, and other essential materials to the front, it was necessary to build, repair, and expand railway networks. These tasks were physically arduous and often carried out under dangerous and uncontrolled conditions. Prisoners not only performed heavy labor but also applied technical skills that contributed directly to the functioning and maintenance of the railway system.

All of these works were extremely arduous and dangerous for the prisoners. They were provided with insufficient food, and their diets failed to meet the basic physiological needs of the human body. The absence or inadequacy of medical care, combined with poor sanitary conditions, further increased the risks to their lives. The combination of strenuous labor, malnutrition, and hazardous conditions severely weakened their health and led to numerous deaths among the prisoners.

Moreover, the labor of prisoners was not limited to purely economic or production-related objectives; their work formed an integral part of strategic efforts to achieve military goals, supplying the front with weapons, equipment, and essential provisions. This fact represents a clear example of gross violations of human rights, as their labor was forced,

their lives and health were left unprotected, and they were compelled to work under extremely dangerous conditions, in direct contravention of international humanitarian norms and principles of human rights.

Thus, the labor of prisoners during World War II in the rear sectors not only served to meet economic or industrial demands but also played a decisive role in supporting wartime objectives and developing military infrastructure. Historically, this situation serves as a clear demonstration of the egregious violation of human rights and underscores the critical importance of international legal norms in protecting the lives and well-being of prisoners of war.

During World War II and other armed conflicts, the employment of prisoners of war in various industrial and agricultural enterprises was a widespread practice. This practice was officially organized by some states, while in others it was conducted informally, though it was nonetheless common. The policies of different states regarding the use of prisoners significantly influenced the nature of their work, the conditions under which they labored, and their overall living circumstances. In many cases, prisoners' labor was subjected to strict discipline, systematic exploitation, and harsh control, which posed serious threats to their health and lives.

Prisoners of war were employed in a wide range of sectors. They worked in ore mines and mineral extraction, in factories and industrial plants, on construction sites for military and civilian infrastructure, as well as in agricultural fields and livestock management. The severity and danger of the work varied depending on the type of enterprise and the specific tasks assigned. For instance, mining and heavy construction work were physically extremely demanding and highly hazardous, while industrial production could involve exposure to chemical or mechanical hazards.

The working conditions for prisoners were generally extremely poor. Food rations were insufficient and nutritionally inadequate, failing to meet the body's essential dietary requirements. Hunger, malnutrition, and the lack of essential nutrients weakened prisoners' physical strength and compromised their immune systems. In addition, prisoners suffered from numerous diseases, infectious outbreaks, and various forms of torture. Safety measures were frequently neglected, and workplaces often lacked the necessary tools and protective equipment. Working hours were excessively long, sometimes reaching multiple consecutive shifts per day, while rest periods were limited or entirely absent. The conditions of prisoners varied across different phases of

the war: at the beginning of hostilities, labor exploitation was comparatively less severe, whereas during the most intense periods of the war, work became extremely harsh and detrimental.

The labor of prisoners was not limited to fulfilling economic or industrial needs; it also played a strategically significant role in supporting military objectives. By producing weapons, ammunition, military equipment, and essential supplies, prisoners directly contributed to the operational capacity of the front lines. Thus, their labor was essential for both wartime logistics and strategic military goals. However, this work was largely performed under coercion, representing a severe violation of human rights and a blatant example of wartime cruelty.

The employment of prisoners in various enterprises during World War II clearly represents a severe violation of human rights. Prisoners were subjected to extreme physical and psychological pressure, malnutrition, inadequate sanitary and medical care, and excessively long working hours. These conditions posed a direct threat to their health and survival, serving as a stark example of wartime cruelty. Moreover, this historical phenomenon highlights the critical importance of international legal norms and humanitarian principles, as their neglect endangered the lives of prisoners and violated fundamental human dignity.

Lenger-Sai village, located at the foot of the Karzhantau Ridge in South Kazakhstan, approximately twenty-five kilometers from the city of Shymkent, is closely associated with historical events following the Second World War. In this location, the construction of a coal mine was carried out through the labor of Japanese prisoners of war. Thus, Lenger-Sai represents a concrete example of the utilization of Japanese prisoners of war for labor in the territory of the Soviet Union after World War II (TD SA F.124, Op.1n, D.3, Ls.19).

The construction of the coal mine was an extremely arduous and physically demanding task. This work required not only significant physical effort but also the ability to endure harsh natural and climatic conditions while operating heavy and cumbersome equipment. Japanese prisoners faced severe risks to their health and lives while performing these tasks. Prolonged working hours, insufficient nutrition, inadequate sanitary and medical services significantly compromised their physical well-being and reduced their chances of survival. Contemporary documents and research indicate that the forced labor imposed on the prisoners had profoundly negative effects on both their physical and psychological health.

Lenger-Sai is currently a settlement within the Lenger District of the Turkestan Region in South Kazakhstan. Historically, this area holds particular significance, as the coal mine constructed there after the Second World War was built through the labor of Japanese prisoners of war. This fact is important not only in terms of local economic development but also as a significant historical illustration of issues concerning international humanitarian law and the rights of prisoners of war. In other words, the construction of the mine in Lenger-Sai demonstrates the labor conditions imposed on Japanese prisoners in the USSR, showing that they were compelled to work under harsh circumstances and that their human rights continued to be violated even after the end of the war (Yakov, 2014).

Archival evidence indicates that the labor of prisoners of war constituted an essential component of the regional economy of South Kazakhstan during and after World War II. Their involvement in coal mining at Lenger-Sai, construction of transport infrastructure, and maintenance of industrial facilities contributed directly to the stabilization of energy supplies and the functioning of wartime and postwar industries. Without this labor force, the rapid restoration of key economic sectors in the region would have been significantly delayed.

Thus, the contribution of prisoners of war to the economy of South Kazakhstan should be understood as a dual phenomenon: it played a significant role in regional development, while simultaneously constituting a form of forced labor that violated fundamental humanitarian principles. Recognizing this duality is essential for an objective reassessment of Soviet economic practices and historical memory.

Thus, the construction of the coal mine in Lenger-Sai was not limited solely to economic or industrial objectives; it also stands as a concrete historical example of the post-World War II practice of exploiting prisoners of war. This situation provides researchers and historians with the opportunity to examine the working conditions of prisoners, the socio-economic relations of the postwar period, and the extent to which international legal norms were observed.

The case of the Lenger-Sai coal mine demonstrates that the use of Japanese prisoners of war was not episodic but systematic. Their labor played a decisive role in the postwar restoration of the regional energy base, while simultaneously reflecting the coercive nature of Soviet labor policy.

The analysis of the historical development of the Lenger-Sai coal mine provides significant scholarly

material for understanding the industrial, social, and political processes of the studied period. Geological surveys conducted in the nineteenth century identified brown coal deposits, which became the initial foundation for the region's industrial development. In the post-Second World War years, efforts to increase the mine's production capacity were renewed, and archival sources confirm that Japanese prisoners of war were extensively employed in this process (TD SA, F.124, Op.1n, D.3, L.19).

Post-war infrastructural expansion—including the construction of railway branches, residential facilities for workers, and the strengthening of the industrial base—both underscored the strategic significance of the mine and provided insight into the role of forced labor resources within the Soviet system. Additionally, the transportation of Lenger coal via the Turkestan-Siberian Railway to various industrial centers during the war demonstrates the region's importance to the wartime economy.

Although the Soviet Union officially declared the completion of prisoner-of-war repatriation in 1950, issues related to their labor conditions, legal status, mortality rates, and participation in production processes remain relevant topics in historical research. Archival documents and scholarly studies indicate that this contingent contributed noticeably to regional economic development, while the nature of their labor clearly bore the characteristics of coercion.

A comprehensive analysis of these data demonstrates that sites such as the Lenger-Sai coal mine should be examined not only as elements of industrial development but also as manifestations of Soviet forced labor policy. The introduction of such facilities into scholarly discourse enables a more thorough assessment of socio-economic relations, political decision-making, and the degree of compliance with international humanitarian norms.

The findings of this research provide a basis for reconsidering the industrial history of the region, systematizing archival materials related to forced labor, and evaluating the experience of prisoners of war in Kazakhstan from the perspective of international law. Such scholarly inquiries contribute to revealing the multifaceted nature of historical processes, including the interconnection of migration-related, political, and social factors, thereby helping to reconstruct an accurate picture of regional development in the mid-twentieth century.

The involvement of military prisoners in the South Kazakhstan region during the Second World War represents a significant historical phenomenon that substantially influenced the socio-economic

development of the area. Archival documents and scholarly studies indicate that the labor of these prisoners was extensively utilized in various sectors, including coal mining, industrial construction, agriculture, infrastructure projects, and the expansion of transport networks.

The contribution of prisoners' labor was particularly evident in industrial sites around Lenger, Lenger-Say, and Karatau, as well as in strategically important projects such as railway construction. These activities strengthened the region's energy and industrial capacity and ensured the stable operation of the home-front economy. Coal, construction materials, and other resources transported via the Turkestan-Siberia (Turksib) railway became a vital component of the regional economy during and after the war.

At the same time, the widespread use of military prisoners' labor highlighted a number of social and legal issues. Archival evidence indicates harsh working conditions, limited legal status, inadequate sanitary and living conditions, and a high mortality rate among the prisoners. These factors reveal the specific characteristics of Soviet labor policy and underscore the need for a scholarly reassessment of its reliance on forced labor.

The analysis allows military prisoners' labor to be understood as a dual-faceted phenomenon: on one hand, it contributed significantly to the development of several sectors of South Kazakhstan's economy; on the other hand, these contributions were realized under conditions of forced labor and did not fully comply with international humanitarian norms. Therefore, the study of this issue is essential for an objective evaluation of regional history, a comprehensive understanding of socio-economic processes, and the development of scholarly conclusions regarding labor policies during the Soviet period.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the contribution of military prisoners to the economy of South Kazakhstan constitutes an integral part of the region's history. The accumulated materials on this topic enable a deeper understanding of demographic, economic, and social processes in Kazakhstan during and after the war. Moreover, studying the experience of forced labor serves to ensure historical justice, integrate archival data into scholarly discourse, and guide future research aimed at comprehensively revealing the developmental features of the region in the mid-20th century.

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**Information about authors:**

*Sengirbayeva Zaure (contact person) – PhD student of the K.A. Yassawi International Kazakh-Turkish University (e-mail: zaure.sengirbaeva@gmail.com).*

**Авторлар туралы мәлімет:**

*Сенгирбаева Зауре Жақсибековна – Қ.А. Ясауи атындағы ХҚТУ докторанты (e-mail: zaure.sengirbaeva@gmail.com).*

**Сведения об авторах:**

*Сенгирбаева Зауре Жақсибековна – докторант МКТУ имени Х.А. Ясауи (e-mail: zaure.sengirbaeva@gmail.com).*

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