

“Comfort Women” and Aggressive War: Reading Korean and Chinese Survivors’ Accounts

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Abstract

Imperial Japan’s “comfort women” system was one of the major atrocities against humanity during the Asia-Pacific war (1931-1945), yet denial of this war crime remains steadfast in Japan today. This paper introduces and discusses the personal accounts of Korean and Chinese “comfort women” which hitherto were unavailable to English readers. It demonstrates, through the testimonies of the survivors and eyewitnesses, the close correlation between the proliferation of the military comfort stations and the progression of Japan’s aggressive war. The lived experiences of the “comfort women” reveal undeniably that the “comfort women” system was created for the war and made possible by the war. The survivors’ narratives highlight that in today’s world when sexual violence continues to be used as an instrument of armed conflicts that prevents societies from achieving sustainable peace, the comfort women’s memories constitute a legacy of global significance.

Key Words: “Comfort Women”, War crime, Slavery, Sexual violence, Memory study, Oral history, World War II

The sexual slavery of imperial Japan’s “comfort women” system was one of the major atrocities during the Asia-Pacific War (1931 to 1945), but until today the denial of this war crime continued, and the Japanese military’s involvement

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in setting up the system has been bitterly contested. The latest move of the denial campaign is an all-out effort to erase the memory of the “comfort women.” Following a series of attempts to remove the “comfort women” memorials from various places in the world, last October the Japanese government suspended its funding to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) after an international committee had submitted 2,744 documents regarding the “comfort women” for listing in the Memory of the World Registry.¹⁾ The denialists vocalized campaigning rhetoric, for instance, that commemorating “comfort women” disgraces Japan and Japanese nationals. However, for the majority of the people in Japan and around the world, honoring comfort women’s history is not a matter of state politics as the denialists describe, but an effort to adhere to humanitarian principles. In fact, Japanese citizens, scholars and legal specialists have been playing a key role in the international “comfort women” redress movement in the past decades. The history of the “comfort women” has particular relevance today because *conflict-related sexual violence still persists, and we need to learn from this history in order to prevent similar atrocities from recurring in the future.*

This paper provides translations and discussions of the personal accounts of Korean and Chinese former “comfort women” which hitherto have been unavailable to English audiences. The survivors’ personal accounts show clearly not only the direct involvement of the Japanese state in constructing and maintaining the “comfort women” system, but also the close correlation between the proliferation of comfort stations and the progression of Japan’s aggressive war. By presenting the common plight of the “comfort women” drafted from imperial Japan’s colony and the country under its occupation together, this paper also reveals unmistakably that the nature of the “comfort women” system is sexual slavery and war apparatus.

1) *The Asahi Shimbun* Editorial, “Japan’s funding snub to UNESCO a move destined to backfire,” *The Asahi Shimbun*, October 20, 2017. Viewed on December 22, 2016 at <http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201610200024.html>. Also, Kim Gi-seong, “Campaign intended to make up for possible shortfall if Japan pulls its support from UNESCO,” *The Hankyoreh*, November 2, 2016. Viewed on December 22, 2016 at http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_international/768463.html.

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A key argument the denialists have used to deny the criminal nature of the "comfort women" system is that "comfort women" were camp-following prostitutes who were not forced into the comfort stations by the Japanese military. It is true that women were drafted into the so-called comfort stations in different ways. According to Yoshimi Yoshiaki's research, when Japanese "comfort women" were sent overseas, they were often chosen from prostitutes and they had to be over the age of twenty-one, though this age rule was often ignored.²⁾ In Japan's colonies, Korea and Taiwan, rounding up women by force was reported, but the most common methods were deception through false job offers to daughters of poor families or through militaristic brainwashing of schoolgirls and young women. The recruiters hid the real nature of the "job" from the drafted women until putting them in the comfort stations. During the drafting process in these regions, Japanese military personnel often stayed behind the scenes, using brothel proprietors or labor brokers to draft the women.³⁾ The deceptive approach the Japanese military took in setting up the "comfort women" system has not only been used by denialists to whitewash war crimes, but also led some who are sympathetic to the victims to wonder whether the "comfort women" system can be called military sexual slavery. As Nicola Henry noted, "[t]he establishment of comfort stations across Asia and the label of 'military prostitutes' had the effect of morally reconstructing the reprehensible act of sexual enslavement into complicit victim participation and collaboration."⁴⁾ However, the deceptive strategies could not erase historical truth. The experiences of former Korean "comfort women," such as Park Rae-sun's testimony in the following account, reveal clearly the violent nature of the "comfort women" system.

Park Rae-sun was taken from her hometown Kyongsangnam-do to China with 30 girls and young women in a "Battlefield Rare Service Team" in 1941, when Japan's full-scale war in Asia continued accelerating and the Japanese military drafted a large number of men and women from the Korean Peninsula to support

2) Yoshimi Yoshiaki, *Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery in the Japanese Military during World War II*. Trans. by Suzanne O'Brien (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 100-103

3) Ibid., 103-118.

4) Nicola Henry, *War and Rape: Law, memory and justice* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 51.

their battles. Park's fiancé was conscripted the year before. When the Japanese military personnel came to her hometown to recruit women for "cooking, laundry and nursing work in China," Park Rae-sun signed up, hoping to be able to find her fiancé and make money to support her family.⁵⁾ She didn't know what sort of hell was awaiting her.

Park Rae-sun and other women were put on a train and taken to a military barracks in Fushun in Northeast China, where there were already about 200 young girls and women detained. Two days after their arrival, they were divided into teams and a steward named Choi told them they must have a physical examination.

Mr. Choi brought us to a large hall and lined us up. A middle-aged Japanese woman wearing a white coat entered the room with five or six big men. "Why are men here at girls' physical exams?" Someone grumbled. Mr. Choi pulled his face tight and yelled at us, scaring everyone to silence. The Japanese woman put on a stern expression and said, "This physical is for the Great East Asia War, and you are to serve the imperial army. You must have the spirit of sacrifice!" She ordered us to be quiet and take off all of our clothes. No one moved. How embarrassing would it be to take off clothes before the eyes of men? We were very scared, standing there in silence. The Japanese woman seemed annoyed. She picked out a young girl from the front row and ordered her to take off her clothes. The girl didn't move. She was very young, perhaps only seventeen or eighteen years old. The Japanese woman then signaled the men around her with her hand. Two big men immediately dashed toward that girl like wolves. They pressed the girl on the floor, ripped off all her clothes, and gang raped her in front of us. The young girl screamed and struggled in great pain, but was unable to break free. She was beaten while being raped, until she was lying on the floor unable to move. Her face swelled, and her tears dripping down like a stream. We were transfixed by what had happened and started crying, but the Japanese men didn't care. They continued forcing us to take off our clothes to let the Japanese woman examine our bodies.

5) Park Rae-sun narrates, Zhang Yingyong records, "Wo bei pianbi dang Rijun 'weianfu' de jingli" (How I was deceived and forced to become a Japanese military "comfort woman"), in Fu Heji, *Tietixiade xingfengxueyu—Rijun qinqiong baoxing shilu* (Terror under occupation—Records of the Japanese military's atrocities during its invasion of Hainan). (Haikou: Hainan chubanshe, 1995), 553-59.

She checked everywhere carefully, pressing our bodies up and down. Girls who couldn't hold back tears were slapped in the face. We had no choice but to endure the humiliation.⁶⁾

Park Rae-sun thought they were going to do cooking, laundry or nursing work after that physical examination as she had been told before. However, a huge crowd of Japanese military men came to the compound that evening. The military men paid two yen for a ticket and picked girls according to the number written on each ticket. “They dragged us to beds violently and raped us.” Park said. “The compound was filled by chaotic sounds: crying, cursing, struggling, tearing clothes, and lecherous laughing. Girls who resisted rape were beaten up; their entire bodies were covered with bruises. That was March 16th, 1941, a day of utmost humiliation I would never forget.”⁷⁾

From that day on, Park Rae-sun was forced to be a “comfort woman.” Japanese military men raped her every day, often as many as a dozen times a day. The comfort station was strictly guarded, so escape was impossible. Park Rae-sun wanted to die, but thoughts of her parents and fiancé stopped her suicide attempt. In 1942, Park Rae-sun was shipped to Haikou in south China by a military battleship when imperial Japan expanded its aggression in Southeast Asia. She was confined in a comfort station with other Korean, Taiwanese, and Filipino women. Women in the station were forced to service Japanese troops stationed at the nearby military headquarters day and night, and once a month a dozen of them were sent to remote locations to “comfort” the soldiers. Sexual torture at these remote places was particularly brutal as the soldiers raped the “comfort women” one after another ceaselessly. The sexual torture damaged the women's bodies and some contracted venereal diseases; their lower bodies festered with malodorous pus. “The Japanese soldiers raped us even when we were menstruating, and they beat us up if we were slightly slow in meeting their demands.” Park recalled. “We became so weak, and many were too sick to move, but as soon as we got a little better, we were forced by the Japanese to service the soldiers again.”⁸⁾

6) Park Rae Sun narrates, Zhang Yingyong records, “Wo bei pianbi dang Rijun ‘weianfu’ de jingli,” 555-56.

7) Park Rae Sun narrates, Zhang Yingyong records, “Wo bei pianbi dang Rijun ‘weianfu’ de jingli,” 555-56.

A year later, in January 1943, Park Rae-sun was transported to Oujia-yuan Comfort Station on Hainan Island, where 52 women drafted from Taiwan and the Korean Peninsula were enslaved. At that comfort station she heard from a Korean steward that her fiancé had been killed in a battle less than three months after his conscription. Unable to overcome her grief, Park Rae-sun fell ill, but she was forced to service the Japanese troops before she fully recovered. The unspeakable torture continued until Japan was defeated and the Japanese troops abandoned the comfort station in August 1945.⁹⁾

Park Rae-sun's personal account was recorded by Zhang Yingyong, a Chinese volunteer researcher, and published in the three-volume collection, *Tietixiade xingfengxueyu—Rijun qinqiong baoxing shilu* (Terror under occupation—Records of the Japanese military's atrocities during its invasion of Hainan, 1995). Her narrative shows clearly that the "comfort women" system was a war apparatus. The Japanese medical personnel who examined Park Rae-sun and others at the comfort station in Fushun made it plain from the beginning that Park Rae-sun and the other women were drafted "for the Great East Asia War" and "to serve the imperial army." The military men's sexual abuse that Park Rae-sun was forced to endure in various comfort stations, her transport from Northeast China to the South China sea frontline by a battleship, and the monthly frontline services the "comfort women" were assigned to do are all illustrative of how the "comfort women" system was designed and operated for Japan's aggressive war. Although the comfort station charged a fee from the military men and Park Rae-sun said occasionally she received tip money from some soldiers, what she experienced in the comfort stations was no doubt sexual slavery.

Park's experience was not an isolated case. Similar slave-like conditions of the comfort stations are revealed even in accounts collected by Japanese rightists. Sumita Tomokichi, former engineer of the 6th Regiment, 6th Division of the Imperial Japanese Army, once posted such an account on the website of the organization known as the Association for Advancement of Unbiased View of

8) Ibid., 557.

9) Ibid., 557-58. Park Rae-sun stayed in Hainan, China after the war ended and worked at the Baoting County High Way Department.

History (Jiyû shugi shikan kenkyûkai). According to the account, Sumita met a Korean "comfort woman" in December 1938 in Hankou, China. The woman told him that her parents had sold her to a Korean dealer for 380 yen and that she had been taken to a comfort station in China run by Koreans. "She said that at the comfort station, each woman had to entertain 25 to 30 men per day, without rest, and with very poor food." Sumita wrote, "Many contracted venereal diseases, and there were cases of suicide."¹⁰ The website seems to have posted this account in order to show that "comfort women" were prostitutes making money at the warzone brothels. Ironically, the content of this account strikingly reveals the comfort station's cruel conditions and enslavement of women.

While the Japanese military often masked the true nature of the recruitment of "comfort women" in their own country and colonies, in occupied regions their operations were much more blatant. Chinese survivor Ren Mei'e, for example, was abducted by Japanese troops when she was only fourteen.¹¹ In 1944, the Japanese troops came to Ren Mei'e's hometown of Gucheng Village, Wu County, Shanxi Province in order to seize members of the Eighth Route Army, a Chinese resistance force. Ren Mei'e's older brother was targeted.

The Japanese troops came to my home and tied up my parents and me in our yard. They tortured us, forcing us to tell where my older brother went. We refused to say anything. The Japanese soldiers then dragged my father to the other side of the yard, whipped him with their belts and stomped on his body with their boots. My father crawled on the ground with his entire body covered in blood. He passed out several times but refused to tell the Japanese troops anything. The cruel soldiers gathered a pile of firewood and poured gasoline on it. Then, they dragged my father who had passed out onto the firewood. My mother and I were frightened to death. We kneeled before the Japanese soldiers and begged them not to burn my father. They kicked us away.

The Japanese soldiers set the woods on fire. Amid the erupting flames my father

10) The Association of Advancement of Unbiased View of History, "Comfort Women," ABC of Modern Japanese History. <http://www.jiyuushikan.org/> (viewed 13 October 2010).

11) Li Xiaofang, *Shiji nahan: 67 wei xingcun weianfu shilu (Cry of the Century: The testimonies of 67 comfort station survivors)* (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 2008), 135-36.

cried: “Help! Help!” His voice echoed in the distance. My mother and I begged the Japanese soldiers to let my father go. My mother kept kowtowing until her forehead was bleeding. The Japanese soldiers paid no attention to us, and only laughed like devils. My mother passed out.

My father was burned to ashes by the Japanese troops. The soldiers then forced me to go with them to a military stronghold on the mountain behind our village, and locked me in a dark room with no windows. I didn’t know how much time had passed before two Japanese military officers came in. With gestures they ordered me to take off my clothes. I was extremely frightened. In tears I kneeled down and grasped the leg of one of the Japanese officers, begging him to let me go. However, the officers jumped on me and raped me... They went out afterwards and locked the door.¹²⁾

Ren Mei’e was locked in the military stronghold and gang-raped continuously. In darkness she didn’t know how many days she was detained there as the soldiers’ sex slave. She only remembered that during the entire confinement, the soldiers merely threw in some leftovers a couple of times. She almost starved to death when the village head finally managed to get her released.

The brutality Ren Mei’e experienced is hard for today’s readers to believe, and some readers might wonder if this was an extreme case because Ren Mei’e’s brother was a member of the resistance force. Yet similar brutal killings accompanying Japanese soldiers’ rape and abduction of women were very common during the Japanese occupation. Li Xiaofang, a Chinese researcher who interviewed Ren Mei’e and recorded her testimony above, has documented the testimonies of over one hundred Japanese military comfort station survivors since 2005. Li Xiaofang is only one of many Chinese researchers who have been conducting investigations since the 1990s on Japanese military’s wartime sexual slavery in Mainland China, and the research findings of Chinese researchers indicate an extremely large scale of the victimization of the Japanese military sexual slavery.¹³⁾

12) Ren Mei’e’s testimony recorded in *Shiji nahan*, 135-36.

13) For more information about the imperial Japanese military’s sexual slavery in China, see Peipei Qiu with

Similar atrocities were reported not only by the survivors and local witnesses, but also by former Japanese military men. In his recollection titled "Dog," Tomishima Kenji, a former Corporal and Squad Leader in the 59th Division, 54th Brigade, 110th Battalion of the Japanese Imperial Army, describes how his unit kidnapped Chinese women in a small coastal village near Bohai Bay on December 8, 1943. Tomishima recounts that when his unit was doing a mopping-up operation that day, they saw eight Chinese women hiding behind the remains of a house that had been destroyed by Japanese troops. The soldiers immediately abducted the women, making them a "comfort delegation" for the troops' holiday pleasure, as December 8 had been made the "Imperial Edict Day" for celebrating the Emperor's declaration of war against the United States and Great Britain two years earlier. The soldiers forced one of the women to have sex with an old local man, who was forced to work as the troops road guide, in front of them. After that, they stripped a young woman naked, made her crawl on the ground, and stabbed her lower body with a bayonet. Afterwards, Second Lieutenant Aoki ordered the soldiers to burn the old man to death while keeping the women alive in order to become the imperial army's sex slaves.¹⁴⁾

The brutal killing and sexual violence were not limited to regions the Japanese imperial army considered particularly hostile. The testimony of Cai Mei'e tells similar horrors of abduction and torture at Hainan Island in south China, where the Japanese forces had built major military bases.

That year (1941), I was fifteen years old when the Japanese soldiers came to my village and drafted everyone who was able to work to a highway construction site. I was tied up among others and taken to the military blockhouse in a town called Shibi, where about a dozen of Japanese soldiers were stationed. A Japanese officer came in and began to rip off my clothes. I resisted with all my strength. He kicked me, hit me with his fists, and lifted me off the ground by grasping my ears.

Su Zhiliang and Chen Lifei, *Chinese Comfort Women: Testimonies from Imperial Japan's Sex Slaves* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

"Inu" (Dog), *Sankō: Kanzenban* (The three exterminations: a complete edition), ed.

14) "Inu" (Dog), *Sankō: Kanzenban* (The three exterminations: a complete edition), ed. *Chūgoku kikansha renrakukai* (Tokyo: Banseisha, 1984), 102-108.

I gritted my teeth tightly and continued resisting. The officer became very angry and he ordered the soldiers to tie my hands behind my back and hang me up to a tree. The officer drew his sword and cut my neck. Blood immediately gushed out and I passed out in shock.

The Japanese officer then raped me. After that, I was forced to work at the highway construction site during the day and was raped by that Japanese officer at night. This continued for about a week, and then the officer passed me to the soldiers. These soldiers often spent whole nights raping me.¹⁵⁾

The experiences of Ren Mei'e and Cai Mei'e are representative of the "comfort women" drafted from the occupied regions. Their narratives exposed the darkest end of the spectrum of sexual violence sanctioned by the "comfort women" system. Like Ren Mei'e and Cai Mei'e, most of the Chinese victims were abducted directly by the Japanese imperial forces when their hometowns were occupied. Of the 102 comfort station survivors confirmed by the Research Center for Chinese "Comfort Women" at Shanghai Normal University by 2013, eighty-seven women were kidnapped directly by Japanese troops; ten were drafted by local Chinese collaborators following the orders of the occupation forces; three were deceived by civilian procurers with false job offers and then detained in military comfort stations; and two had been prostitutes before the war and were forced to become military "comfort women" when the Imperial Japanese Army turned their brothels into comfort stations.¹⁶⁾ Although Japanese military personnel also employed deception to round up women in the occupied regions, the drafting process almost inevitably involved violence. Similar brutal abduction was also reported by the former Filipino "comfort women."¹⁷⁾ Many victims during their abduction witnessed the torture or murder of their family members as Ren Mei'e described. The Japanese military officers not only permitted soldiers to carry out the violence, but also participated in it. As seen in Tomishima's account, raping and kidnapping

15) Cai Mei'e testimony in *Shiji nahan*, 207.

16) Qiu et al, *Chinese Comfort Women*, 8.

17) See, for example, Henson, Maria Rosa's memoir, *Comfort woman: a Filipina's story of prostitution and slavery under the Japanese military* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999).

became so common that soldiers considered abusing women their entertainment and "reward."

From the survivors' narratives we can also see that the vast majority of the "comfort women" received no monetary compensation from the comfort facilities. As mentioned earlier, the monetary compensation some "comfort women" received has been used by the denialists to repudiate the criminal nature of the "comfort women" system. It is true that offering jobs was a common method used by Japanese military procurers when rounding up women for the comfort stations. In order to support their families, women of poor families signed up for the jobs and some of them received an advance payment, but what they were forced to do in the comfort facilities, as seen above, not only differed completely from the original job descriptions, but was also totally different from ordinary brothels. It must be pointed out that although some "comfort women" received an advance payment when they were recruited and/or were given a percentage of the service fees in the comfort stations, they lost their freedom and were forced to provide sexual services to the military forces continuously once they were taken into the comfort stations. In addition, the small percentage of the service fees the women received went to paying back their debts, medical expenses, clothing and other living costs. A 1941 report published in the *Guangxi Women's Journal* (*Guangxi funü*) describes the military comfort station at Tongcheng, Hubei Province, China, as follows:

The Japanese soldiers who use the comfort station have to go to the ticket office to purchase a paper slip. (There are three types of tickets: first class [Japanese women] is 1.4 *yuan*; second class [Korean and Taiwanese women] is 0.8 *yuan*; and third class [Chinese women] is 0.4 *yuan*)...Although the money the soldiers paid to purchase the comfort station tickets is supposed to be given to the women who serve as the "comfort objects," after many layers of exploitation, very little is left for the women. Moreover, all the medical expenses are charged to the "comfort objects" when they become sick, and the money the women received was not even enough to pay a single medical bill. This is how the women suffer under such brutal abuse.¹⁸⁾

Setting different fee rates for “comfort women” drafted from different countries, like the Tongcheng comfort station did, was a common phenomenon at the military comfort stations, which manifested Japan’s imperialistic policy that discriminated people of the colonized and occupied counties in every aspect. It is striking that Wang Bizhen’s report, written when the comfort stations were in operation while battles between Japanese and Chinese forces continued, uses the term “comfort object” (*weianpin*) to characterize the “comfort women” regardless their origins. It shows that the military “comfort women” were clearly distinguished from ordinary prostitutes at the time, and that all the “comfort women,” whether Japanese, Korean, or Chinese, suffered under brutal abuse and exploitation. Even though some of the women were given a small percentage of the comfort station fees, the coercive nature of the military comfort system as a whole is undeniable.

In terms of monetary compensation, the Chinese survivors’ narratives exposed an even darker reality of the coercive exploitation of the “comfort women” system: the majority of the “comfort women” abducted from the occupied regions not only received no monetary compensation, but also were forced to pay the Japanese military ransoms as their families tried to rescue them. The experience of survivor Gao Yin’e was one example., On the lunar Fourth Day of the Fourth Month in 1941, Japanese troops raided her hometown of Nanshe in Yu County, Shanxi Province of China, and killed about 30 people. The soldiers kidnapped Gao Yin’e, her mother-in-law, and other women and children, and detained them in the Japanese military stronghold at Yangma Mountain. She recounts:

Some of the detainees were released after their families paid the Japanese army ransom by selling their belongings to raise the money. My husband’s family was very poor, so preparing the ransom money took a long time. I was gang-raped by Japanese soldiers continuously for many days, and my abdomen became swollen. I didn’t know how many days I was detained there. My husband was told that in order to get us released he must pay money, so he sold our land for two hundred silver dollars and ransomed my mother-in-law and me out.¹⁹⁾

18) Wang Bizhen, “Weiansuo li de nütongbao” (Women in a comfort station), *Guangxi funü* 17-18 (1941): 36. Translation from Qiu at al, *Chinese Comfort Women*, 64-65.

This kind of kidnapping combined with extortion was widespread in the areas under the Japanese military control. There were even more devastating cases in which the occupation army collected the ransom money but would not release the detainee. According to an investigation by Ishida Yoneko, Uchida Tomoyuki, and their research team, Nan Erpu, a native of Yu County, Shanxi Province, was abducted by a non-commissioned officer when the Japanese troops from the stronghold at Hedong Village invaded her hometown of Nantou Village in 1942. In order to pay the ransom to free her from captivity, her father sold all the three-hundred *mu* (48 acres) of land he and his brothers co-owned. However, the Japanese army would not release Nan Erpu after her family submitted the ransom. Nan Erpu was detained for a year and half until the officer moved away from the area. Not long after Nan Erpu returned home, a senior soldier abducted her again and forced her to be his sex slave. Devastated by the cruel torture, Nan Erpu risked her life to escape. When the senior soldier found that Nan Erpu had escaped, he caught and tortured her ten-year-old brother Nan Shuancheng. The soldier tied his hands to the saddle of a horse and hit the horse's rump to make it run, dragging him on the ground. Nan Shuancheng was near dead when the head of the local Association for Maintaining Orders begged the Japanese troops to release him. Still not satisfied, the senior soldier set fire to Nan's house and burned it to the ground.²⁰⁾

Apparently, Japanese troops' open kidnapping, enslavement, and extortion were made possible by the wartime military rule when the occupation forces held total control of people's lives in the occupied territories. Evidence found in China indicates that as early as 1932, the Japanese Guandong Army in northeastern China had already begun kidnapping local women and detained them in military barracks to be sex slaves.²¹⁾ As the war escalated, massive abduction of local women to

19) Gao Yin'e's testimony in Ishida Yoneko and Uchida Tomoyuki, *Kôdo no mura no seibôryoku: Dâ'nyan tachi no sensô wa owaranai* (Sexual violence in the villages on the yellow earth plateau: The war is not over to these aged women). (Tokyo: Sôdosha, 2004), 76-79.

20) Yang Xiulian's testimony in *Kôdo no mura no seibôryoku*, 49-56. Association for Maintaining the Orders (Weichihui) was a local administrative organization established by the Japanese military at the occupied areas during the war.

21) See, for example, Li Bingxin, Xu Junyuan, and Shi Yuxin, ed., *Qin Hua Rijun baoxing zonglu* (Investigative records of the atrocities committed by the Japanese forces during Japan's invasion of China). (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 1995), 69.

set up comfort facilities became an integral part of the Japanese military operation from the 1937 Nanjing Massacre. Yoshimi Yoshiaki's research shows that by 1939, comfort stations were already systematically implemented throughout the warzones and the methods of establishing comfort stations were being taught at the Japanese military accounting school.²²⁾ Shikanai Nobutaka, a former army accounting officer who studied at the school from April to September 1939, described this in the following account:

At that time we had to figure out the endurance of the women drafted from local areas [*chôben*] and the rate at which they would wear out. We also had to determine which areas supplied women who would work best and how much "service time" should be allocated to a man from the time he entered the room until he left -- how many minutes for commissioned officers, how many minutes for non-commissioned officers, and how many minutes for soldiers. (Laughter) The fees were also decided based on different ranks. Regulations regarding these were called the "Essentials for the Establishment of Pii Facilities," which were taught at the army's accounting school.²³⁾

Shikanai used a derogatory term "*pii*" to refer to "comfort women" here,²⁴⁾ which reflected the general attitude of Japanese military men who saw the "comfort women" as nothing more than tools for venting their libido. The fact that a course on how to operate the comfort facilities was taught at the military accounting school indicates that the "comfort women" system involved not only sexual violence but also monetary exploitation. However, while detailed instructions on the financial management and regulations were given at the military accounting school, many of the comfort stations, particularly the makeshift comfort facilities at the frontlines, followed no regulations at all, and violence and extortion were

22) Sakurada Takeshi and Shikanai Nobutaka, *Ima akasu sengo hishi* (A secret postwar history now revealed) vol. 1. (Tokyo: Sankei shuppan, 1983), 40-1; cited in Yoshimi Yoshiaki, *Jûgun ianfu* (Military comfort women). (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1995), 37.

23) Ibid. Translation from Qiu at al, *Chinese Comfort Women*, 36.

24) "*Pii*" was believed to have come from the pronunciation of "p" in "prostitute." Another explanation is that it was from the sound of a slang word for female genitals in Chinese.

prevalent as seen in the survivors' testimonies.

It is worth noting that when talking about drafting "comfort women," Shikanai used the Japanese word "*chôben*," which in the military vocabulary means to obtain provisions locally in the warzones. According to the former Commissioned Accounting Officer of the Commissariat of the 11th Army, the mid-level leaders of the Japanese imperial forces employed "*chôben*" as a major strategy from the early stage of the full-scale war.²⁵⁾ From 1938 onward, over one million Japanese troops were regularly deployed in China.²⁶⁾ As they looted Chinese resources for military provisions, women were abducted from the occupied regions as part of the military supplies. In fact, the investigations conducted by the Research Center for Chinese "Comfort Women" show that about 60 percent of the military comfort stations in Mainland China were set up in rural areas, and these comfort stations detained an extremely large number of women abducted from the local areas.²⁷⁾

Nationwide investigations in China in the past two decades suggest that the scope of the Japanese military sexual slavery is much larger than previously known. Earlier in the 1990s, scholars estimated that the total number of "comfort women" was between 50,000 and 200,000,²⁸⁾ of which 80% to 90% were Korean women. However, these estimations were unable to adequately reflect the number of the Chinese victims because information about the Chinese "comfort women" was not yet fully revealed at the time. Since then, the research on "comfort women" has progressed in China, and based on the newly found evidence, Chinese historian Su Zhiliang concluded that from 1937 to 1945, the "comfort women" replacement rate was approximately 3.5 to 4.0, much higher than was previously thought. Taking this higher replacement rate into consideration, he estimated that the total number of "comfort women" was about 360,000 to 400,000.²⁹⁾

Su's estimation based on the high replacement rate of the "comfort women" is supported by the testimonies of eyewitnesses, investigation results, and existing

25) Senda Kakô, *Jûgun ianfu* (Military comfort women). (Tokyo: Kôdansha, 1984), 73-74.

26) Yoshimi Yoshiaki, *Jûgun ianfu*, 22.

27) Chen Lifei, *Rijun weianfu zhidu pipan* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006), 202.

28) For a summary of different researchers' estimations, see Yoshimi, *Jûgun ianfu*, 78-81.

29) Su, *Weianfu yanjiu* (A study of the comfort women). (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 1999), 277-79.

wartime documents. Eyewitness Wu Liansheng, for example, was forced to work as a janitor at the Zhaojiayuan Comfort Station in Hainan, China for nearly two years from 1942 to 1943. According to his testimony, the Zhaojiayuan Comfort Station opened in February 1942 and regularly kept twenty to forty-five “comfort women.” However, the number of women victimized by this comfort station was much larger than that, because the Japanese troops frequently moved women from this comfort station to other locations and killed those who were too sick to work. The bodies of the dead women were destroyed by the Japanese troops, so no one knew exactly how many women had been enslaved there during its operation from 1942 to 1945. Wu Liansheng escaped from the comfort station at the end of 1943. The angry Japanese troops arrested his father and buried him alive.³⁰⁾

A similar high replacement rate was also seen in the comfort stations set up in large cities. A document prepared by the Special Agents Department of the Tianjin City Police Bureau on July 3, 1944 recorded that the Japanese Garrison Headquarters in Tianjin directly run comfort stations and forced local women to be sex slaves in rotating groups. The station regularly detained twenty to thirty women who were to be replaced by a new group every three weeks.³¹⁾ This document does not mention how long this program of rotation lasted, nor how many comfort stations in Tianjin operated this way, but the given replacement time indicates that this one comfort station alone would have victimized about 350 to 520 Chinese women in a period of one year.³²⁾

In addition to the formal comfort stations in big cities, the small comfort stations set up by the field troops in rural areas detained numerous local women during the eight years of Japan’s full-scale invasion of China. As seen from the survivors’ accounts cited earlier, the Japanese forces frequently abducted women from local areas and detained them in military strongholds or barracks to be their sex slaves.

30) Wu Liansheng’s recollection, “Nada weiansuo” (Comfort stations in Nada City) in *Xue tong: Ershiliu ge weianfu de kongsu* (Testimonies of twenty-six comfort women), ed. Chen Qinggang (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 2005), 15-18.

31) Li Qin, “Xin faxian de Rijun qiangzheng Tianjin funü chongdang ‘weianfu’ shiliao xi” (A newly discovered historical document on the Japanese military’s forcing of women in Tianjin to be “comfort women”), in *Taotian zuinie: Erzhan shiqi de Rijun weianfu zhidu* (Monstrous atrocities: The Japanese military comfort women system during WWII), eds. Su Zhiliang, Rong Weimu, and Chen Lifei (Shanghai: Xuelin Chubanshe, 2000), 639.

32) Ibid.

He Tianyi, a researcher at the Hebei Provincial Academy of Social Sciences, reported that by the end of 1943, the Japanese army had built 1,103 strongholds in the southern region of Hebei Province, which indicates that the total number of military strongholds constructed in northern China would have exceeded 10,000. Since each of the strongholds typically enslaved ten to twenty local women, He Tianyi estimated that the number of local women enslaved in the military strongholds in northern China alone could have been between 100,000 and 200,000.³³⁾

As shown above, contrary to the Japanese military leaders' claim that the comfort stations were established to prevent widespread rape, the "comfort women" system in effect fostered and institutionalized sexual violence. The atrocities committed on such a large scale cannot be simply explained by the military men's sexual starvation or lack of discipline. As the survivors' testimonies demonstrate, the bodily violation of the "comfort women" was a politicized act integral to imperial Japan's warfare, a violent expression of imperialist conquest. Timothy Brook once made the following observation when discussing the Japanese occupation forces' violence against Chinese women: "Women of childbearing age were raped or forced into prostitution because they were, or stood in for, the body of the nation... Japanese soldiers performed this act on the bodies of Chinese women, but the target of the humiliation was Chinese men: it was proof of their impotence in all ways."³⁴⁾ Indeed, dominated by a politicized and militarized mentality, the Japanese military men perceived brutality as a necessary part of the war effort, the loyalty to the emperor. First Lieutenant Hayao Torao, a psychiatrist affiliated with the Kônodai Army Hospital, commented on such mentality of Japanese soldiers in his report on "Special Phenomena in the Battlefields and Policies Regarding Them" prepared in June 1939:

It has been an extremely widespread idea that the soldiers are free to do anything to enemy women, even things that would never be permitted in the homeland, so

33) He Tianyi, "Lun Ri jun zai Zhongguo Huabei de xingbaoli" (Japanese military's sexual violence in north China), *Taotian zuinian*, 262.

34) Timothy Brook, *Collaboration: Japanese Agents and Local Elites in Wartime China* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2005), 23-24.

when they see Chinese girls they act as if possessed. Therefore, those who have been reported are only the unlucky ones; we don't know exactly how many cases have happened without being reported.³⁵⁾

The symbolic meaning of such bodily violence that the Japanese soldiers believed can be seen clearly in the testimonial accounts of Kondô Hajime, a former Japanese military man of the 13th Infantry Battalion of the 4th Independent Mixed Brigade. Kondô recalled that during a mopping up operation in Shanxi Province of China, the commander of his unit, Captain Maekawa, had a village woman stripped naked and marched with the soldiers. The woman was holding a baby in her arms. When the troops reached a mountain, a soldier suddenly snatched the baby and threw the child off the cliff. The woman, who had been gang-raped by the troops, jumped off the cliff in devastation.³⁶⁾ Kondô also recalled that Commander Yamamoto of the advance unit liked to cut Chinese people with his sword. He ordered the soldiers to kill local people by smashing their heads with big rocks, saying: "When killing Chinese people, using a gun would be inexcusable to our emperor. Use a rock instead!"³⁷⁾ Kondô said his unit trained the new recruits how to use a bayonet by tying Chinese people to trees as the targets. When he was ordered to thrust his bayonet into a Chinese man's body, he did not feel that he was killing a human being. Kondô believed that this ruthless mentality came from the education he had received from childhood: they had been taught to believe that "Chankoro (a derogatory term for Chinese people) are worse than pigs."³⁸⁾

Evidently, the imperialistic education made the Japanese soldiers see raping and killing as symbolic of loyalty to the emperor and service to the Japanese state. The women's bodies were turned into a symbolic site of the occupied or colonized

35) Cited in Yoshimi, *Jûgun ianfu shiryôshû* (Documents on military comfort women). (Tokyo: Ôtsuki shoten, 1992), 229-232. Translation is from Peipei Qiu et al, *Chinese Comfort Women*, 72.

36) Ikeda Eriko, "Tamura Taijirô ga egaita senjô no sei: Sanseishô Nihongun shihaika no baishun to kyôkan" (Tamura Taijirô's portrayal of sex in the battlefields: Prostitution and rape under the Japanese military occupation in Shanxi Province), in *Kôdo no mura no seibôryoku*, 320. Kondô's recollections are also recorded by Ômori Noriko, *Rekishi no jijitsu to mukiatte: Chûgokujin "ianfu" higaisha to tomo ni* (Facing the truth of history: Together with the Chinese "comfort women" victims). (Tokyo: Shin Nihon shuppansha, 2008), 112.

37) Ibid.

38) Ômori Noriko, *Rekishi no jijitsu to mukiatte*, 111.

nations, and raping and killing were acted out in the most gruesome ways to celebrate the victory of Imperial Japan. This political symbolism gravely intensified the sufferings of the hundreds of thousands of "comfort women."

The plight of the "comfort women" teaches us profound lessons about conflict-related sexual violence. While rape has been commonly considered a private experience of bodily violation,³⁹⁾ the suffering of the "comfort women" has been highly politicized, first by Japan's aggressive war and then by the postwar nationalistic politics. These women, whose bodies were taken as war supplies, were brutally tortured and exploited by the Japanese imperial forces during the war. After the war ended, for a long period they were ignored or even discriminated as shameful or traitorous by their own patriarchal societies. When the survivors finally raised their voices in order to demand for an official apology and compensation in recent years, their requests were denied, and the denialists continue violating these aged women by discrediting their voices and memories. However, human suffering of such magnitude cannot be denied. Denying the sufferings of individual lives in the name of national honor is not only wrong, but also dangerous: it has been a ploy nation-states used, and continue to use, to drag people into war and to abuse them.⁴⁰⁾ The current denial campaign reminds us the importance of memory: amid the rise of violence, hate, and armed conflicts in today's world, the remembrance of the history of the "comfort women" is more urgent than ever for preserving international peace and the fundamentals of humanity. The comfort women's voices and memories constitute a legacy of global significance when sexual violence persists across the continents and is used as an instrument of armed conflicts to ruin lives and peace. As the comfort women's individual memories become part of the memory of the world, their legacy will continue to educate us and future generations, promoting the transnational effort to prevent yet more crimes against humanity.

39) Henry, *War and Rape*, 52.

40) I have made similar points in the Foreword of my book on the Chinese "comfort women." See *Chinese Comfort Women*, xx.

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