

TO THE U.N. HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE ON JAPAN

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Subject: List of Issues and Questions in relation to the Combined Seventh and Eighth Periodic Reports of Japan (CEDAW/C/JPN/Q/7-8)

Question from the Committee:

The Committee has been informed of recent public statement that there was no evidence that proved the forcible removal of “comfort women.”

Our Reply is as follows:

The “comfort women” who worked for Japanese military during the Chino-Japanese War and the Pacific War are often described as (1) “sex-slaves” who were (2) forcibly recruited and the (3) number reached as much as 200,000 persons. I consider these claims are not true. In this reply, I will examined them from the viewpoint of (1) consistency with historical evidence, (2) the general knowledge about sexual behavior of military persons in the world, and (3) the conclusions were derived.

As a scholar who has examined the history of Japan during the period in question for the past decade, the author insists that the above claims are highly distorted from the historical fact, and unjustifiably defame the honor of the Japanese people.

Consistency with Historical Evidence:

There is no disagreement even among Japanese scholars that there were women called “Comfort Women “ (*Ianfu* in Japanese) associated with Japanese military during the Sino-Japanese War and the Pacific War which ended in 1945. There are a large number of scholarly writings available in Japanese. Among them, the most comprehensive writing would be Ikuhiko Hata (1999) *The Comfort Women and the Sex in the Battlefields (Iannfu to Senjo no Sei)*.ⁱ Among few English-language documents, a notable one is Yoshiaki Yoshimi (1995), *Comfort Women* (Columbia UP). Then, there is a survey report prepared by U.S. Office of War Information Psychological Warfare Team Report No. 49. This report was prepared in Burma (now Myanmar) in 1944, on the basis of interviewing 19 Comfort Women from the Korean Peninsula which was a part of the Japanese territory at the time.

In addition, I shall refer to two books written by Korean writers. One is Park Yuha, professor of anthropology with Sejong University, *The Comfort Women of the Empire* (2014) (Available only in Japanese and Korean, Japanese version published by Asahi Newspaper), and the other is C. Sara Soh (2008), *The Comfort Women* (University of Chicago Press). The author at the time was professor of anthropology with San Francisco State University. I shall examine three questions: (1) how many Comfort Women were there in the brothels in the Japanese battle fields?, (2) were they recruited coercively?, and (3) were they sex-slaves?

(1) How Many Comfort Women were there?

As they were not conscripted as soldiers, and were mostly recruited by private recruiters, there is no comprehensive statistics on the number. Professor Hata (1999) estimated the number to have been around 30,000 including 12,000 in China.ⁱⁱ He rejects the number 200,000 which is often given and is stated in the history textbook published by McGraw-Hill, because of the proportion to the number of military soldiers to whom they served. His argument is shown at <http://19historians.com/requesting-correction-of-factual-errors-in-mcgraw-hill-textbook/>.

In addition, Hata claims that the largest ethnic group was Japanese, and not Koreans. Within China in 1940, he reports that the number of Korean women engaged in entertainment sectors was about a half of the number of Japanese women.ⁱⁱⁱ

Professor Park Yuha (2014) argues that the number 200,000 might have come from the number of the Women's Volunteer Labor Corp workers, Japanese and Koreans, who worked in factories during 1944 and 1945.^{iv} For some reason, many people in Korea could not distinguish Women's Volunteer Labor Corp Workers from Comfort Women. The former included very young girls of teenagers, but they did not provide sexual services.

Professor Soh (2008) states that "the real number will never be known for sure" (p. 23), but on the basis of comparing many estimates by Korean, Japanese, and Chinese writers, concludes that the exact number would seem "tens of thousands", and suggests 50,000 as a base number to quote.^v

Thus, the total number of Comfort Women would not be known for certainty, but the number frequently quoted, 200,000, is definitely excessive.

(2) Were they recruited coercively?

One important source of confusion which gave the impression that they were coercively recruited was the book by Seiji Yoshida (1983), *My War Crimes* (Watashino Senso Hanzai), in which he claimed he was a leader of Japanese Military team assigned to “hunt” more than 200 young girls in the Cheju Island south of the Korean Peninsula in 1944. Although he claimed the story in the book was his own experience, a local journalist in the island discredited the credibility, and this finding was also confirmed by Professor Hata in 1992.^{vi} Nonetheless, Asahi Newspaper maintained reporting Yoshida’s story for a long time. But, finally in August 2014, Asahi Newspaper acknowledged its misreporting on Yoshida’s writings.^{vii} This book has been quoted as a source for claiming coercive recruitment in an early writer Hicks (1994) and a U.N. report by Coomaraswamy (1996) which depended on Hicks (1994) and Yoshida (1983).^{viii}

Excluding Yoshida’s story, all the authors agree that there is no evidence of Japanese Military coercively and systematically recruited women either within Japan proper or outside. There were some military persons violating the military codes in raping or taking coercively women captives to brothels such as a case with Semarang, Indonesia. But they were exceptions. These violators were given proper punishments either by Japanese military court or by the trials after the war in the location where the violation took place.

As prostitution was not illegal in Japan at that time, women were recruited mainly through prostitution houses. Outside of Japan proper, newspaper advertisement was also used for recruitment. The newspaper advertisements made in Seoul, Korea in 1944 indicate the job location is in a Comfort Station, the age to be 17 through 30, and monthly salary more than 300 yen. Refer to Mera (2015), p. 13. This monthly salary should be compared with the monthly salary of low-rank soldiers which was between 7 to 10 yen per month.

The Government of Republic of Korea demanded the Government of Japan to admit its direct involvement in its recruitment in the early 1990’s for political purposes. The Kono Statement (1993) on behalf of the Japanese Government was a political compromise for silencing the ROK Government on this issue. In the hope of silencing her, Yokei Kono, then Cabinet Secretary, almost admitted coercive recruitment in his statement. But, he did it without any supporting evidence. In the early part of 2014, the Abe Administration undertook an examination of the background to the Kono Statement. The Committee for this task concluded that there was negotiation between the two governments before finalizing the Kono Statement, and the Japanese side decided to include words of apology in exchange for the ROK Government’s promise not to present this issue to Japan any longer. See for more detailed description, Mera (2015), pp. 48-67. Thus, the Kono

Statement should be considered as a political statement. To be more specific, it includes the following statement:

“The Government study has revealed that in many cases they were recruited against their own will, through coaxing, coercion, etc., and that, at times, administrative/military personnel directly took part in the recruitment.”

The direct recruitment referred in the last line should refer to the exceptional cases such as the Semarang case. But, the statement did not refer to it as such. In addition, it is known from many studies that at that time in Korea as well as in Japan, some parents sold their daughters to recruiting agents in exchange for money which was badly needed for survival or paying off debts. In those cases, the daughters went away “against their own will.” In those cases, the Japanese military or government were not involved at all.

Professor Hata (1999) argues there was no systematic involvement of the military or government.^{ix} Professor Yoshimi (1995) considers many Korean Comfort Women were recruited through deception by procurers promising good income but not telling the kind of work which should be performed, and does not see any direct involvement of the Japanese military or Government.^x However, he emphasizes they were sent “against their will.”

Professor Park (2014) stresses the potential economic gains were the principal source of attraction for becoming a Comfort Woman, and even though some, not many, ex-Comfort Women stated they were coercively taken away by an officer or military personnel, she doubts the credibility of their statement. Then, she accuses those procurers who deceived women as a source of misery.^{xi} Professor Soh (2008) claims the Comfort Women system of the Japanese military was a product of the paternalistic society of Japan, allowing prostitution as a legal commercial activity, but it had an aspect of criminal activity.^{xii} She does not accuse Japanese military for coercive recruitment.

One important issue in this context is the interpretation of the ex-Comfort Women’s testimonials. Because there is no evidence showing coercive and systematic recruitment of Comfort Women by Japanese Government or military, the accusers of the Japanese Government are relying upon the testimonials from ex-Comfort Women. Soh (2008) is foremost in this area.

She noted that some Korean ex-Comfort Women gave different versions of testimonial narratives. She writes:

“In the case of Yi Yong-su... .. the published account states that she left home at dawn when her age-mate and neighborhood friend Pun-sun knocked on her window and whispered, “Come out quietly,” Yi recalled: “tiptoed out and followed Pun-sun to leave home. Without letting my mother know, I simply left home by following my friend. Her published testimonial narrative included a description of what she was wearing at the time. The readers will recall her reminiscence of the delightful moment of seeing a red dress and a pair of leather shoes in a packet the recruiter handed to her in the fall of 1944, when she could not think of anything else except to follow him “readily”.

By contrast, Yi’s recently devised imaginative statement of having been “dragged away by the Japanese military during sleep” dovetails with the activists’ paradigmatic discourse on the comfort women issue. Such a statement given by a publicly recognized individual survivor is apt to have a very potent emotional impact, creating an-indelibly horrid image that serves to legitimate the generalized Korean nationalist rhetoric.....

Notably, Yi further developed the theme of forcible recruitment when she gave testimonial in the United States and Japan in 2007. At the February 15, 2007, hearing conducted by the U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, and the Global Environment in Washington, D.C. Yi Yong-su again dramatized her recruitment story. She said that she was sleeping at night when a Japanese ...and a girl came and, covering her mouth, dragged her away. Notably, I found that the written version of the testimonial the activists submitted to the subcommittee on her behalf was basically the same as her original story, minus her recollection of the pleasure of receiving the packet containing the dress and the shoes. “ (p. 100)

Then, she reasons that “some survivors have recently added to their original and published stories in order to live up to the paradigmatic story of the forcible recruitment by the Japanese military”, and because of this pressure, some survivors have kept silence out of fear of making “speech errors”.^{xiii}

She also refers to the confession given to her by a noted professor at Seoul National University, Ahn Byung-jik, who was involved in the government-sponsored research team compiling testimonials of ex-Comfort Women. According to Soh (2008), Ahn told her that he strongly objected to the title of the volume the nationalist researchers have decided,

and left the research group after three years of collaborative investigation because he found the members to be more interested in fighting against Japan than in learning about the historical facts.^{xiv} The title given was *Stories That Make History: Experiences and Memories of Japanese Military Wuanbu Women*.

The background investigation of the Kono Statement which was undertaken by Abe Administration in 2014 revealed that testimonials were taken from 16 ex-Comfort Women by a team of researchers in South Korea, but 5 Japanese officials, admitted to the hearing as observers, were not given any opportunity to crosscheck their statements, and were prohibited from ever disclosing the contents of the hearings. In addition, the wording of the Kono Statement was already determined after consultation with the Government of ROK and before the hearings from the ex-Comfort Women.^{xv} Despite ROK Government's desire that coerciveness on the side of Japanese military would reveal in the hearing, it would have been unlikely that it had. This would have been a main reason for keeping the entire hearing undisclosed.

This issue of coercive recruitment has been the principal issue between the two governments. However, as presented above, clear evidence has not been found, and testimonials from ex-Comfort Women are unreliable at best.

(3) Were they sex-slaves?

It is common to refer to "Comfort Women" as sex-slaves in English-language newspapers. For discussing this issue, the U.S. Office of War Information Report No.49 of 1944 is useful. The report describes the working and living conditions of Comfort Women as follows:

- 1) Their work hours were from 10 AM through 12 PM for 6 days per week,
- 2) Each was paid about 750 yen per month for the services (the salary of low-level soldier was 7 to 10 yen per month),
- 3) They were allowed to refuse a customer. This was often done if the person were too drunk,
- 4) Those women who had paid off their debt were allowed to go home,
- 5) Each lived in a single room, with meals provided by house master,
- 6) They lived well because their food and material was not heavily rationed and they had plenty of money with which to purchase desired articles,
- 7) They amused themselves by participating in sport events with both officers and men, and attended picnics, entertainments, and social dinners,

- 8) Army doctor checked the health of each woman every week with emphasis on examining the presence of venereal diseases. If found, they were treated.

Even though their movement was restricted and had to work under normal conditions, they were compensated for the service and had the right to quit from the job. Thus, it is not appropriate to call them “sex-slaves” as the representative of the Government of Japan from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated at the United Nations Human Rights Committee meeting on the report from Japan on July 16, 2014 in Geneva.^{xvi}

Korean writer, Park (2014), did not use the phrase, sex-slaves, for describing Comfort Women, and another Korean writer, Soh (2008), after examining the use of “prostitutes” versus “sex-slaves”, she concludes that calling them “sex-slaves” does not explain fully the social background in which this system was established.^{xvii}

It is not appropriate to judge past events on the basis of accepted value standards of today. The societies during the 1930s and 1940s were quite different from those of today. At that time, prostitution was legal in Japan (including the entire Korean Peninsula which was part of Japan). Its society was much more paternalistic, and some section of the society was living on this profession. In the case of Comfort Women, as described earlier, some women and girls were attracted to enormous economic prospects of the profession, and some were exchanged for debt-relieving asset by parents. Under the current value standards, these must be seen as crimes, but in the societies they were in, these should be seen as ordinary economic activities.

General Knowledge about the Sexual Behavior of Military Persons in the World

It is interesting to note that the Comfort Women issue of the Japanese military more than 70 years ago is frequently debated among countries and through media frequently. Then, is this a peculiar event only with the Japanese military? Certainly, not. All military stations of any nation cannot avoid dealing with the sexual demand of soldiers.

Yoshimi (1995) reports how the sexual demands of American soldiers were handled when they started the occupation of Japan immediately after the War in 1945. He writes:

“The Allied forces moved in to occupy Japan on August 28. Preceding that, on August 18, the Japanese government ordered on its own initiative the construction of comfort stations for the Allied troops.” (p. 180)

The Japanese experience in comfort stations must have helped in completing the project. To comply with this government instruction, Recreation and Amusement Association linking local associations related to this business nationwide, was established, and “special female workers” were recruited through newspaper ads. Behind this idea was the thought that unless such facilities were built, many ordinary women, not affiliated with prostitution houses, would be raped. However, within a year of the start of these facilities, the U.S. 8th Army Headquarters issued an order to forbid American officers and soldiers the use of such facilities.^{xviii} This order is related to GHQ’s planned ban on the public prostitution in Japan. When the public prostitution was banned, American soldiers started to look for free-lance girls in Japan, who were called “Pan Pan.”^{xix} They were looked down by Japanese general public.

During the war in Vietnam in the 1990’s, the U.S. military allowed the establishment of brothels around the military bases. Vietnamese women who served in the brothels received periodic medical checks as with the Japanese Comfort Stations, according to Hata (1999).^{xx}

Hata (1999) also gives the experience of Germany. The country had a quite a similar Comfort Stations as Japan had from 1940 in occupied territories such as the Netherlands, France, and the occupied portion of the Soviet Union after the war broke out between Germany and the Soviet Union. The principal objective of this system was to prevent the soldiers from getting venereal diseases. These brothels were regulated by the German military, and the code of their operation was very similar to those used by the Japanese military.^{xxi}

At the time of Korean War including the period of negotiation between the opposing forces, a considerable number of American troops were stationing in South Korea. The Government of South Korea established a system of Comfort Stations similar to those established by Japan before the end of the War. A number of Comfort Women were rounded up. President Chung-hee Park, father of the current president, ordered the establishment of the facilities. During 2015, 122 Korean women filed a lawsuit against the Government of South Korea, demanding apology and compensations.^{xxii} Not much information has been available on this lawsuit probably due to the control of information by the government. But, this incident implies that the sexual issue of the soldiers during the war time is a universal issue, and is not restricted to Japan.

A more alarming case is the cruelty of the South Korean soldiers when they were dispatched to Vietnam to help the American military during the Vietnam War. There have been a number of rumors of Korean soldiers who raped women and killed innocent children and adults. According to a recent publication, Kitaoka and Kitaoka (2013), the Korean troop massacred at least 10,000 civilians, many of them women.^{xxiii} There were many cases of rape, followed by massacre. Massacres took place at least 18 locations. Also, it is a well-known fact that many babies were born from Korean soldiers and Vietnamese women during the war period, but were abandoned by their fathers.

Conclusions

As we have seen, the Comfort Women system was a way of handling the sexual needs of soldiers, and the Government of Japan was not directly involved in the recruiting process. The women were recruited mainly by professional procurers. The women were paid enormous monetary rewards, and were able to quit the job under certain conditions.

During a war time, many nations have adopted a similar system. There is no evidence that the Japanese system was worse than that of any other country at the comparable period.

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ⁱ See **References** for details of the publication.

ⁱⁱ He gives an estimate of 12,000 in China (p. 85) but does not give a total in any year close to 1945. The estimate of 30,000 provided by the author is based on the following assumptions: the total military size in China was 700,000 (p.85) and that in other parts of the battlefields (mainly in southeast Asia) was 1,000,000. By assuming the same ratio of Comfort Women to soldiers, the total becomes about 30,000.

ⁱⁱⁱ Hata(1999) p.89.

^{iv} Park (2014), p. 63.

^v Soh (2008), p. 24.

^{vi} Refer Mera (2015), p. 5.

^{vii} Asahi Newspaper Company reported its admission of mistakes on the Japanese version of Asahi Newspaper on August 5 and 6, 2014. It reported it in its English-language paper only on August 22 in an abbreviated version. Refer to Mera (2015), pp. 68-81.

^{viii} Hicks(1994)'s claim that the Japanese military recruited women coercively is large depended on Yoshida(1983)'s book. Hicks (1994) and Yoshida (1983) combined, provided a basis for Coomaraswamy to claim coercive recruitment by the Japanese military, pp.1-8.

^{ix} Hata (1999), pp. 377-381.

^x Yoshimi (1995), pp. 103 -107.

^{xi} Park (2014), pp. 25-34.

^{xii} Soh (2008), pp. 25-34.

^{xiii} Soh(2008), p. 101.

^{xiv} Soh(2008), p. 102.

^{xv} Mera (2015), pp. 60-61.

^{xvi} Mera (2015), pp. 93-95.

^{xvii} Soh(2008), pp. 32-33.

^{xviii} Yoshimi (1999), p.184.

^{xix} Hata (1999), pp. 168-170.

^{xx} Hata (1999), pp. 171-172.

^{xxi} Hata (1999), 149-152.

^{xxii} See <http://19historians.com/three-point-suite-the-facts-about-south-koreas-comfort-women-1945-2015/>

^{xxiii} Kitaoka and Kitaoka (2013), pp. 18-24.