

COMFORT WOMEN – TEACHING TO THE TRUTH

GRADES: 11, 12

AUTHOR: Lou A. Kindschi

TOPIC/THEME: Seeking historical accuracy/ war crimes and sexual slavery

TIME REQUIRED: Two to three class periods

BACKGROUND:

In the early 1990s Korean women broke almost five decades of painful silence to demand apology and compensation for the atrocities they suffered under Japanese military sexual slavery during WWII. During the 1930s and 1940s up to 200,000 women were coerced, kidnapped and drafted into forced sexual servitude and confined to “comfort stations” which were sexual facilities organized throughout Japanese occupied territory, including the frontlines of war. Approximately 100,000 of these young women were Korean. Survivors have testified to the world about the horror of the Japanese military’s institutionalization of sexual violence. The women seek (1) acknowledgement of the war crime, (2) revelation of the truth about the crimes of military sexual slavery, (3) an official apology from the Japanese government, (4) legal reparations, (5) punishment for those responsible for the war crimes, (6) establishment of a memorial and historical museum and, (7) accurate records of the crimes in history textbooks.

Since the 1990s the international community has met to convene and hear testimony from the “Halmoni”, or grandmothers, as they are called in Korea and from other survivors from North Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Indonesia, China and the Netherlands. A global campaign has emerged to seek justice for these acts and to assure that sexual violence during war, perpetrated under the auspices of an official government, will be prosecuted as war crimes. Organizations such as the UN Human Rights Commission, the International Commission of Jurist, the International Labor Organization, and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women have recommended the Japanese government make an official apology to the survivors and take actions according to its legal responsibilities. A Women’s International Tribunal on the Military Sexual Slavery by Japan was held in 2000 and a final judgment was delivered in December 2001 at The Hague finding Japan responsible for these atrocities. Amnesty International and other human rights organizations seek world nations to adopt a resolution demanding solutions from the Japanese government. The United States House of Representatives adopted such a resolution in 2007, and the Netherlands, Canada and the European Union have since adopted their own official resolutions.

Although some of the demands made by these organizations and governments will require monetary compensation and more lengthy proceedings, the survivors seek some immediate relief

in the way of recognition that they have been wronged, an official and public apology, and a guarantee that their pain and loss will be noted in the history books for posterity. Survivors repeatedly note that they share their tragic stories, previously withheld for years so that others may learn from it and so that it will not be repeated. This request is the subject matter of the Document Based Question presented in the following lesson.

Students will have access to documents that will allow them to answer the DBQ question: Why should Japanese textbooks and curriculum include the history of Comfort Women?

CURRICULUM CONNECTION:

This lesson could be included in a study of WWII, in a Women's Studies course, or in a Global Issues course. The subject matter raises ethical questions, looks at the treatment of civilians in wartime, and speaks to the heart of the importance of academic freedom. The lesson provides opportunity for critical reading, document analysis, and thesis driven and document supported essay construction.

CONNECTION TO STUDENTS' LIVES:

Although these crimes were committed a half century in the past, the ramifications of the tragedies are vivid on a personal level and have grave import on an international level. The testimony of the Comfort Women is compelling and the photographs of recent demonstrations make history come to life today. Students will relate to the question of justice on a personal level and consider what we, as global citizens and nations, should do when sexual violence occurs as war crime. This issue will resonate with students because these atrocities appear to be on the increase in recent global conflict, such as acts committed during the Bosnian War, the Rwanda Genocide and conflict in the Congo. This lesson teaches students about the darkness committed during war, but it also demonstrates the profound power of speaking and teaching to the truth.

OBJECTIVES AND STANDARDS:

Wisconsin Model Academic Standards for Social Studies

1. Students will distinguish relevant information while reading documents about the events surrounding the Comfort Women issue from a historical and current perspective.

Standard B.12.1 Explain different points of view on the same historical event, using data gathered from various sources, such as letters, journals, diaries, newspapers, government documents, and speeches

2. Students will analyze demands for justice the Comfort Women seek, and come to a reasoned conclusion supporting a thesis statement regarding the importance of teaching history to affect policy and justice in the present.

Standard B.12.2 Analyze primary and secondary sources related to a historical question to evaluate their relevance, make comparisons, integrate new information with prior knowledge, and come to a reasoned conclusion

3. Students will refer to the relevance of international hearings and resolutions that demand solutions from Japan on the matter of the treatment of Comfort Women and include an honest historical treatment of the subject in textbooks and in course curriculum.

Standard B.12.16 Describe the purpose and effects of treaties, alliances, and international organizations that characterize today's interconnected world

4. Students will consider the tenacity of interest groups and the consequent hearings of international organizations which lend gravitas to the demands made on Japan to change academic coverage of Comfort Women.

Standard E.12.6 Analyze the means by which and extent to which groups and institutions can influence people, events, and cultures in both historical and contemporary settings

National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies

1. Students will consider events that happened in the past, but were unknown until the recent testimony of Comfort Women brought the events to the consciousness of the world. Students will embark upon critical historical inquiry while analyzing the survivors and international institutional demands for change in historical coverage of these events in academic curriculum in Japan.

Social Studies Strand 2: Time, Continuity and Change

2. Students will consider the interaction between the Japanese government and military on individuals who were forced to service as sexual slaves for soldiers and the interactions between survivors, interest groups, international organizations such as the United Nations Human Rights Commission and the Japanese government. Finally, students must define the role of education as an institution in purveying historical truth.

Social Studies Strand 5: Individuals, Groups and Institutions

Common Core Standards:

RH 1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources

RH 2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source

RH 3 Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text

RH 4 Compare the point of view of two or more authors for how they treat the same or similar topics

WHST 1 Write arguments focused on discipline-specific content

WHST 2 Write informative/explanatory texts

WHST 3 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience

WHST 9 Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection and research

SL 1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions

MATERIALS REQUIRED:

- Documentary film covers Comfort Women from Korea
“You Can Never Forget, Never...” – Her Stories, 20 minute DVD
Can be ordered at www@womenandwar.net.

The trailer can be viewed at
www.vofproductties.tv/because-we-were-beautiful/015/

- Documentary film (available online) covers Comfort Women from Indonesia “Because We Were Beautiful” produced by Jan Banning, 2010, one hour
- Documents – see attachments
- Document Based Question, DBQ, instructions sheet • Evaluating Primary Documents methods sheet
- Document Based Question grading rubric
- Computer lab or laptops for completion of the essay, if available

INTRODUCTION AND EXPLORATION:

Document Based Questions (DBQ) challenge students to work with historical sources. Students will interpret primary and secondary sources, consider multiple points of view, develop and support a thesis.

This lesson includes documents that provide a framework for the study of issues surrounding Comfort Women. The document based lesson may be used as an introduction to the topic or as a culminating assessment, as readings provide some basis of understanding about the topic. The lesson also asks students to consider how censorship of historical events affects social perceptions. This lesson allows students to consider the cost of hidden truths to individuals who experienced events, the nature of nationalistic identity, the value of learning from the past, and the complex notion of justice.

The documents included in this lesson provide a framework for a number of compelling document driven questions. Suggested questions include:

- Why should Japanese textbooks and curriculum include the history of Comfort Women?
- Will an inclusion of the history of Comfort Women in Japanese curriculum constitute justice for survivors?
- Why is an accurate portrayal of the history of Comfort Women crucial for future relations between Korea and Japan?

PROCEDURE - INCLUDES DELIVER AND APPLICATION OF THE CONTENT:

I. Class period one

- A. Introduce the students to the topic of Comfort Women. Provide a context for the historical setting using the video *You Can Never Forget, Never...Her Stories* or show a portion of Documentary film (available online) from Indonesia, “*Because We Were Beautiful*” produced by Jan Banning, 2010, one hour. If you cannot access either of the documentaries, use selections from the attached pieces by Hirofumi and Soh to introduce the students to the issue.

B. Pair/share and discussion:

1. Ask why the Japanese government would go to the expense and effort to provide Comfort Stations?
2. As a class, consider other examples of sexual violence committed with the approval of commanders during war in the past 50 years.
3. Brainstorm suggestions regarding what the global community could do to stop these human rights violations.
4. Why should Japanese textbooks and curriculum include the history of “comfort women?”

II. Class period two

- A. Introduce the DBQ assignment. See attached handouts. Pass out the following documents.
 1. DBQ question, instructions, and rubric
 2. Notes on evaluating primary sources using the APPARTS method (includes author, place and time, prior knowledge, audience, reason, the main idea and significance).
- B. Inform students that they must attach the rubric to their essay upon completion.
- C. Pass out the documents. Allow students time to read and take notes.
- D. Students may need to continue reading and note preparation as homework. it is possible to assign the DBQ for homework rather than in-class writing.

III. Class period three

- A. Write the DBQ essay.

RESOURCES:

Choi, Schellstede, Sangmie. *Comfort Women Speak: Testimony by Sex Slaves of the Japanese Military*. New York: Holmes & Meier, 2000.

The Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan. *History That Can't Be Erased: Military Sexual Slavery by Japan*. Seoul, Korea: Choheung Bank, 2007.

The Women's International War Crimes Tribunal for the Trial of Japan's Military Sexual Slavery. *Judgment on the Common Indictment and the Application for Reparation: Delivered 4 December 2001, The Hague, the Netherlands: The International War Crimes Tribunal, 2002*

DBQ Instructions and Guiding Question

A Document Based Question (DBQ) challenges you to work with historical sources. You will interpret primary and secondary sources, consider multiple points of view, and develop and support a thesis driven essay.

This particular DBQ includes documents that provide a framework for the study of issues surrounding Comfort Women. You will need to use and cite the documents as evidence in support of a thesis that responds to the assigned question below. You must also weave prior knowledge into your position. Remember, your thesis statement must answer the question. You will be required to use all documents and incorporate outside information. The essay must be a standard 5 paragraph expository essay.

You are advised to refer to the rubric for this lesson as you construct your essay. Please attach the rubric to your essay upon completion.

You may use the remainder of this sheet for notes as you read. (Make sure to note your sources as you will need to reference the documents in the essay.)

Consider the following question:

Analyze the ways in which surviving “comfort women” have responded to their wartime ordeal and evaluate how the Japanese government has responded to pressures placed upon them by these women.

APPARTS: Evaluating Primary Sources

AUTHOR

Who created the source? What do you know about the author?
What is the author's point of view?

PLACE AND TIME

Where and when was the source produced? How might this affect the meaning of the source?

PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

Beyond information about the author and the context of its creation, what do you know that would help you further understand the primary source? For example, do you recognize any symbols and recall what they represent?

AUDIENCE

For whom was the source created and how might this affect the reliability of the source?

REASON

Why was this source created at the time it was produced?

THE MAIN IDEA

What point is the source trying to convey?

SIGNIFICANCE

Why is this source important? What inferences can you draw from this document? Ask yourself, "So what?" in relation to the question asked.

Source: http://chnm.gmu.edu/cyh/archive/files/apparts_b60cd02284.pdf

Retrieved 09/24/2011

DBQ Essay Rubric

Student Name: _____

CATEGORY	1	2	3	4
Thesis	Fails to address the task; confusing and unfocused	Addressed the task but has weak structure and focus	Thesis stated addresses the task in a well written fashion	Strong thesis-responds directly to the question
Use of Documents	Fails to use documents correctly; simply paraphrased or misunderstood	Uses most documents correctly-simplistic analysis; does not always weigh the importance or validity of the evidence	Uses documents correctly; recognizes that all evidence is not equally valid	Uses documents completely and accurately; weighs the importance and validity of evidence
Outside Information	Includes no relevant information from beyond the documents	Includes little/irrelevant information from outside learning	Cites some relevant information from outside learning	Cites considerable relevant information from outside learning
Use of introduction/conclusion	Does not use opening or concluding statements	Uses an unorganized/irrelevant introduction and concluding paragraph	Includes a good introduction and conclusion	Uses strong introduction and conclusion
Organization	Disorganized; littered with errors in standard English	Weaker organization; some errors in writing detract from the essay's meaning	Clearly written and coherent; some minor error in writing	Well structured, well written; proper spelling, grammar, and mechanics

Source: www.socialstudieswithasmile.com/DBQRubric4.doc

Retrieved 09/24/2022

This is an edited version of an article that was published in *Peace Studies Bulletin*, no. 20 (June 2001) by the Peace Studies Association of Japan.

Critical Asian Studies 33:4 (2001)

The Japanese Movement to Protest Wartime Sexual Violence: A Survey of Japanese and International Literature

Hayashi Hirofumi

The twentieth century was an epoch of war and violence, with levels of destruction and genocide that were unprecedented. Above all, vast numbers of women were made victims of sexual violence in the course of and associated with war. Even now, sexual violence is taking place as wars rage between nations and internal armed conflicts continue throughout the world. In order to end the cycle of silence and impunity that accompanies wartime sexual violence against women, the Japanese military comfort women system must be confronted. The purpose of this article is to outline Japanese research on the subject of wartime sexual violence - the comfort women, in particular - and on associated popular movements founded to expose and criticize the treatment of the comfort women.

The term "comfort women" (*jūgun ianfu*) has been severely criticized because it does not indicate the actual conditions the women had to suffer. In my view, the system of Japanese military comfort women was in fact sexual slavery. Nevertheless, in this article, I use the common historical term comfort women.

The Issue of Japanese Military Comfort Women

Until the 1980s, little attention was paid in Japan to the issue of Japan's war responsibility or Japan's aggression and the atrocities committed against Asian people. Though a large number of books have been published in Japan about the war, most have dealt with Japanese suffering, such as in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and with the U.S. air raids against Japanese cities. But in the 1980s, many Japanese came to recognize the nature and extent of Japan's wartime aggression. The history textbook dispute of 1982 had a considerable impact on Japan because fierce criticism of Japanese textbooks came from other Asian countries. The issues took on new urgency, moreover, because Japan had not only become a major economic power, but was trying to become an important military power as well. Of particular significance was the fact that many veterans, who until then had remained silent about their inhumane conduct, began to speak out both about their own wartime actions and against Japan's new push for military strength. Thereafter, a large number of studies of war crimes such as the Nanjing Massacre and the activities of Biological Warfare Unit 731 were conducted; but the comfort women were still ignored.

In August 1991, however, Korean former comfort woman Kim Hak Sun broke nearly half a century of silence and made her story public. She was followed by several more

women, not only in South Korea, but in several other Asian nations as well. Their bravery in stepping forward encouraged Japanese, especially women activists, to organize support groups. In South Korea, the Korean Council for Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan (hereafter the Korean Council) was set up in November 1990 and demanded that the Japanese government reveal the truth about the comfort women system, make a formal apology to the women, and pay reparations to the victims. With the support of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), lawyers, and researchers, the surviving victims began to file lawsuits against the Japanese government. The first of these was filed by Kim Hak Sun and other Koreans in December, 1991.

The Japanese government denied any involvement by the military in the organization of the comfort women system and refused not only to apologize or provide reparations, but even to conduct an investigation of any kind. However, the government was unable to sustain this position, particularly when in January 1992 historian Yoshimi Yoshiaki unearthed official documents in the Defense Agency's National Institute of Defense Studies that proved conclusively that the military had played a role in the establishment and control of "comfort stations." As a result, Prime Minister Miyazawa Kiichi publicly admitted that the Japanese military was involved and he apologized over the comfort women issue for the first time.

The issue then came into popular consciousness not only in Japan but also throughout Asia and the world. Research on the issue began and popular movements demanding a formal state apology and reparations to the victims appeared.

Investigation and Demands for Compensation

The Japanese government collected some materials relating to the comfort women and the results of surveys on this issue were announced in July 1992 and August 1993. In the second announcement, the government was forced to admit that the conscription and use of comfort women had been carried out forcibly.

However, the government concluded its efforts with important materials left undisclosed and unexplored. Most importantly, it failed to admit that the Japanese government and military were the main actors in setting up and operating the comfort women system and that the comfort women system was a violation of international laws prohibiting war crimes and crimes against humanity. Further, the government still refused reparations for the victims on the grounds that Japan had earlier provided reparations to, or reached agreements with, the governments concerned.

Against this background, a group of historians, legal experts, and others established the Center for Research and Documentation on Japan's War Responsibility (JWRC) in April 1993 as the first nongovernmental organization dedicated to research on issues related to the war-related victimization of Asians by Japan. The JWRC immediately investigated documents relating to Japanese war crimes and, in particular, to the comfort women. Its first findings were announced in August 1993 and numerous important official documents were made public. The JWRC has published a quarterly journal, *Senso Sekinin Kenkyu* (Report on Japan's War Responsibility), since September 1993 (number 32 appeared in June 2001). The information and documents revealed in this journal have greatly influenced the course of the movement.

Various other organizations have also come into being to provide support to victims in their legal struggle against the Japanese government. Women are the main actors in these groups. In the Philippines, former comfort woman Maria Rosa Henson made public her story in September 1992 and filed a lawsuit against the Japanese government in April 1993.

The comfort women issue was first raised at the UN Commission on Human Rights in February 1992. In August 1992, the first Asian Solidarity Conference, sponsored by the Korean Council, was held in Seoul. Representatives from South Korea, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Japan concluded that the comfort women were an example of how the patriarchal system, militarism, and war had come together to violate women and trample their human rights. Further, the conference determined that resolving this issue would be a crucial step toward preventing the recurrence of war crimes and building a peaceful world. Since this gathering, cooperation among organizations in the areas victimized and those in Japan has increased.

Steps toward democracy in South Korea, the Philippines, and Taiwan, facilitated by the end of the cold war, have made it possible for groups in these and other nations to organize and to publicize the plight of the former comfort women. And as women have brought a gender-specific viewpoint to the issue, victims and their supporters in various countries have joined in solidarity to criticize nationalist attempts to conceal information about the comfort women.

Fruits of Research and Neonationalist Reaction

Historical research into the issue of the Japanese military comfort women has achieved remarkable results. First, it has demonstrated that the Japanese government and military were fully and systematically involved in planning, establishing, and operating the system of comfort women. The Japanese military set up so-called comfort stations in almost every area they occupied; local women from China and several Southeast Asian nations were forced to join those from Korea and Taiwan as sexual slaves of the military. Research has proved the supporting role of Japan's Home Ministry, as well as that of prefectural governors and the police at all ranks, the Foreign Ministry, its consulates in occupied areas, and the governors-general of Korea and Taiwan, in making possible the trafficking of women to comfort stations throughout the empire.

Second, research has shown that the military comfort women system was sexual slavery, organized and controlled by the military, and that it constituted sexual, racial, ethnic, and economic discrimination and the violation of the rights of women. The racial or ethnic dimension is seen in the fact that the military protected Japanese women to a certain extent, while completely ignoring international law in the case of subjecting other Asian women and girls to sexual slavery. Most of those recruited as comfort women were economically impoverished, with little education.

Third, although one of the reasons given by the Japanese military for introducing the comfort women system was to prevent the rape of local women by soldiers, rape was not eliminated. In order to garner local support, soldiers in areas secured by the military, such as major occupied cities, were ordered not to molest women. But in contested or hostile areas - where the people were regarded as the enemy - the military encouraged soldiers to kill, loot, burn, and even rape. Thus, despite the comfort women system, rape was rampant.

Fourth, it has been proven that the system of Japanese military comfort women violated numerous international laws including laws against enslavement and the transportation of minors across national boundaries. There is overwhelming evidence that the comfort women system constituted a war crime and a crime against humanity.

Finally, the suffering of the women involved did not end with liberation. Many comfort women were unable to return home. Some still remain where they were abandoned, as illustrated by the case of Korean women still living in Wuhan, China. Further, former comfort women have suffered the aftereffects of disease, injury, psychological trauma, and posttraumatic stress disorder, as well as social discrimination for having been made comfort women.

As former comfort women began to come out and tell their stories, it became clear that their suffering has not ceased. That suffering will continue until the Japanese government definitively acknowledges its responsibility, apologizes, pays compensation, and restores the honor of its victims. Among several proposals for

Compensation and apology that have been put forward in response to the findings regarding the comfort women, I summarize here the one made by Professor Yoshimi, deputy director of the JWRC, based on a JWRC proposal of 1994. (1)

- All official documents in government possession relating to military comfort women must be made public.
- Acknowledgment of and apologies for all violations of international law and war crimes committed by the Japanese government must be made.
- Acknowledgment of responsibility for not having punished those responsible for these acts must be made.
- Rehabilitation of the victims must be carried out.
- Victims' dignity must be restored and individual compensation paid.
- There is a need for educational programs about history and human rights; monuments to mourn the victims; a research center to establish the historical facts; memorial museums that preserve this history; and steps to be taken to prevent the repetition of these mistakes.

As a result of the efforts of the JWRC and others, the Japanese public has begun to take note of the comfort women issue and many have come to accept Japan's responsibility. The issue is now being taught to high school and junior high school students and more and more Japanese have come to understand that Japan pursued a war of aggression and was responsible for numerous atrocities, including the comfort women system.

Neonationalists, however, began launching a systematic counterattack in the mid-1990s. Campaigns have been undertaken by Liberal Democratic Party MPs (Members of Parliament), as well as members of other parties, scholars, journalists, veterans, religious organizations, and other neonationalists. They attack textbooks that deal with Japan's various atrocities, including the comfort women system, demanding that such material be

deleted in order to recover Japanese national pride. They also claim that Japan liberated Asia from the tyranny of Western colonialism, that the Nanjing Massacre was a fabrication, and that comfort women were protected and well treated, not exploited by the Japanese military and government authorities. Against a background of economic depression and a climate of prejudice against other Asians, Chinese and Koreans in particular, many Japanese have been influenced by these campaigns.

Various victims of atrocities, including comfort women and those forced into slave labor, have filed lawsuits against the Japanese government (a total of fifty-eight cases had been filed by September of 2000). However, the courts have dismissed almost all of these suits. Support groups are preparing parliamentary bills for individual compensation or for investigation of the historical facts. These have so far gained the support of more than 160 MPs, including some members of the Liberal Democratic Party. However, the majority of the 480 MPs in the House of Representatives still oppose or remain indifferent to such proposals.

Recently, research on the comfort women issue has faced difficulties due to Japanese government efforts to prevent access to many documents. To make matters worse, some documents that were previously available have been closed on the pretext of protecting privacy.

International Movements against Wartime Sexual Violence

Since the comfort women issue first came before the UN Commission on Human Rights in 1992, it has been repeatedly taken up in spite of objections by the Japanese government, which claims that the UN has no jurisdiction over events that took place before the organization came into being. The Commission accepted a report by Special Rapporteur Rhadika Coomaraswamy in January 1996, which made six recommendations to the Japanese government. These included acknowledgement of legal responsibility, payment of compensation to individual victims, the making of a public apology, and the identification and punishment of perpetrators to the extent possible.

The UN Sub-commission on Human Rights welcomed a final report by Special Rapporteur Gay J. McDougall in August 1998: *Systematic Rape, Sexual Slavery and Slavery-like Practices during Armed Conflict*. The report's appendix is entitled "An Analysis of the Legal Liability of the Government of Japan for 'Com-fort Women Stations' Established during the Second World War." One of the major aims of this report was to end the cycle of impunity for slavery, including sexual slavery, and for sexual violence, including rape. The report states, "One significant impetus for the Sub-commission's decision to commission this study was the increasing international recognition of the true scope and character of the harms perpetrated against the more than 200,000 women enslaved by the Japanese military in 'comfort stations' during the Second World War." And, in conclusion: "Sadly, this failure to address crimes of a sexual nature committed on a massive scale during the Second World War has added to the level of impunity with which similar crimes are committed today." Resolving the comfort women issue is an important item on the agenda of international movements against acts of sexual violence and slavery that continue to occur in contemporary armed conflicts.

In addition to recommendations for individual compensation, the UN report recommended that responsible government and military personnel be prosecuted for their

culpability in establishing and maintaining the rape centers. It also stressed the need for mechanisms to ensure criminal prosecution and pro-vide compensation.

Thus, the comfort women issue can be regarded not only as one of war crimes and war responsibility, but also as one aspect of sexual violence and discrimination during war and peace in male-dominated societies. In other words, settling the comfort women issue is one essential move toward redressing sexual violence and deprivation of the rights of women in contemporary societies. The international solidarity achieved among women in victimized countries and Japan is an important step toward these goals.

To take the case of South Korea, the comfort women issue was originally dealt with from the perspective of male-dominated nationalism, rather than from that of a woman's human rights. While blaming Japan for its atrocities, many Koreans ignored the suffering of the victims themselves. Indeed, the victims were regarded as a shameful disgrace. Thus the women involved were not only victimized by the Japanese during the war, they were doubly victimized because they suffered from social prejudice and discrimination in their own societies after the war. Supporters of the former comfort women have vehemently criticized such chauvinist responses. The Korean Council has recently been dealing not only with Japan's behavior, but also with South Korean sexual violence against Vietnamese women during the Vietnam War and contemporary sexual violence against Korean women by U.S. soldiers stationed in South Korea. This broadening of the scope of comfort women issues is also taking place in Japan and other countries. It suggests an agenda for action that examines the actions of soldiers and the military in many other societies who have engaged in military actions and/or maintain military forces abroad.

Women's International War Crimes Tribunal 2000

Despite pressure from various international movements and organizations, the Japanese government continues to deny legal responsibility for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed against women before and during World War II. It also refuses to pay individual compensation. Further, Japanese courts have repeatedly rejected claims filed by former comfort women from various countries. A majority in the National Diet still supports this policy.

The Japanese government did establish the Asian Women's Fund in July 1995 "to protect women's human rights in Japan and around the world." According to the official description of the fund, it promotes "the desire to convey to these [comfort] women the sincere apologies and remorse of the Japanese people" through an "atonement" fund raised through direct donations from the Japanese public. Note that this "atonement" fund is not paid for by the government but by public subscription and that it offers not compensation but a form of charity. This approach demonstrates the Japanese government's refusal to accept legal responsibility even after tacitly acknowledging moral responsibility for atrocities committed against the comfort women. As a result, the fund has been condemned by most former comfort women and by their support groups around the world.

In contrast to the German government, Japan has never prosecuted a single Japanese war criminal or any person responsible for military sexual slavery. Nor has it provided even one yen of government funds in individual reparations to victims. There are close parallels to the issues posed by the comfort women and the International War Crimes

Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, which are prosecuting sexual violence as a crime against humanity for the first time. The establishment of the International Criminal Court is also of great significance.

After a 1997 international conference in Tokyo on violence against women in war and armed conflict situations, VAWW-NET Japan (Violence Against Women in War Network, Japan) was organized in January 1998.(2) VAWW-NET Japan pro-posed to other related organizations that a war crimes tribunal be held. An International Organizing Committee (IOC) was set up jointly by the Korean Council, the Asian Center for Women's Human Rights (ASCENT) - Philippines, and VAWW-NET Japan. The committee was eventually composed of representatives from North and South Korea, China, Taiwan, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Japan. Three other countries took part in the tribunal that took place in Tokyo in December 2000: the Netherlands, Malaysia, and East Timor.

The objectives of the IOC in setting up the Women's International War Crimes Tribunal were as follows:

- To collect from each country evidence highlighting the grave nature of the crimes committed against the comfort women and to clarify the consequent responsibility of the Japanese government and its military.
- To carry out a rigorous analysis of the gender nature of the crimes and to establish a gender-sensitive approach to the issues of war crimes against humanity and genocide.
- To involve the international community in shedding light on the nature of the crimes committed against the comfort women of Asia and identify steps that the Japanese government should take.
- To encourage an international movement in support of issues related to violence against women in war and armed conflict situations.
- To end the impunity with which wartime sexual violence is carried out against women and to prevent such crimes from happening in the future.

Although the tribunal would have no legal power to punish those found responsible for crimes, the hope was to clearly establish that the system of military sexual slavery implemented by the Japanese military and government constituted a war crime against women and a crime against humanity.

According to the charter of the tribunal, it was to have jurisdiction over both individuals and states and it would identify those responsible for crimes with an emphasis on perpetrators in top military and government positions with command responsibility, including the Japanese emperor. In preparing for the tribunal, victims, legal experts, historians, and other participants from each country cooperated to prepare evidence and testimony. The five tribunal judges were selected from among internationally renowned experts in international law, including a former head of the International War Crimes Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, who was chosen to preside. The IOC planned to run the tribunal as closely as possible to the workings of an actual court. The Japanese government was asked to attend, but no reply was ever received.

The tribunal ran from 8 to 12 December 2000, with the judgment delivered on the final day. More than one thousand people, including over sixty former comfort women from various countries, attended each day. Several hundred volunteers helped to run the tribunal. The tribunal found Emperor Hirohito guilty of responsibility for rape and sexual slavery, a crime against humanity, and determined that the government of Japan was responsible for establishing and maintaining the comfort women system. Verdicts on twenty other military and political leaders accused of crimes against humanity were to be presented in the final judgment in September 2001.

For the first time the emperor has been found guilty of war crimes. Since the impunity from prosecution enjoyed by the emperor has led to impunity for the Japanese government and high-ranking government officials, this finding is highly significant, albeit as the judgment of a citizens' tribunal it lacks legal authority. In a sense, this is the culmination of ten years of work, as the tribunal made full use of the accumulated historical research and drew on the progress of the moment. Needless to say, the judgment was received with excitement by attendees, in particular the victims of sexual violence. Indeed, we may say that the tribunal goes some way toward meeting the demand for justice that victims have been seeking. Nevertheless, the issue cannot be finally settled until the Japanese government accepts full legal responsibility and acts accordingly. With many of the former comfort women in their seventies, eighties, and nineties, will the Japanese government act before it is too late?

While many Japanese approved of the tribunal, it is significant that important segments of the mass media completely ignored or ridiculed it, and in contrast with the foreign media, few journalists even mentioned the question of the emperor's guilt. The issue of the emperor's culpability still appears to be taboo in Japan.

Notes

* This is an edited version of an article that was published in *Peace Studies Bulletin*, no. 20 (June 2001) by the Peace Studies Association of Japan.

1. Yoshimi Yoshiaki, *Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery in the Japanese Military during World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 207-208.

2. VAWW-NET Japan: [Http://www.jca.apc.or~vaww-net-japan/](http://www.jca.apc.or~vaww-net-japan/).

References

Asian Center for Women's Human Rights, *From the Depths of Silence: Voice of Women Survivors of War* (Quezon City: Asian Center for Women's Human Rights, 2000).

The Center for Research and Documentation on Japan's War Responsibility. : <http://www.jca.apc.org/iwrc/center/english/index-english.htm>.

Hayashi Hirofumi, 'Japanese Comfort Women in Southeast Asia,' *Japan Forum* 10, no. 2 (1998): 211-19.

Maria Rosa Henson, *Comfort Woman: A Filipina's Story of Prostitution and Slavery under the Japanese Military* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999).

International Commission of Jurists, *Comfort Women: An Unfinished Ordeal Report of a Mission* (Geneva: International Commission of Jurists, 1994).

Indai Lourdes Sajor, *Common Grounds: Violence against Women in War and Armed Conflict Situations* (Quezon City: Asian Center for Women's Human Rights, 1998).

Gay J. McDougall, *Systematic Rape, Sexual Slavery and Slavery-like Practices during Armed Conflict*. Final report submitted in 1998 by Ms. Gay J. McDougall, Special Rapporteur to Commission on Human Rights, Sub-commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, E/CN.4/Sub.2/1998/13.

Yoshimi Yoshiaki, *Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery in the Japanese Military during World War 11* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

Yoshimi Yoshiaki and Hayashi Hirofumi, eds., *Nihongun Ianfu Japanese military comfort women* (Tokyo: Otsuki Shoten, 1995).

Source: <http://ann.sagepub.com/content/617/1/123.refs>

Retrieved 09/20/2011

Japan's Responsibility Toward Comfort Women Survivors

by C. Sarah Soh

The euphemism "comfort women" (ianfu) was coined by imperial Japan to refer to young females of various ethnic and national backgrounds and social circumstances who were forced to offer sexual services to the Japanese troops before and during the Second World War. Some were minors sold into brothels; others were deceptively recruited by middlemen; still others were forcibly abducted. Estimates of the number of comfort women range between 50,000 and 200,000. It is believed that most were Korean.

The question of the wartime forced recruitment of Korean women as ianfu was first raised in the Japanese National Diet in June 1990 as a result of the women's movement in South Korea. The first class-action suit by Korean ex-comfort women was filed against the Japanese government in December 1991, on the eve of the 50th anniversary of Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor. Since 1992, Korean and Japanese women leaders, as well as ex-comfort women and legal experts, have persuaded international organizations, including the United Nations, to conduct a series of hearings and formal investigations into the matter. In her 1998 U.N. report on contemporary forms of slavery, Gay McDougall recommended among other things that Japan pay state compensation to the "individual `comfort women'" and prosecute all those responsible for the comfort system who remain alive today.

Legal scholars such as David Boling believe that "due to both substantive and procedural obstacles," the plaintiffs in Korean and Filipina litigations are unlikely to win, and he has therefore suggested that concerted international pressure on Japan by Western nations, especially the United States, will be needed to achieve state compensation. Indeed, in the latest court decision on March 26, 2001, the Hiroshima High Court overturned a 1998 district court that had ordered the Japanese government to pay three Korean former comfort women 300,000 yen (\$2,272 as of April 1998) each.

The Japanese government has steadfastly maintained that the San Francisco Peace Treaty and various bilateral agreements between Japan and other nations have settled all postwar claims of compensation. Nonetheless, in response to mounting international pressure to compensate former comfort women, the government has acknowledged its moral responsibility for the suffering imposed on them and it helped establish the Asian Women's Fund (AWF) to express "a sense of national atonement from the Japanese people to the former 'comfort women,' and to work to address contemporary issues regarding the honor and dignity of women." AWF is nominally a non-governmental organization. In fact, however, it is the Japanese government that is responsible for AWF projects.

From the perspective of groups in Japan and elsewhere that are demanding state compensation, the AWF is an expedient designed to evade Japan's legal responsibility. Thus, the AWF became controversial even before its birth, and its formation in July 1995 has contributed to divisions among pro-comfort women activists in Japan and the Philippines. Advocates of state compensation have held rallies and conferences in Japan and elsewhere calling for abolishing the AWF. But the issue of Japan's legal and moral responsibility also involves the attitudes of the Western nations that defeated Japan in World War II. Why did the issue of comfort women as a war crime take nearly half a century before it suddenly emerged in the international community in the 1990s? Did the Allied Forces really not know about it at the end of the war?

Postwar Western Responses

John W. Dower wrote in *Embracing Defeat*: "When World War II ended in Asia, the consuming

sentiments of the victorious Allies were hatred and hope; and the tangle of these emotions was nowhere more apparent than in the war-crimes trials the victors conducted" (p. 443). Nonetheless, among the approximately fifty military tribunals convened at various Asian locales between 1945 and 1951, only one tribunal, conducted by the Dutch in Batavia (today's Jakarta), meted out stern punishments (including one execution) to Japanese officers who forced Dutch women into sexual servitude. The Batavia trial thus recognized the "forced prostitution" (to use the Dutch government's terminology) of thirty-five Dutch women as a war crime. However, it ignored similar suffering by a much greater number of native women in Indonesia, not to mention female victims in other Asian countries. What, then, is the meaning of the Batavia trial for the comfort women issue? Obviously, it was the action of a victorious nation-state protecting the human rights and personal security of its nationals in a colonial setting as a matter of national interest. It underscores the common deprivation of human rights of people under colonial rule.

The International Military Tribunal for the Far East, commonly known as the Tokyo war crimes trials or Tokyo tribunal, did not punish any Japanese leaders for the abuse of comfort women, even though U.S. military intelligence units had gathered relevant information on it (as revealed in documents kept at the National Archives in Washington). In this case, the Tokyo tribunal's lack of concern for the human rights violations of "comfort girls" (as they are called in the U.S. documents) reflected not only the pervasive racism of Western nations toward non-white people but also the fact that no American women were victimized. The prevailing military culture, then as now, no doubt contributed. Upon landing in defeated Japan, the Allied Forces-- composed mainly of American soldiers-- were offered Japanese comfort women as an official policy. The policy was meant to protect the Japanese women at large from random rapes by the American soldiers and reflected the sexist assumptions that had underlain Japan's comfort system for its own troops. However, plagued by the rampant spread of venereal diseases, the comfort facilities of the RAA (Recreation and Amusement Association) were closed by the end of March 1946, several weeks before the Tokyo tribunal began.

Postcolonial Disputes Between Japan and Korea

The transnational redress movement for ianfu survivors originated in South Korea as a women's movement against sex tourism by Japanese male visitors. It developed into a post-colonial dispute between Japan and Korea. The two countries hold diametrically opposed views regarding the legitimacy of Japan's colonization of Korea. The 1982 history textbook controversy in Japan, which began as a domestic squabble and expanded into an international incident involving primarily China and Korea, epitomized Japan's nationalist view of its colonization of Korea and the imperialist war as an "advance" instead of "aggression" into its neighboring countries. Such nationalist views continue to serve as a fundamental source of tension and disagreement over Japan's postwar responsibility for Korea's colonization in general and for comfort women survivors in particular. It should be noted, however, that the issue of comfort women remained a non-issue for both Japan and South Korea during the fourteen years (1952-1965) of negotiations to normalize bilateral relations.

Although the Japanese government did not formally express its apology for or regret over colonial rule in Korea until 1992, a very small number of progressive intellectuals in Japan have repeatedly called on their government to confront the issues of colonial domination since the 1982 textbook controversy. A public statement made by eight Japanese intellectuals on August 14, 1982, called on both government and people to recognize and apologize to the Koreans for Japan's aggression and colonial injustices, including former comfort women who were recruited under the guise of the "volunteer labor corps" (Teishintai /Chongsindae in Japanese and Korean) and who perished in the South Seas. Four of the eight signatories were professors, including the historian Haruki Wada of the University of Tokyo. A prominent critic of Japan's inadequate response to its colonial misdeeds and war responsibility, Wada is one of the proponents of the AWF.

Although not a signer of the 1982 statement, the feminist historian Yuko Suzuki bluntly defined Japan's comfort system as "state crime" (kokka hanzai) in a February 1, 1990, essay in the *Mainichi Shimbun*. In it, she called for the belated but necessary atonement the Japanese state must make for the comfort women in order for Japan to live "as a 'moral nation.'" However, Suzuki has played a leading role in the anti-AWF camp.

The Korean Women's Movement

It is largely the Korean women's movement that spearheaded the international effort to obtain recognition and compensation for the comfort women survivors. In 1991, two landmark events galvanized the Korean women's movement. In August, Kim Hak-sun testified in public about her suffering as a former comfort woman, and in December a class-action suit was filed against Japan by thirty-five Koreans, including three former comfort women. Kim's personal appearance in Tokyo as a former comfort woman and a plaintiff in the lawsuit riveted the attention of both Japan and the world community.

A third watershed event occurred on January 11, 1992, when the *Asahi Shimbun* reported that Yoshiaki Yoshimi, a Japanese historian, had discovered several official war documents at the Library of the National Institute for Defense Studies in Tokyo. Contrary to Japan's official position up until then, these documents revealed that the imperial army was involved in both establishing and operating the comfort stations. As a result, the Japanese government could not help but acknowledge its wartime involvement in the comfort women issue; and on January 13, 1992, it issued an apology. Four days later, Prime Minister Miyazawa formally apologized to the Korean people during his visit to Korea. In March 1992, a South Korean non-governmental organization, The Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan (Han'guk Chongsindaemunje Taech'aek Hyopuihoe, "Korean Council" for short) appealed to the U.N. Commission on Human Rights to investigate the comfort women issue.

In December 1992, the Korean Council conducted a nationwide fund-raising drive to help the survivors. In March, 1993, South Korean President Kim Young Sam announced that Seoul would not seek material compensation from Japan for former comfort women, but he urged Tokyo to investigate the issue thoroughly and make public the truth. Kim's policy was designed to stake out a position of "moral superiority" for Korea in forging a new relationship with Japan in the future. The Korean government passed a special bill granting each former comfort woman a one-time payment of five million won (approximately US\$6,250) plus an additional monthly sum. Between 1996 and 1997 there were two further Korean fund-raising campaigns in order to counter the temptation of the survivors to accept money from the Japanese Asian Women's Fund. During this period, seven Korean survivors accepted AWF money, causing outrage and sharp criticism among Korean activists. In April 1998, at the request of the Korean Council, the Kim Dae Jung government approved the payment of a further 31.5 million won in support money to about 140 survivors, who were required to pledge not to accept AWF money.

A National Fund a.k.a. the Asian Women's Fund

After acknowledging the involvement of the military in the comfort system in January 1992, the Japanese government conducted two formal investigations into the matter before it admitted in August 1993 that there had been coercive recruitment in some cases. Prime Minister Miyazawa indicated that the government would come up with some vague gesture in lieu of compensation for the survivors. The Miyazawa cabinet, however, was unable to act on this for two reasons. First, the Korean Council and other support groups were opposed to any measure that evaded Japan's legal responsibility. Second, the Japan Socialist Party had insisted on the investigation of the truth, a sincere apology, and compensation as its policy. The ruling Liberal Democratic Party was trapped between its admission of coercive recruitment and its unwillingness to say or do anything that might indicate legal responsibility.

Moreover, there arose a wave of strong resistance among conservative Japanese to compensating Korean comfort women survivors. Ken'ichi Takaki, head of the legal team for the class-action lawsuit, has suggested three causal factors for this Japanese resistance. First, stunned by the compensation lawsuit, some Japanese immediately assumed that the comfort women survivors were motivated by economic gain. Second, many pointed out that everybody had suffered during the war and that Japanese women had also worked as comfort women. (In other words, it was gendered labor that a certain class of women had offered in order to help their nation win the war.) Finally, many backed the government position that the 1965 agreement normalizing relations between Korea and Japan had settled all reparation issues.

When Tomiichi Murayama, the leader of the Socialist Party, became prime minister in June 1994, progressive intellectuals and movement leaders had high hopes for achieving a satisfactory resolution to the comfort women issue. But Murayama, as a leader of a coalition cabinet, was caught between the conservative resistance and the progressives' clamor for state compensation. In June 1995, his cabinet came up with the proposal to establish the Josei no tame no Ajia Heiwa Yuko Kikin (Asia Peace and Friendship Fund for Women).

Despite harsh criticism of the proposal, a month later the government announced the formation of Josei no tame no Ajia Heiwa Kokumin Kikin, accompanied by a statement from nineteen proponents of the fund calling for public participation in a fund-raising drive. The name of the fund was also slightly changed: Yuko (friendship) in the originally proposed name was replaced by Kokumin (a people, or a nation). In Japanese, the fund is commonly referred to as the Kokumin Kikin (People's or National Fund), while in English, it is known as the Asian Women's Fund.

One of the main criticisms leveled against the AWF has been that it is a "private fund." However, this is inaccurate: although an amalgam of private and government money supports the projects for comfort women survivors, the Japanese government is financially responsible for the operation of the fund. The first president (1995-1999), Bunbei Hara, was a former speaker of the upper house of the Diet. Following Hara's death in 1999, former Prime Minister Murayama agreed in the fall of 2000 to become the second AWF president.

The fund's activities fall into four categories: 1) to deliver two million yen (around US\$18,000 depending on the exchange rate used) to each survivor-applicant as "atonement money" raised from the Japanese people, accompanied by letters of apology from the Prime Minister and the AWF president; 2) to implement government programs for the survivors' welfare; 3) to compile materials on the comfort women for the historical record; and 4) to initiate and support activities that address contemporary issues of violence against women. The funds raised from the private sector between 1995 and 2000 have amounted to about 448 million yen, while the government is expected to expend about 700 million yen over a ten-year period in order to pay the medical and welfare expenses of individual victims. The government also grants the fund several hundred million yen each year for its operating budget.

However, the Japanese government has authorized the fund to operate as a non-profit foundation and regularly reiterates that it supports AWF projects out of moral responsibility and that legal compensation issues have been settled. The meaning of the expenditure of state funds is thus fudged by the state's double-talk. Moreover, with its insistence on moral responsibility, the government has sidestepped the issue of whether the comfort system was a war crime. This is the fundamental reason why supporters of state compensation will continue to reject AWF funds.

Another important issue in the AWF controversy is the state's formal apology to the survivors. When the AWF delivered the first "atonement money" to four Filipina survivors in August 1996, they also handed over letters of apology from both Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto and the President of the AWF, Bunbei Hara. Hashimoto's letter included phrases such as "apology and remorse" and "women's honor and dignity," but without any reference to the war of aggression or

colonial domination. Activists for state compensation also found fault with the phrase "my personal feelings" in Hashimoto's letter, pointing out that it conveyed the feelings of one individual and not of the government of Japan. It is not known why the term "personal" was added in the official English translation of the Japanese phrase "watashi no kimochi" (my feeling). From 1998 on, when Keizo Obuchi succeeded Hashimoto as prime minister, the letter in English no longer contained the term "personal." Furthermore, Obuchi's letter in the official Korean translation contains the crucial term *sajoe* (*shazai* in Japanese). The English word would be "apology," but it is a stronger term than *sagwa*, another term for apology: *sajoe*, in contrast to *sagwa*, implies the admission of a crime, rather than just a mistake. However, except for a few undisclosed recipients of the AWF atonement money, practically no one in Korea is aware of this terminological change because the AWF projects cannot be implemented publicly, owing largely to the strenuous objections raised by the Korean Council and the survivors.

In any case, in comparison to Hashimoto's 1996 letter, which was designed primarily to evade the issue of state compensation, AWF president Hara's letter of apology recognized the involvement of the Japanese military in establishing comfort stations as well as acknowledging coercion and dissimulation in the recruitment of comfort women, some of whom were teenage girls. Both letters do not fail to mention Japan's "moral responsibility," and the phrase, "in cooperation with the Government of Japan," appears multiple times in Hara's letter.

Since the AWF is a compromise measure to deal with the issue of compensating comfort women survivors, the organization is composed of supporters from opposing camps ranging from conservative neo-nationalists to progressive intellectuals. The tensions among them have resulted, among other things, in personal confrontations on the AWF Committee on Historical Materials on "Comfort Women." For example, Ikuhiko Hata, a conservative historian and a member of the committee, has publicly criticized, in a 1999 essay, fellow committee members Soji Takasaki and Haruki Wada, calling them "termites" (*shiroari*) and accusing them of having a secret agenda eventually to turn AWF activities into state compensation. A primary reason why even some supporters of state compensation-- such as Wada and Takasaki -- back the AWF is their desire to take some concrete action before elderly survivors die without receiving any tokens of atonement, let alone legal compensation. For his decision, Wada has been subjected to vitriolic name-calling by his former friends and allies.

Diverse Responses to the AWF Projects

Following the lead of the Korean Council, many representatives and supporters of the international redress movement are also opposed to the AWF. However, they have taken varying positions regarding the individual survivor's acceptance of the AWF offer. For example, Maria Rosa Henson, the first Filipina former comfort woman to come forward, was among the first to receive the AWF money and the letters of apology at a ceremony held in Manila in August 1996. Henson died a year after the public event. In contrast, Kim Hak-sun, the first Korean woman whose testimony helped ignite the international movement, refused to accept the AWF offer and died in 1997, with the lawsuit still pending and prior to receiving the 1998 Korean government's special payment for survivors.

In January 1997, seven Korean survivors did accept the AWF offer, which outraged the movement's leaders and split the organization into supporters and opponents of the leadership's position. The Korean rhetoric of rejecting the AWF included the metaphor of a "second rape" of the survivors by Japan with the temptation of money. As of October 2000, the AWF acknowledged publicly that 170 victims in three countries have accepted its offer. The fund reveals only the aggregate number of recipients in consideration of the survivors' privacy, especially of those in Korea and Taiwan. It is estimated, however, that Filipina recipients of the AWF offer number over one hundred, while the combined number of Korean and Taiwanese recipients is about fifty.

The Dutch survivors have also reacted very differently from the Koreans. Among the ninety women applicants who contacted the Project Implementation Committee in the Netherlands, some seventy-eight were judged to be genuine comfort women survivors and accepted the AWF assistance. (Some survivors who are plaintiffs in a class-action lawsuit of Dutch war victims against the Japanese government have rejected the AWF offer, but the high concern for their privacy has prevented their identities and number from being revealed publicly.) Some Dutch women said that they actually preferred the AWF money to state compensation because the former comes from the Japanese people who wanted to express their regret to the war victims while the latter would be money that was forcibly generated from an unwilling and divided government. As of October 2000, the AWF has offered its resources to about 250 survivors in four countries (South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, and the Netherlands), and it has launched another round of fund-raising called "Campaign 2000."

The clash between those who criticize and the survivors who want to accept the AWF money raises questions about the basic human rights of the survivors. Do the survivors have the right to decide whether to accept the AWF offer and thus bring closure to an unfortunate chapter in their lives? By insisting on Japan's legal responsibility and state compensation is the movement's leadership (or, in the case of Indonesia, the government) victimizing the survivors anew by denying them freedom of choice? In Indonesia, the government has opted for Japan to fund a national social welfare project in lieu of payments to individual survivors.

National Interest Versus Healing Truth

At the legal level, the Japanese government seems to regard it in its national interest to ward off the possible domino effect that accepting the claims of comfort women survivors to state compensation could have on other types of non-Japanese war victims. Such a concern by a state is not unique to Japan. It is mirrored, for example, in the U.S. government's refusal, in its report of January 2001, to characterize the Korean massacre at No Gun Ri by the American military during the Korean War as a war crime. The U.S. admitted the massacre of civilian Koreans by American servicemen. President Clinton expressed his deep regret to President Kim Dae Jung over the telephone, but he did not apologize. There are many more incidents (at least sixty-one according to an Associated Press report) involving multiple killings of civilians by the U.S. military in 1950-51, but the U.S. is not willing to investigate further. The Korean victims and their bereaved families plan to file a lawsuit, and their demand for a U.S. apology and compensation are reminiscent of the demands made by the comfort women movement.

Contemporary Japan is deeply divided over the comfort women issue. In a 1997 opinion survey, a slim majority (50.7 %) replied that Japan should apologize properly to Asian countries and the victims. Some progressive lawyers and grassroots activists are campaigning for legislation that would authorize an investigation into the comfort women issue, an apology, and compensation. In contrast, conservative neo-nationalists, who feel neither a moral nor a legal responsibility for the comfort women survivors, believe that Japanese supporters of the international redress movement display an egregious lack of "awareness of national interests" (*kokueki ishiki*). Some conservatives have actively engaged in the project to write history textbooks with a view to fostering self-confidence and pride in being Japanese among school children. As a result, five of the eight middle-school history textbooks approved for use from the year 2002 do not mention military comfort women.

Some Japanese perceive the comfort system as having been a necessary evil, placing them at odds with feminist and anti-Japanese critics who regard the comfort system as a form of sexual slavery. In opinion surveys conducted in 1998 and 1999, more than two-thirds of Japanese military veterans replied that Japan should neither apologize nor compensate comfort women survivors because they had been paid money for their services. It is in this social context that prominent politicians and cabinet secretaries in Japan have asserted that comfort women were nothing more than licensed prostitutes engaged in business, causing outraged responses among movement

activists and survivors alike. To be fair, one of the official aims of the comfort system was to prevent soldiers from randomly raping the women of occupied territories. Survivors' testimony reveals, however, that some comfort stations degenerated into "rape centers" (to use Gay McDougall's term) in the final years of the war.

Nonetheless, one must distinguish between rape used as a genocidal weapon of war (such as in Bosnia and Kosovo) and the comfort system with its official, intended purpose of regulating prostitution and providing R& R. Beyond this lies the problem of ascertaining operational details of the comfort system, such as the issue of forced recruitment, payment, and working conditions, which varied widely depending on the particular locale and period. There is, moreover, the problem of how one defines being "forced," which is one of the major bones of contention in the compensation issue, even after the Japanese government's admission that some comfort women were forcibly recruited. Apparently, the only evidence that anti-comfort women conservatives in Japan will acknowledge as an exceptional case of forced recruitment is that of Dutch women from civilian internment camps. By contrast, some feminist and human rights activists argue that not only military comfort women in the colonies and occupied territories but also women sex workers in Japan's licensed prostitution system were victims of sexual slavery.

If one accepts the latter view, one interesting question becomes the meaning of the total absence of Japanese former comfort women in the redress movement. As Christa Paul suggests in her preface to the Japanese translation of her book on forced prostitution in wartime Nazi Germany (*Nazizumu to kyoseibaishun*, Tokyo: Akaishi, 1996), ethnic nationalism, steeped in a strong antipathy toward Japan, has played a pivotal role in launching and sustaining the Asian women's redress movement for comfort women survivors. Thus it is no accident that Japanese ex-comfort women are conspicuously absent in the redress movement. Despite the borderless, globalizing capitalist economy, nation-state interests and identity politics deriving from a colonial history still constitute major barriers to discovering what the South African reconciliation tribunal has called "healing and restorative truth."

During Japan's fifteen-year war in the Asia Pacific theater, the comfort system evolved as a complex social, sexual-cultural, and historical institution for the military, from urban centers of sexual entertainment provided mostly by Japanese women into facilities of authorized gang rape and sexual enslavement of women of the colonies and occupied territories. The uncompromising search for gender justice in terms of state compensation and a proper apology clashes with a humanitarian desire to take some concrete action on behalf of the aging survivors during their lifetime. It is a difficult choice for sympathetic supporters of the redress movement.

C. SARAH SOH is Associate Professor of Anthropology at San Francisco State University. She is the author of *Women in Korean Politics* (Westview, 1993) and "Korean 'Comfort Women': Movement for Redress," *Asian Survey* Vol. 36, No. 12 (1996): 1227-1240. In studying the AWF, she received a grant for research and writing from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

Source: <http://www.jpri.org/publications/workingpapers/wp77.html>

Retrieved: 09/19/2011

Comfort Women

In 1992, Japan issued an apology for having forced tens of thousands of Korean women into sexual slavery during its colonial period and World War II, 1931 to 1945. Recently, the government again denied its culpability. An estimated 200,000 were taken into sexual slavery, many also from China, Taiwan, the Philippines, and Singapore. Chris Steele-Perkins interviewed these survivors, who are still boldly fighting for recognition.



KOREA—Park Ok-Ryun, born in 1919. When she was 20 her abusive husband sold her to an employment agency. They told her she would be washing clothes and caring for wounded soldiers. She was sent to Papua New Guinea where she discovered she was to be a sex slave. From 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. she had to have sex with private soldiers, from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. with noncommissioned officers, and from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m. with officers. In principle, the time assigned to a soldier was one hour, but there were too many to keep that schedule. She would have sex with between 20 and 30 soldiers daily, 2006.

© Chris Steele-Perkins / Magnum Photos



KOREA—Pak Ok-Seon, born in 1924, was from a poor family of eight children. She went with friends to find work in a textile plant in China but was made a sex slave in Manchuria for four years. She tried to commit suicide a number of times. She escaped when the sex station was bombed. She is still scared of the Japanese and has received no compensation, 2006.



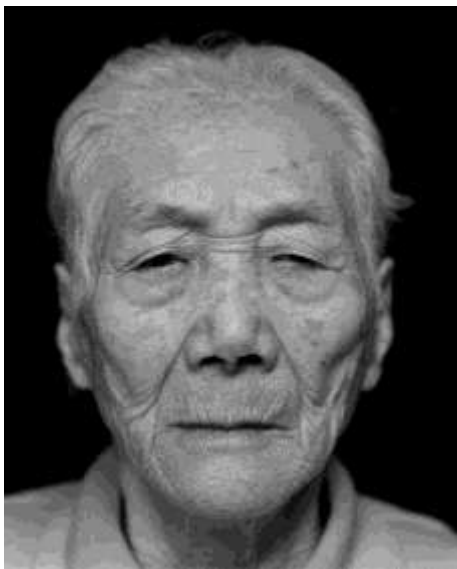
KOREA—Kil Won Ok was 13 when she was taken to Beijing by the Japanese to help build a factory. A friend told her there was a place to make a lot of money. They took a train there but were put into a sex station where they were beaten frequently if they resisted. They also had their feet stomped on as punishment. Now is the happiest time of her life, 2006.

© Chris Steele-Perkins / Magnum Photos



KOREA—Kang Il-Chul, born in 1928, was taken by a military police officer who said she was being conscripted for the National Guard. Instead she was taken to a sex station in China. Twice she attempted suicide. She is not interested in financial compensation but wants public acknowledgement by the Japanese, 2006.

© Chris Steele-Perkins / Magnum Photos



KOREA—Lee Sun Duk was 17 years old and working on a farm harvesting when she was taken by a Japanese soldier. She was put in a room with 15 other girls and then taken to Shanghai to work at a sex station. There, she was frequently beaten for resisting, which damaged her eyesight. She had to have sex every day of the year. When she finally came home, both her parents had died, 2006.

© Chris Steele-Perkins / Magnum Photos



KOREA—Jang Jum Dol was 14 and on the way to do laundry when she was taken by a Japanese man and told she was going to a factory to make money, but she was tied up in a house with an 11-year-old girl and then taken with some other girls to Manchuria. She tried to escape and was captured and beaten and kept at a sex station with a wire fence around it. She had three children there, two of whom died; the surviving girl had a weak heart. She had to continue as a sex slave. When she came back to Korea with her daughter after the war, she was so poor she had to sleep in the streets, 2006.

© Chris Steele-Perkins / Magnum Photos



KOREA—Kim Ginja was the oldest of three daughters. Her father died when she was 10, then her mother died when she was 14. She was adopted into her aunt's family. At 17 she was made to get a job and was taken by a Korean agent to a “Comfort Station.” Her first experience was with an officer who smashed her eardrum when she refused him. After that, she had to service officers on weekdays and ordinary soldiers on weekends. Every Friday she had a medical exam to check for STDs. She was freed when she was 20, 2006.

© Chris Steele-Perkins / Magnum Photos



KOREA—Kim Soon Ak, born in 1928, was the eldest child and only daughter of poor farmers. She remembers she was wearing a white top and black skirt when she was taken to work, she was told, in a thread factory. She was taken on a four-day journey to Mongolia and forced to work in a sex station at age 17. On weekends, even when she had her period, she had to have sex with 20 to 30 soldiers who stood in line outside. When she came home, she learned her father had died of grief over losing her. Until the Comfort Women movement started, she told no one of her past. She still wishes she could have worn the wedding veil, 2006.



KOREA—Lee Yong Soo, born in 1928, came from a poor family. Her mother worked as a nanny, and her father delivered rice. She was 16 when a friend called her out of the house to meet a Japanese man who gave her a dress and leather shoes and promised more if they came and worked for him. There were four other girls, including her friend, with the man, and she was too excited to ask about where they were going. They traveled for several days to the north of Korea to work harvesting radishes. The man's behavior changed, and he beat them if they made mistakes or complained. After a month, they were taken by a Japanese naval ship to Taiwan. The girls were raped repeatedly on the journey, and Lee Yong Soo contracted a sexually transmitted

disease. In Taiwan, they were forced to work in a "Comfort Station," where they had to have sex three or four times a day.

© Chris Steele-Perkins / Magnum Photos



KOREA—Yi Okseon, born in 1927, was abducted from a bar when she was 16 by two men and taken to work building a Japanese airport. When she protested, she was taken to a sex station and forced to have sex 40 to 50 times a day. When she complained, she was stabbed in the arm and beaten so badly her eyesight and hearing were permanently damaged. One girl from the same sex station who protested was stabbed to death in front of her and thrown in the street to be eaten by dogs, 2006.

© Chris Steele-Perkins / Magnum Photos

Testimony of Survivor Kim, Bok-dong, 05/07/2004

“Now reflecting of my days at that time is just as painful as death. Nevertheless, I am still speaking. As for what happened there back then...”

It was when I was in the fourth grade in elementary school. My mother told me that I had better stay at home since these were uncertain times, so I stopped schooling and was just staying at home. Scared of being drafted by the Japanese, my sisters were married off early and had left away from home.

I remember it was one day in the spring of 1941 when I was fifteen. A Japanese man in yellow clothes visited my house with a village-head and told my mother to send me to “daishin tai” for the empire, since she had no son. Otherwise, he added, my family would be traitors and unable to live here. He also said that “daishin tai” meant to go to work at a workshop producing army uniforms. He forced my mother to sign on the document. Despite my mother’s resistance, I ended up being drafted in this way.

I arrived in Guangdong via Taiwan. Until then I still believed I was going to a workshop. However, an army surgeon gave all of the girls an examination for venereal diseases and assigned to the comfort station where I began my nightmarish days. The first night there the army surgeon who examined us came to my room. I was so scared of his coming that I ran away to the backyard and hid myself into the bushes. He chased me and then hit my face badly. After being beaten for a while, I felt numb on my whole face. In this way my life was ruined. Each room had its own number and we were not allowed to go out. If it was necessary, we could go out only after the soldier’s examination. During weekdays I received about 15 soldiers a day, but it seemed more than 50 during weekends.

We moved from Guangdong to Hong Kong, and then to Singapore after about three months. In Singapore sometimes we went on official trips to army bases located in deep valleys. There were so many soldiers rushing in that I could not even stretch my legs at night. After staying in Singapore for several months, we were on the move constantly to Sumatra, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Java to receive soldiers there. Suddenly, the soldiers stopped coming. The war was over. However, we didn’t learn of our liberation.

One day the Japanese soldiers took us to the 10th Army Hospital in Singapore and trained us in nursing to disguise us as nurses. After for a while, we stayed in a US POW camp and then took a ship for Korea to come back home. I left home at 15 and came back at 20; it had been five years.

Shocked when I told her that I could not get married because of being a comfort woman, my mother died of sorrow. She died wishing for me to get married and have children and a happy life. So I followed her wish and got married, but ended up failing in marriage as I could not have a child. I opened my own small store and have had my living.

One day on TV I came to learn of an activity to resolve the “comfort woman” issue and then made my report on January 17th, 1992. Afterward I worked hard telling of the crimes committed by the Japanese army. In June 1993 I went with the Korean Council to the World Human Rights Conference held in Vienna to make a testimony about what I had been through and to demand acknowledgement and compensation from the Japanese government. Reflections and testimonies of my horrible experiences were just as hard and painful as if I were repeating the same experience again right now. However, I wanted to tell of who ruined my life like this. I also wanted to speak out about the comfort women issue that is neither over yet, nor resolved for all the victims who have survived and suffered like this.

It was probably in 1995 that the Japanese government said that it would not compensate, instead, it could give us “Asia Peace Fund for Women. I really felt humiliated. I wondered if my testimony to the world to disclose the Japanese army’s crimes was simply regarded as a gesture for some money. When I began to give my testimony and work for the comfort women issue, Japan first dishonored us saying that there was no coercion and we did it out of our own will to make money. Then now they attempt to solve the issue with money while we have demanded they accept legal responsibilities. Therefore, I was opposed to the civil fund.

My body is still covered all over with wounds. I cannot even properly digest a spoonful of rice, so that I have to depend on digestive medicines to eat. I feel sore all over my body as if I am pricked with pins. While other seniors have happy lives full of love from their children and grandchildren, I have had such a lonely life without children. Who made my life such a miserable one?

I don’t know when I’ll die. Going to bed at night, I wonder if I can really achieve my wish and smile as I say goodbye to this world. The Japanese government seems to be waiting for us to die. However, it is really an absurd attitude. Shouldn’t it resolve this issue and its wrong past quickly and start a new future with its Asian neighbor countries?

Source: The Korean Council for the Women

<http://www.womenandwar.net>

Retrieved 08/22/2011

Violence Against Women in War - Network Japan

-Towards a 21st Century Without War and Violence Against Women-

History Textbooks Issue in Japan

Japan's role in World War II, especially its invasion of its Asian neighbors and the suffering this caused, was not correctly described in Japanese history textbooks. This is because the Ministry of Science and Education's (formerly the Ministry of Education) textbook screening system forced textbook authors to delete or modify these descriptions. During the mid-80s, however, history textbooks in Japan began to improve and included more accurate accounts of the war with reference to the suffering its aggression had caused, due to increasing international criticism and other factors. References to the Japanese military's "comfort women" first appeared in the majority of high school history textbooks in 1994, three years after Ms KIM Hak-soon, a Korean, broke the fifty years of silence and came forward as a survivor in 1991. Then in 1997, all the junior high school history textbooks included accounts of military "comfort women".

On the other hand, the mid-90s saw a growing conservative backlash against these improvements in the treatment of Japanese wartime aggression, particularly the appearance in textbooks of the "comfort women" issue. Members of LDP, the ruling party, stated that the war was not a war of aggression but for "the liberation of Asia", and that the Nanjing Massacre and "comfort women" are false allegation, began their systematic campaigns. Much pressure was put on textbook publishers and authors. Now as previously, four of the seven junior high textbooks that used to contain references to 'comfort women' have no reference altogether. Some of high school textbooks which used to have reference on the issue now have no reference either.

Source: <http://www1.jca.apc.org/yaww-net-japan/english/backlash/whitewashing.html>

Retrieved 9/17/2011

Japanese State Approves Disputed Textbook

Published: August 9, 2001

TOKYO, Aug. 8— A regional school board today approved use of a history textbook that critics say whitewashes Japanese atrocities during World War II, and the book's authors accused their opponents of carrying out a "terrorist attack" against them.

The six-member board of education in Ehime State, in the southwest, voted unanimously to use the "New History Textbook" in middle schools for students with disabilities, a state official said. Ehime was the second board to do so; on Tuesday, Tokyo's board of education endorsed the book for use in three of the state's 45 schools for handicapped students.

The book has angered other Asian countries and opponents in Japan who say it covers up Japan's atrocities before and during World War II. South Korea has suspended plans to expand cultural exchanges with Japan to protest the book.

Hours after Tokyo's approval, an explosion went off at the office of the authors and their supporters. Nobody was injured, but the attack scorched part of a first-floor wall and destroyed a window frame, the police said. Nobody has claimed responsibility.

"It's a terrorist act," said Akinori Takamori, one of the authors. "It's nothing else but a challenge to the approval."

The Ehime official said the textbook would be used in a few of the city's eight schools for handicapped students.

Several private schools in Japan have decided to use the book, one of eight middle-school history textbooks approved by the Education Ministry in April.

But the book's authors said that the text has been largely avoided and that they would not make their target of a 10 percent share of the market.

The "New History Textbook" has been criticized for not mentioning World War II atrocities by Japan, like germ warfare in China and forcing 200,000 women to provide sexual services to the wartime military.

The authors have corrected several passages involving South Korea, but the Japanese government has refused to accept demands from Seoul and Beijing for more extensive revisions.

Source: <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/08/09/world/japanese-state-approves-disputed-textbook.html>

New York Times World, August 9, 2001,

Retrieved 08/23/2011

The ongoing battle over Japan's textbooks

By Thomas Crampton

Published: February 12, 2002

HONG KONG— Japan's invasion of Asia may have ended with surrender more than 50 years ago, but for many in the region battles over the war still rage on. The problem is history textbooks, which periodically unleash a firestorm of controversy, sometimes stoked by Japanese politicians playing up to nationalist sentiments.

In August last year, 20 men in Seoul draped themselves in Korea's national colors and ceremonially chopped off part of their little fingers to protest the wording in one Japanese textbook.

"Rectify distorted history," the men shouted.

Their protest reflected a deep well of anger and resentment in South Korea. A similar incident took place in the early 1980s when a different Japanese account of the colonization of South Korea prompted a man in Seoul to sever a finger and attempt suicide by setting himself on fire.

But the issue crosses borders and transcends ideology.

Also in August, a flurry of small-scale protests took place under Chinese government supervision in Beijing. Japan's flag was burned on a sidewalk opposite the Japanese Embassy while letters were delivered protesting a visit by Japan's prime minister to a Tokyo shrine honoring war dead that includes 14 war criminals.

Communist North Korea and the anti-Communist South have united in fury over Japan's sugarcoating of schoolbook history. Although bitter enemies, China and Taiwan have also found common anger over textbooks.

The controversies often come over the alteration of a single word. After describing Japan's "invasion" of China for years, some books published in Japan in the 1980s began referring instead to an "advance."

A major point of contention for South Korea is the description of a March 1, 1919, demonstration in Seoul at which independence from Japanese rule was declared. South Koreans commemorate March 1 as an official holiday, Independence Movement Day, describing it as the date when "a nationwide campaign of nonviolence against the Japanese colonial government" began.

Korean history books detail a brutal suppression of demonstrators that left 6,000 dead and 15,000 wounded.

Some Japanese textbooks describe the events as a riot and often do not mention the death toll. The much-resented requirement then that South Koreans speak Japanese is euphemistically described as "use of the official language." Slave laborers are said to have been "drafted."

Some of the strongest condemnation of Japan's textbooks relates to the Rape of Nanking. The city was seized in December 1937 and brutalized by Japanese troops. Up to 300,000 people were killed, and tens of thousands of women were raped and mutilated, according to most historians.

In the 1980s, Japan's textbook screening committee censored a social studies textbook on Nanking by ordering editors to delete half of a sentence. The first half

"The Japanese Army murdered a large number of Chinese troops and civilians" — was allowed into print. The second half — "and engaged in raping, looting and arson" — was not.

This case highlighted the practices of the Education Ministry's textbook screening committee. Names of its members, appointed by the Education Ministry, were not announced because the government said they did not want any pressures applied. In fact, textbook writers complained, the long-governing Liberal Democratic Party packed the committee with like-minded political supporters.

By the mid-1990s, official Japan began at last to grapple with the country's policies during World War II. In 1993, for the first time, a prime minister described the war as aggressive and colonial. In 1995 the Diet adopted a resolution expressing formal regret.

The fact that the government ran "comfort houses," or bordellos, for Japanese soldiers in conquered territories, was admitted, and it was conceded that most of the local women inside had been forced into the work.

Some in Japan, however, felt that textbooks were going too far with the self-examination process. Nobukatsu Fujioka, a professor at Tokyo University, founded a group striving to "inculcate a sense of pride in the history of our nation" by deleting all references to "comfort women" from school history textbooks.

"The Nanking Massacre is a totally made-up case," Fujioka has said. His and several associated groups contested the official admissions of responsibility and guilt, opposing what they called a "masochistic" vision of history. The story of the "comfort women," they held, is an unfounded scandal created in the 1990s solely to bash Japan. Teachers and textbooks that bring the issue into the classroom, these groups held, serve only to "corrode, pulverize, melt and disintegrate" Japan.

At the same time, groups within Japan began to press for a more complete coming to terms with the past. One of the most prominent groups started in 1983 as a seaborne adventure for university students seeking to root out the truth for themselves. The group's Peace Boat sailed from Japan to Asian countries formerly occupied by Japan. The trips were initiated by 10 Japanese students who were alarmed at revised presentations of their country's aggression through the censorship of history textbooks.

Their boat now sails around the world on a mission to promote peace, human rights, equal and sustainable development and respect for the environment.

Thomas Crampton is the Asia correspondent of the International Herald Tribune.

Sources: New York Times, <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/02/12/news/>

Retrieved 08/23/2011

[MichaelSolis](#)

Mitchell Scholar and LLM Candidate

Posted: January 13, 2010 04:12 PM

[Surviving "Comfort Women" Rally at 900th Protest](#)

Bundled up against the frigid winds and a temperature of 3°F, survivors of Japanese military sexual slavery, also known as the "comfort women," gathered on Jan. 13 for their 900th Wednesday protest held outside of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul, South Korea.

The women (or halmoni, the word for grandmother in Korean, as the women are euphemistically called) have been protesting every Wednesday since Jan. 8, 1992. At the 900th protest, Kang Il Chul, Yi Ok Seon, Pak Ok Seon, and Gil Won Ok were the four surviving halmoni to attend.

Also in attendance were representatives from Amnesty International, the Korean Women's Association United, the House of Sharing, and people from Korea, Japan, and other nations who came to lend support to the halmoni.

Hiromi Ui, a Japanese woman in attendance, protests weekly with the halmoni and volunteers at the [House of Sharing](#), a home for 9 of the surviving comfort women.

"Whether or not it's the 900th protest it doesn't matter to me," Ui stated. "It's important as a Japanese woman to be here week after week. I come here every week. Today is no different."

In a speech, Jude Lee from the House of Sharing called for the punishment of surviving war criminals, compensation for the halmoni, and education to prevent the recurrence of gender-based crimes in Asia and other regions of the world. She expressed her particular concern with the human trafficking of Filipina women, who are being sexually subjugated in US military zones in Korea.

Japanese military sexual slavery had its roots as early as 1932 during the conflict between Japan and China in Shanghai. The estimated 50,000 to 200,000 comfort women who served as sex slaves came from territories occupied by Japan prior to and during World War II, but most came from Korea, which Japan officially annexed in 1910.

Japanese soldiers seized many of the women forcibly through violence or coercion. At the numerous comfort stations scattered throughout Asia, soldiers and officers raped the women from 10 to 30 times per day. Physical abuse was rampant, with soldiers often beating the women to the point of unconsciousness, branding them with hot irons, or cutting them with swords.

On top of the physical abuse, the majority of the women acquired infections and sexually transmitted diseases. Those who became pregnant were administered arsenic-based drugs to abort the fetuses, a process that rendered many of the women infertile.

In 1991, Kim Hak-sun became the first of the comfort women to share her story with the world. Shortly thereafter, 35 war victims from Korea, including Kim and two other comfort women, filed a class action

lawsuit demanding reparations from the Japanese government. Japan denied responsibility for the occurrence of military sexual slavery.

Following Kim Hak-sun's courageous decision to "come out," many more former comfort women stepped up to share their stories publically. One of the women, Yi Ok-Sun, was snatched off of the street as a young girl and taken to China to work as a laborer before being forced to serve in a comfort station. She spent 58 years of her life in China and returned to Korea in 2000. Soon after she offered her testimonial and has participated in the Wednesday protests ever since.

At the 900th demonstration, Yi-Ok Sun expressed her frustrations with the Japanese government.

"We think that the Japanese government should just apologize as soon as possible because we were so young when we were drafted. We didn't know anything, but who took our dignity? Who took our honor? Who stole a 15-year-old girl's chastity?"

"Even today the Japanese government keeps denying its involvement," Yi-Ok Sun added. "It's just common sense. When someone commits a crime, they should apologize for it if they are human beings. But the Japanese government keeps denying their involvement in setting up this system. I think it's really unfair, and I feel very wronged."

Yi-Ok Sun is optimistic that an apology will come this year, in light of recently passed ordinances in 15 cities and localities calling for the Japanese government to support the women.

Another halmoni, Kang-II Chul, was abducted at the age of 16 and was forced to serve in a comfort station in Manchuria. After contracting typhoid, the Japanese military sent her to be cremated with the bodies of fallen war victims. She was subsequently saved by Korean independent fighters.

An energetic woman in her early eighties, Kang-II Chul was adamant in her demand for an apology and reparations from the Japanese government.

"I delivered my testimony at the Women's International Tribunal on Japanese Military Sexual Slavery in 2000 and two former Japanese soldiers gave testimony that there were comfort stations," Kang-II Chul stated. "Those soldiers said that they took part in this too and that they went to the comfort stations. Yet the Japanese government still denies it and calls us liars. We don't lie!"

When asked about what Korea's current conservative government is doing to address the issue, Kang II-Chul responded with a frustrated moan. "What the hell are they doing? The parties are doing nothing but fighting among themselves in the national assembly. They are wasting time when they should be setting history straight."

"The president (Lee Myung-bak) is voted for by the people," Kang II-Chul added. "He should be working for us. If he can't settle this issue, he should step down."

Today there are only 89 registered survivors of Japanese Military sexual slavery in South Korea. In 2009, five halmoni passed away without receiving a direct, formal apology or reparations.

The international community has called on Japan several times to resolve the comfort women issue. A [United Nations report](#) in 1996 highlighted Japan's numerous violations of customary international law in

establishing the comfort stations. In 2007 [House Resolution 121](#) from the United States called for a formal, clear, and unequivocal apology. In 2008 the United Nations Human Rights Committee called upon the Japanese to accept legal responsibility and apologize for its system of military sexual slavery in an acceptable way that restores the dignity of the women.

Angela Lytle, a volunteer at the House of Sharing and a feminist research associate at the Centre for Women's Studies in Education at the University of Toronto, offered her words of encouragement and admiration to the halmoni during the demonstration.

"Halmoni, your strength, zest and humor inspires women around the world to know their own strength. You are not alone - women throughout time and place have endured what you endured. It is time for the world to change, and you are helping make that happen."

The aspiration of Lytle and so many of the halmoni's supporters is that Japan's stance will shift before the remaining halmoni pass away with their wishes for justice unrealized and their hopes for humanity shattered. Until then, they will continue to demonstrate every Wednesday.

Source: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/michael-solis/surviving-comfort-women-r_b_422211.html

Retrieved 0924/2011

Comfort Women Demonstration at the Japanese Embassy in Seoul, South Korea-July 19, 2011

Every Wednesday since 1992, a group of South Korean former Comfort Women survivors and their supporters gather outside the Japanese Embassy in Seoul to demand reparation, punishment for the crimes committed against them and education to prevent sex crimes in the future.

Photos by Lou A. Kindschi



Comfort Women, referred to as “Halmoni” which means Grandmother.



Supporters included high school students, college students, lay persons, and clergy.



Korean soldiers observe from across the street at the Japanese Embassy.



Some of these women have attended close to 1000 rallies.



A survivor gives testimony of her experiences as a Comfort Woman.