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## Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate Japan’s national responsibility for its wartime comfort women system. The Japanese government acknowledges its involvement in the system and its military’s inhumane acts toward comfort women, but it does not accept its national responsibility. Furthermore, the rise of neo-liberalism in Japanese society facilitates the glorification of its national history, disseminating the view that “Japan as a nation has no responsibility for wartime comfort women.” This neo-conservative leaning in Japan poses a great hurdle for the future of cooperative relations between Korea and Japan. Against this backdrop, finding the truth about wartime comfort women is a pressing matter to resolve for the future relations of the two countries, and this paper is an attempt at this endeavor.

This truth-finding endeavor focuses its research on Korean comfort women, comfort stations built in China, and direct and indirect evidence from various sources. With the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War (July 1937–November 1941), the Japanese system of wartime comfort sta-

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tions took its full shape, and the largest number of Korean comfort women were deployed to mainland China.

While comfort women were recruited in various ways depending on their nationalities, the largest proportion of Korean comfort women were recruited through brokers who were hired by private contractors designated by the military. This paper, however, investigates only private contractors, not brokers, since private contractors were the direct link to the Japanese government or the Japanese military.

No documented evidence has yet been found indicating that the Japanese Government-General of Korea was directly engaged in recruiting comfort women in Korea. This is in part because the Japanese government has not allowed the public access to documents of the Ministry of Colonial Affairs and the Home Ministry, both of which supervised the Government-General of Korea, nor to police documents during the imperial era. However, there are ways to assess the situation. First, documents from the Government-General of Taiwan can shed light since it was in a similar situation to Korea. Second, administrative directives that the central government of Japan issued to local governments are another source of evidence since the same directives were likely sent to the Government-General of Korea. Despite the limitations, including the paucity of records, these complementary methods enable this study to reconstruct the entirety of Imperial Japan's comfort women system and illuminate Japan's national responsibility.

The discussion is divided into four parts presented in the following order: Section 1 relates the course of the comfort women issue from its dramatic appearance as a significant social issue for the current state. In addition, it provides an overview of the stances of the Japanese government, civic groups, victims, and international organizations regarding Japan's national responsibility concerning wartime comfort women. Section 2 explores the Imperial Japan's motives for establishing comfort stations in its war zones, including the circumstances leading up to the military's direct installation of comfort stations. Section 3 gives detailed accounts of how the Japanese government and the military supervised and controlled the comfort station system in the following order: the installation of comfort

stations, the recruitment of comfort women, their transportation to designated stations, and the operation of comfort stations. Lastly, the conclusion touches on the author's opinions regarding the pending reparations issue concerning comfort women victims and the lessons that we must learn from this historical tragedy.

## **Controversies over Japan's Wartime Comfort Women System**

### **1. Revelation of the Comfort Women Issue**

The issue of Japan's wartime 'comfort women' gained public attention in association with the nation's postwar reparations in 1991 with the Korean woman Kim Hak-sun's public testimony of her experience as a comfort woman under the Imperial Japanese army. She was the first former comfort woman who publicly testified under her real name. Beginning with her press conference, Korean and Japanese civic organizations officially raised Japan's responsibility to compensate comfort women victims, and since then it has developed into one of the thorniest diplomatic issues between South Korea and Japan.

Individual reparations for various groups of victims under Japanese colonial rule had already been an issue long before the comfort women issue came about. Notable cases are conscripted Korean laborers, repatriation of Korean expatriates in Sakhalin, and Class B and Class C war criminals; none of these issues have been resolved yet. However, these cases have not created as momentous an impact and controversy as the comfort women issue. The report on the brutal sexual abuses that the women had suffered grabbed the media spotlight as well as international attention at that time due to the increasing awareness of women's rights. In addition, the courage of a sex slavery victim's public testimony in her real name made a dramatic impression on people. The Japanese media also covered Kim Hak-sun's accounts of comfort station experiences extensively as the Japanese public watched the news with complicated feelings.

Kim Hak-sun's testimony was triggered by a series of events at the

time of South Korean President Roh Taewoo's visit to Japan in May 1990. A South Korean women's group released a statement demanding an apology and compensation from the Japanese government to *Jeongshindae* victims. In response to these demands, the Japanese government strongly denied any state-level involvement in wartime comfort stations, claiming that they were run by private businesses.

Furious with the Japanese government's blatant denial, Kim Hak-sun made her first public testimony. Following this event, Professor Yoshimi Yoshiaki (吉見義明) of Chuo University discovered an official document in the library of Japan's Ministry of Defense that demonstrates the Japanese military's direct involvement in the recruitment of comfort women. *The Asahi Shimbun* covered his findings in its headline of the January 11, 1992 issue, and as a result, the Japanese government could no longer maintain its denial.

On the following day, January 12, 1992, Chief Cabinet Secretary Kato Koichi (加藤紘一) officially acknowledged the Japanese military's involvement in wartime comfort stations and, on the next day, announced an official statement of apology to the victims at a press conference. All of these events took place just before Japanese Prime Minister Miyazawa Ki-ichi's (宮澤喜一) visit to South Korea on January 17, on which he made a formal apology at his summit meeting with the South Korean president.

After this dramatic revelation, Japanese scholars and civilians unearthed a substantial number of materials concerning Japan's wartime comfort women system. Pushed by Korean and Japanese civic groups' demands for truth, the Japanese government also released its own investigative reports on comfort women twice, on July 6, 1992 and August 4, 1993, but they were little more than a recycling of already known facts and thus, were vastly inadequate. Despite activists' continuous demands for more detailed information about comfort women, the Japanese government has not responded.

## 2. Stances on Japan's National Responsibility

This subsection summarizes the stances of relevant parties—the Japanese

government, right wing Japanese, victims, and the international community—on Japan's national responsibility and reparations for wartime comfort women.

### 1) The Japanese Government

As mentioned before, the initial position of the Japanese government was that “wartime comfort women had traveled with private contractors, following military forces” and that the Japanese government had not taken any part in the operation of comfort stations. This position has changed since Kim Hak-Sun's testimony and since the revelation of evidence in January 1992, which were enough to acknowledge the military's involvement and to necessitate the issuance of a formal apology to victims.

Later, on August 4, 1993, along with the second government-level investigative report, Chief Cabinet Secretary Kono Yohei (河野 洋平) made an official statement that admitted “military and government authorities' involvement in the comfort system” and “the use of coercion while recruiting and managing comfort women,” acknowledging “profound human rights violations in the core of the system.” Despite some progress, this statement has still left room for the interpretation that private contractors were the principal agents of procuring comfort women and operating the comfort system. In other words, the Kono statement acknowledges the Japanese government's involvement in the comfort system to a certain extent but leaves a nuance that the overall responsibility was placed on private contractors.

On the same day, however, the Cabinet's Foreign Affairs Office released a report entitled “On the Issue of Wartime Comfort Women,” which stated, “Comfort women were always under the supervision of the military and were forced to move with troops because they were in battle zones. Thus, it is evident that they were forced into a miserable life with no freedom.” This document seems to suggest that the military played the main role in the comfort system, a different position from the Kono Statement. From this, we can see that the Japanese government has not been clear and consistent with its stance on who was mainly responsible for the comfort system—the military or the private contractors.

Turning to the issue of reparations for comfort women, the Japanese government maintains the stance that all reparation issues have been settled with South Korea and thus individual reparation for comfort women is out of the question.

Three years after the Japanese government's admission of its military's involvement in the comfort system, Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi (村山 富市), the chairman of the Japan Socialist Party, led the coalition cabinet. In his speech delivered on August 31, 1994, a couple of days before Japan's 50th postwar anniversary, Murayama proposed a blueprint of "peaceful and friendly relations" and declared that the government would seek "a wide way of engaging the Japanese people" in the cause of comfort women instead of paying individual reparations. Following his speech, a subcommittee under the Diet Affairs Committee was formed for "the project of the 50th year postwar affairs and the comfort women issue," which announced the fund-raising project of "the Asia Peace and Friendship Fund for Women" (a.k.a., the Asian Women's Fund) on December 7, 1994. This fund idea was the result of a compromise among the coalition parties of the cabinet, departing from Murayama's Socialist Party's original stance that "Japan as a nation must compensate for individual comfort women."

Behind this Asian Women's Fund plan lay the Japanese government's refusal to pay individual reparations to colonial victims. The Japanese government claims that postwar reparations have all been settled, except for those with Taiwan and North Korea, thus it has no national responsibility to pay reparations to comfort women victims from South Korea. Thus, the intent of this fund was to offer symbolic compensation on moral grounds to comfort women.

On July 18, 1995, a private fund-raising organization called "The Asia Peace Fund of the People for Women" was established, which started raising funds from Japanese people from August 15 of that year. Then the Japanese government announced its plan to pay compensation to comfort women victims with this fund collected from Japanese people.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Asian Women's Fund was authorized as a foundation on December 8, 1995 and has been under the joint jurisdiction of the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

From August 14, 1996, the Asian Women's Fund began to pay lump sum allowances to comfort women victims, and as of August 1997, twenty-eight victims from South Korea and the Philippines received two million yen each with a letter of 'apology and regret' signed by the prime minister. The rest of the victims are, however, refusing to accept the fund and are still demanding reparations from the Japanese government.<sup>2</sup>

## 2) Right Wing Japanese

The right wing Japanese stance on national reparations for comfort women is succinctly encapsulated in a statement by Okuno Seisuke (奥野誠亮), a former Minister of Justice quite well-known in Korea, who, at a press conference on June 4, 1996 announcing the establishment of a union of parliament members called "Bright Japan," stated that "Wartime comfort women were engaged in trade; they were not forced to come." In May 1996, the Ministry of Education permitted the use of a middle school social science textbook that included a description of wartime comfort women. Itagaki Tadashi (板垣 正), a parliamentary member and the advisor of the Japan War-Bereaved Families Association, condemned this decision to license the textbook "attributing things to historical facts which are not proven with historical facts."

Right wing Japanese, represented by the Association for the Advancement of the Liberal View of History, in which Professors Fujioka Nobukatsu (藤岡信勝) of the University of Tokyo and Hata Ikuhiko (秦 郁彦) of Chiba University are active members, also condemned the textbook for distorting Japanese history. They claim that 'comfort women' were prostitutes providing sexual services to soldiers and that teaching prostitution as men's sexual abuse of women would lead teenagers to form wrong sexual beliefs and that it would have adverse effects on future generations. They also criticize the history education labelling Japan's course of actions after the First Sino-Japanese War as aggression for teaching 'masochistic' history, urging Japan to break from such history education and revise history

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<sup>2</sup> *Yonhap News Agency*, 15 August, 1997, <https://news.v.daum.net/v/19970815014000859> (Searched on July 30, 2021).

textbooks to benefit the nation. These right wing nationalists echo Okuno's view on wartime comfort women, stating that comfort women were not forcibly mobilized, but that they conducted commercial activities, and thus insist that the descriptions of comfort women as victims must be removed from textbooks. Furthermore, they denounce the Japanese government's acknowledgement of the military's involvement and apology, claiming that they were induced by the media's manipulation of public opinion and the government's incompetent foreign policy.

### 3) Victims and the International Community

The fundamental wish of comfort women victims is, in a nutshell, "Return my lost youth." However, it is impossible to make this wish come true. Realistically, the most we can do for them is to compensate for their loss and restore their honor.

The consensus of the victims, the Korean public, and the *Jeong-daehyeop* (The Korean Council for Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan; henceforth, The Korean Council) is that the Japanese government is responsible for the comfort women issue and thus must acknowledge this, apologize and compensate the victims, and punish those responsible.

International NGOs and public opinion generally agree with the victims' stance and support their cause in seeking the Japanese government's acknowledgement of its national responsibility and in demanding that it provides individual reparations. On February 1, 1992, the IED of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) demanded the Japanese government to pay individual reparations to the victims. On April 10, 1996, the UNCHR officially adopted a report containing recommendations for the Japanese government to acknowledge its national responsibility and to pay individual reparations to comfort women. Those recommendations were made on the grounds of the international law of the Imperial Japan era, and the most relevant are the following five cases.<sup>3</sup>

First, Japan's wartime comfort system violated the "International

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<sup>3</sup> Yoshimi Yoshiaki, *Japanese Military Comfort Women* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1995), 160-92.

Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women and Children.” This 1921 treaty bans the prostitution of women under the age of 21 with or without their consent (Article 5), and those who force even adults into prostitution by means of fraud, threats, the use of violence, the abuse of power, or the use of other forms of force or coercion are deemed to be prosecutable (Article 2).

When Japan signed this treaty, colonies were excluded from its application. Thus, some raise doubts regarding whether this convention can be applied to Korean cases. However, since Korean comfort women were carried by Japanese vessels and transported first to Japan, and from there to China or other war zones, it is generally believed that the colonial exemption does not apply in this case.

Although prostitution of minors and forced prostitution conducted in Korea were exempted from the convention, some argue that those cases under the command of the War Central of mainland Japan and those that the War Central was aware of must not be deferred as colonial matters. According to this argument, the comfort women recruitment conducted in Korea from March 4, 1938—i.e., the moment that the Ministry of War issued the document “Concerning the Recruitment of Women for Military Comfort Stations”—should be subject to the convention.

Second, Japan’s wartime comfort system violated “The Forced Labor Convention” of 1930, which made provisions for maximum labor hours, guarantee of payment, compensation for workplace injuries or death, and maintenance of workers’ health. However, there is some controversy over whether sexual services forced upon comfort women could be construed as ‘labor’ as defined in the treaty. On this, the ILO’s Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations declared its opinion in its 1997 report that the sexual services of wartime comfort women were also a form of forced labor.

Third, Japan’s wartime comfort system violated the 1926 Slavery Convention. Since this is an international convention, Japan was obligated to comply with this treaty despite not being a member of the treaty. This convention prohibits ‘debt slavery (bonded labor),’ which includes certain comfort women cases bound by cash-advance contracts.

Fourth, Japan's wartime comfort system committed crimes against humanity. The Charters of the International Military Tribunals at Nuremberg and for the Far East define crimes against humanity to be "murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation and other inhumane acts done against civilian populations, or persecutions on political or racial grounds before or during a war." They include all inhumane acts or persecutions committed outside battlefields or battle time.

Japan accepted the 1951 San Francisco Treaty, and this entails its acceptance of the Charters. Thus, the Japanese military's murders, abuses, and slavery testified by comfort women can be prosecuted as crimes against humanity. However, in order to apply the Charters to comfort women cases, some argue that the Japanese government's organizational plan and execution of such inhumane acts must be proven.

Fifth, Japan's wartime comfort system violated the 1907 4th Hague Convention. Although this convention is relevant only to the treaty participants and Japan did not join it, it is possible that Japan will be called for violating Article 46 because it is a conventional law. The article requires respecting the laws and customs of war on land such as "family honor and rights, the lives of persons, and private property." Humiliating acts such as rape are, therein, regarded as violating "family honor and rights." Article 46, however, specifies respect in 'war on land,' and thus its application to Korea, a colony, is disputable.

The discussions so far have demonstrated Japan's national responsibility for its wartime comfort system in terms of major international law.

### 3. The Core Issues Relating to Japan's Wartime Comfort System

As explained in the previous subsections, there are serious differences of opinion regarding the issue of comfort women among the victims, NGOs, and the Japanese government. Many assume that Japan's national responsibility comprises only the forced conscription of comfort women under the government's order. Furthermore, some tend to minimize the entire comfort women issue into a mere question of whether coercion was used to procure comfort women.

Also, as has already been emphasized several times, the most controversial points in the comfort women issue are Japan's national responsibility and the method of compensation. Here, we should refrain from simplifying the situation into the equation of Japan as the perpetrator and of comfort women as the victims. Such bipolar simplification, which highlights the legal aspects of the comfort women issue, may render the public disinterested and lead them to dismiss it as somebody else's matter and lose the chance to learn historical lessons from the past. The following presents four core issues relating to Japan's wartime comfort system that underlie the timeless significance of this issue.

First, Japan's wartime comfort system is a war crime committed by a state. That is, state power violated fundamental human rights for the purpose of war, which is the main point this paper aims to underscore. In this regard, the wartime comfort system must be distinguished from commercial prostitution, which is often found even these days in the vicinity of military bases.

Second, the comfort system has an element of racism in the specific context of colonies or occupied territories. Situated in this context as women of a colony, Korean women were subjected to conscription as "comfort women" for Imperial Japan's military and furthermore, were rendered vulnerable to racial discrimination and contempt at comfort stations. It should not be overlooked that their status as prostitutes from a colony made their conditions far more harrowing.

Third, the comfort system represents gender discrimination. It reflects the institutionalized sexual ideology that condones women as sex slaves for male soldiers. This aspect must have drawn the particular attention of women's organizations around the world today to the comfort women issue. Therefore, the comfort system needs to be understood not merely as a historical event of the past but as an on-going event of the present.

Fourth, the comfort system resulted from the unique characteristics of Japanese militarism. While the three issues above are inherent to Japan's comfort system itself, this fourth core issue has to do with its background, which facilitated a military brothel system particular to Japan among many countries engaged in World War II. Behind the institutionalization of the

comfort system lay the uniqueness of Japanese militarism and the traditional values and lifestyle of Japanese society of that time, which Section 2 demonstrates in detail.

## Reasons for Establishing the Wartime Comfort System

### 1. Circumstances prior to the Establishment

The military comfort system was modelled after the existing public brothel system of Japan. The Japanese military adopted the system to facilitate its control and management, including compulsory STD (sexually transmitted disease) testing for prostitutes.

The history of Japan's public brothel system dates back to the early 17th century, when the Edo Shogunate permitted a red-light district in Edo in 1617, but compulsory STD tests were not conducted immediately. STD testing for prostitutes began in the late Edo era at the request of a Russian admiral whose battleship docked at Nagasaki Harbor in Kyushu. In March 1876, Japan legalized the twice-a-month compulsory syphilis testing for prostitutes, and from October 1900, a modernized public brothel system was implemented by the Home Ministry with the enactment of prostitution regulations.

How then did this public brothel system develop into the wartime comfort system? The process will be discussed in the following order: the circumstances in mainland Japan, the colonies, and the occupied territories. Japan licensed brothels only to restricted areas on the mainland, limiting the number of prostitutes. As a result, entertainer geishas and barmaids in private brothels greatly outnumbered prostitutes in public brothels. In addition, public brothels were mostly located around big cities, far from barracks. Therefore, cash-strapped soldiers often patronized cheap bars and private brothels, where STDs were not rigorously tested, during their off days, and caused headaches for the military by contracting and spreading venereal diseases rampantly in their barracks. Moreover, civilian society was not much different in this regard, thus a high proportion of drafted men already had venereal diseases.

The military determined the primary cause of widespread STDs among soldiers to be private brothels, followed by prostitutes in public brothels. Then it called for a ban on private brothels and more frequent STD testing for prostitutes in public brothels.

The spread of STDs in barracks was a serious problem. It damaged the health and lives of soldiers, weakened their morale and fighting power by hindering their training, and incurred enormous treatment costs.<sup>4</sup> In addition, this problem was not limited to mainland Japan; a similar situation was playing out in Taiwan. According to records from the Taishō period, the Japanese army medical corps repeatedly called for the establishment of public brothels for soldiers, rigorous STD testing and control, and a ban on private brothels. Also, the Japanese government instituted Japanese-style public brothel systems in Korea and Taiwan in order to manage and control their prostitution businesses efficiently.

Before the Second Sino-Japanese War, the Japanese military's fundamental strategy to prevent STDs was their strict ban on private brothels and thorough STD testing at public brothels. Shanghai, where a Japanese concession was located, had Japanese-style public brothels, *kashiseki* (貸席), run by Japanese. In 1929, the Chinese government abolished its public brothel system and requested Japan to close its public brothels in China. To save face, Japan's Foreign Affairs Ministry closed them but found an expedient way to operate a *de facto* public brothel through the Japanese consulate's licensing and policing authorities over Japanese restaurant hostesses and barmaids.<sup>5</sup>

The problem was, however, the occupied territories in war zones. The consulate could not properly supervise war zones and hence, could not conduct rigorous STD tests there. In March 1932, concomitant with the Shanghai Incident, the Japanese expeditionary force in Shanghai established and ran a comfort station of its own. This was Japan's first military comfort station in records so far, but the deputy chief of the expeditionary

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<sup>4</sup> The Ministry of War, *Military Hygiene* (Tokyo: Heiyo Tosho, 1929).

<sup>5</sup> Yoshimi Yoshiaki, *A Sourcebook of Japanese Military Comfort Women* (Tokyo: Otsuki Shoten, 1992), 183.

army staff, who had participated in the establishment of the station, testified that it had been modelled after the Japanese navy brothel in Shanghai.<sup>6</sup>

Although no historical document has been found so far, it is highly probable that Japan's military had operated comfort stations before March 1932. By the end of 1936, the Japanese army comfort station in Shanghai housed approximately 300 prostitutes and the navy operated seven comfort stations. The navy comfort stations accepted only petty officers and naval soldiers, and specialist doctors examined prostitutes once a week under the supervision of marines and the consulate police.<sup>7</sup>

In July 1937, Japan launched a full-scale invasion of China, thereby starting the Second Sino-Japanese War. Hundreds of thousands of Japanese troops were deployed to China, and by 1938, nearly one million Japanese troops were stationed in China. From that time, comfort stations were built on a massive scale, attracting in droves those who were attempting to make money by running comfort stations and those who did not hesitate to commit crimes to supply women to comfort stations. To control this situation, in early 1938 the Japanese government and War Central began to be directly involved in the overall operation of the comfort system, which was previously under the supervision and control of Japanese expeditionary forces in China, from the installation of stations to the recruitment of women.

## 2. Circumstances behind the Establishment

Why did the Japanese forces build comfort stations? The reasons can be surmised into the following four: (1) to prevent soldiers' crimes such as looting and rape in occupied territories; (2) to prevent the spread of STDs among the troops; (3) to prevent violent and disorderly acts within the barracks, including assaults on superiors; and (4) to prevent the infiltration of

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<sup>6</sup> Okabe Naozaburo, *General Okabe Naozaburo Diary* (Tokyo: Fuyo Shobo, 1982), 23; Inaba Masao, *General Yasuji Okamura Documents <Part I>: Battlefield Memories* (Tokyo: Hara Shobo, 1970), 302.

<sup>7</sup> Yoshimi Yoshiaki, *A Sourcebook of Japanese Military Comfort Women* (Tokyo: Otsuki Shoten, 1992), 185.

spies. The first three are interrelated to each other. That is, STDs, crimes, and disciplinary misconduct were all closely linked to the historically rooted unique characteristics of the Japanese military.<sup>8</sup>

The Meiji regime, which was forging ahead with Japan's modernization with the successful Meiji Restoration of 1868, instituted a conscription ordinance in January 1873 and enacted a system of universal military conscription (國民皆兵制) with the proclamation of the Meiji Constitution in January 1889. The universal military conscription system offered a way to draft a massive number of impoverished young men, mostly from the peasant class, who were, on average, very undereducated and ill mannered. Later, as emperor-centered Japanese militarism was increasingly strengthened, the military worked hard to install soldiers with the warrior ethos, which included unquestionable obedience and fealty, manners, valor, austerity, and loyalty.

However, the Japanese military's mental education at that time was far from a modern education, which is based on mutual respect. Rather, it was an extension of the traditional premodern patriarchal disciplines, which were adapted for a unique social system—the military. As a result, violent means such as abuse and beating by superiors were commonplace in barracks, under the guise of “the rod of love.” The military leadership was aware of improper personal disciplinary acts but acquiesced to maintain order within the barracks, having no better options. Trained through such inhumane manners, it is not surprising that peripheral soldiers had a scant sense of human rights toward others.

Against this backdrop, the Second Sino-Japanese War broke out in July 1937. Most of the Japanese military forces were dispatched to China to fight the untenable and unjustifiable war. Tied in a long war without any end in sight and without a break, the morale of the troops was naturally very low. Soldiers felt desolate because of the inhumane conditions and the barracks, some even showing psychiatric symptoms due to anxiety and

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<sup>8</sup> For more information, please refer to Ohama Tetsuya, *The Emperor's Army* (Tokyo: Kyōikusha, 1986); Yoshida Yutaka, *The Emperor's Army and the Nanjing Incident* (Tokyo: Aoki Shoten, 1986).

desperation over the fear of death. Thus, this unruly and desperate army with low morale, infused with a sense of superiority and racist supremacy as the Emperor's Troops, ended up committing the Nanjing Massacre and killing hundreds of thousands of Chinese on their way to plunder, burn, and rape.

The Nanjing Massacre intensified anti-Japanese sentiment among the Chinese and made it very difficult for the Japanese military to maintain order in their occupied territories in China. Seeing the danger of losing leverage in the war if it allowed the situation to continue as it was, the Japanese military leadership sought solutions to remedy it. One of them was building as many comfort stations as possible, where soldiers could satisfy their sexual and violent urges in a controlled and orderly manner.

## The Japanese Government's Involvement in the Wartime Comfort System

### 1. Overview of the Wartime Comfort System (Refer to Chart 1 and 2 in the Appendix)

A wartime comfort station was a brothel for soldiers and civilians attached to the military. There were two types of public bodies involved in the establishment and operation of comfort stations: government offices and the military. In addition, comfort stations can be divided into three types in terms of their locations: mainland Japan, the colonies, and the occupied territories. Accordingly, our main research targets are Japan's central government and its War Central in the case of mainland Japan, the Government-General and the Japanese military in the colonies, such as Korea and Taiwan, and government agencies such as consulates and expeditionary troops in occupied territories.

To illustrate how government authorities were involved in the comfort system, the operation of comfort stations will be investigated in five stages: the installation of comfort stations, recruitment of women, transportation of comfort women, supervision and management of comfort stations, and finally, postwar settlement.

(1) Installation of Comfort Stations: Comfort stations were installed at the instruction of the Ministry of War and the authorities of each expeditionary force. To be more specific, comfort stations were set up through three routes: first, a higher military office giving orders to each contingent force; second, the headquarters of the expeditionary force permitting the requests of its battalions or companies; and third, individual barracks installing stations on their own without permission from their superiors.

(2) Recruitment of Comfort Women: The recruitment process was extremely complicated since it was executed mostly by private contractors. In general, comfort women were procured in the following four steps:

First, the authorities of the expeditionary force which planned to set up a comfort station requested the relevant government body of the mainland or the colony to procure comfort women for them.

Second, the relevant bodies—i.e., the Ministry of War and the Home Ministry in the case of the mainland, and the Government-General and military headquarters in the case of Korea and Taiwan—administered the recruitment of comfort women in each region. As of the present time [December 1997], no official document proving that the Government-General of Korea had ordered the recruitment of comfort women has been discovered.

Third, the Home Ministry sent out to each prefectural office a notice with an assigned number of women to procure. Then the local police of each prefecture selected private contractors to recruit comfort women. In Korea, the headquarters of the Japanese force in Korea directly designated private contractors. On other occasions, it is believed that the Government-General of Korea also assigned the number of women to recruit to each province and each provincial police office designated private contractors.

Fourth, the private contractors designated by the military or the police recruited comfort women by themselves or through hired brokers.

(3) Transportation of Comfort Women: The military or private contractors were in charge of transporting recruited women to their destinations while the Japanese government or relevant troops provided support and conveniences. Comfort women were transported to China by military or fishing vessels or by railroad, and within China, by Japanese military-controlled railroads or military trucks.

(4) Operation of Comfort Stations: Wartime comfort stations fell into two types—direct military-run stations and civilian-run stations. Even those run by civilian contractors were provided with various conveniences from the military and were practically supervised and managed by the military.

(5) Postwar Settlement: It is not an exaggeration to say that defeat in World War II came suddenly to Japan with the nuclear bombings of Nagasaki and Hiroshima, which did not allow for much preparation. The defeated Japanese troops left comfort women behind in their occupied territories, where many of those dislocated women are still living. Since this stage is not directly related to the Japanese government and the military's involvement in the comfort system, it will not be dealt with in this paper.

## 2. Installation of Comfort Stations

The Japanese government has acknowledged its military's partial involvement in the installation of comfort stations but is maintaining the claim that most of them were set up by profit-seeking civilian contractors. Right wing Japanese go even further, denying any involvement of the Japanese government or military all together. Their blatant denial is apparently an act of suppressing and distorting historical truth. As an endeavor to reveal the truth, this subsection examines various documents and records that have been disclosed so far to demonstrate that the Japanese military planned and supervised most of the installation process of the military comfort stations.

The document that made the Japanese government acknowledge its

military's involvement was the notice "Regarding the Recruitment of Women for Military Comfort Stations" issued by the Ministry of War in 1938.<sup>9</sup> The evidence that has been gathered so far indicates that this notice, dated March 4, 1938, signaled the War Central's direct involvement in comfort women recruitment. This notice, signed by a deputy of the Ministry of War, was sent to the chiefs of the Japanese North China Area Army (北支那方面軍) and the Japanese Central China Area Army (中支那方面軍). Its main message was to order them to monitor and supervise with the utmost care the installation of comfort stations from the designation of private contractors to the recruitment of comfort women and to closely collaborate with the local and the military police of their respective areas in recruiting comfort women. As previously mentioned, this was the very document that forced the Japanese government to acknowledge the Imperial Army's involvement in the comfort system in January 1992. Delegated by Minister of War Sugiyama Hajime (杉山元) of the Konoe Fumimaro (近衛文麿) Cabinet, the notice was first drafted by the Military Administration Bureau of the same ministry, and then was approved by Umezu Yoshihiro (梅津美治郎), Vice Minister of War. The head of the Military Administration Bureau was Imamura Hitoshi (今村均) and the Senior Staff Officer of the Military Administration Bureau was Chiba Kumaji (千葉熊治).

The reason behind the Ministry of War's issuance of this notice was the social problem caused by private contractors in Japan who even employed means as foul as kidnapping to procure women and girls for comfort stations. The Ministry of War was worried about the damage to the Imperial Army's reputation if the situation was not dealt with, as an increasing number of comfort women recruiters were being investigated by the police as kidnappers. Therefore, it ordered the military to thoroughly and strictly monitor and supervise private contractors and to collaborate closely with local and military police.

The next evidence is Kodama Kyuzo's (兒玉久藏) testimony at the

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<sup>9</sup> 軍慰安所従業婦等募集に関する件, 支受大日記(密) 基10 昭和13年自3月3日至3月11日. Catalogue Reference: 陸軍省-陸支密大日記-S13-6-115, no. 242.

International Military Tribunal for the Far East, IMTFE, a.k.a., Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal, Record Number 265.<sup>10</sup> Colonel Kodama served in the Military Administration Bureau during the Pacific War and testified during the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal. According to his testimony, the Ministry of War sent out the following instructions to occupying forces as preventive measures of war crimes: (1) Distribute the guideline booklet *Wartime Service Requirements* (戦時服務提要), published by the Inspectorate General of Military Training (教育総監部), to all officers and instruct them to follow its instructions in occupied territories; (2) Dispatch a military discipline inspection team (軍紀風紀査察團), specifically composed of staff from the Ministry of War of the central government, to various locations in China for two months to conduct surveys and give instructions on comfort stations while taking measures such as expanding the stations in accordance with the survey outcome; and (3) Expand and supplement comfort station facilities.

The booklet *Wartime Service Requirements* was issued on May 25, 1938. Chapter 8, entitled ‘The Hygiene of Troops,’ gave instructions as follows: “Find effective prevention for STDs and equip comfort stations with complete sanitation facilities. In addition, strictly control any access to unlicensed prostitutes and local Chinese.” This instruction reveals that the Ministry of War tried to control and supervise the installation and the management of comfort stations in all of its occupied territories.<sup>11</sup> The other instructions in Kodama’s testimony also clearly indicate that the Ministry of War was directly involved in the installation and the expansion of comfort stations in its occupied territories on the premise of preventing war crimes.

The next document to examine is “Instructions Regarding the Troops’ Conduct toward Local People,” which Okabe Naozaburo (岡部直三郎), Chief of Staff of the Japanese Northern China Area Army, issued to each contingent force in June, 1938. The document ordered to accelerate the installation of the comfort stations as quickly as possible, since

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<sup>10</sup> International Military Tribunal for the Far East, *Stenographic Record of International Military Tribunal for the Far East VI* (Tokyo: Yushodo Shoten, 1968), 483-500.

<sup>11</sup> Yoshimi Yoshiaki, *A Sourcebook of Japanese Military Comfort Women*, 161-63.

“misconduct toward local people is provoking their resentment and anti-Japanese sentiment and is providing anti-Japanese communists with excuses to incite natives.” The document warned that the troubling situation was obstructing the troops in keeping order and conducting missions in its occupied territories.<sup>12</sup>

The misconduct specified in the document was the raping of Chinese women and girls, which was “occurring frequently in various places.” The Chinese of this period maintained strong traditional Confucian values, such that they considered raping a woman or a girl to be a more serious crime than anything else. Japan’s military leadership ordered the installation of comfort stations to prevent its soldiers from raping local women or girls and thereby provoking anti-Japanese sentiment.

Another interesting document is “Measures to Raise the Morale of Soldiers, Learned from the War in China,” a report written by the Ministry of War based on two months of research on the ground in 1939. Completed in 1940, this report was distributed to all of the army commands as a mental education textbook for soldiers.<sup>13</sup> The report pointed out that frequent misconduct by soldiers, such as looting, rape, arson, and killing prisoners, since the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War, had been undermining the reputation of the Imperial Army and had been inciting aversion to the so-called ‘holy war’ from both inside and outside Japan. This also disrupted the order in Japan’s occupied territories and aggravated its international relations, thus disrupting its overall strategies in the war. In order to amend this situation, the report instructed its readers to “consider installing comfort stations” and in particular to “reinforce the facilities of comfort stations using any possible means.”

The four documents discussed above have demonstrated that the Japanese military leadership directly ordered the installation of comfort stations. Apparently, the military leadership considered comfort stations a solution to prevent soldiers from committing crimes such as rape, looting,

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<sup>12</sup> Yoshimi Yoshiaki, *A Sourcebook of Japanese Military Comfort Women*, 209-11.

<sup>13</sup> 陸密 第1955号 支那事変の経験より觀たる軍紀振作対策. Catalogue Reference: 中央-軍事行政 その他-42, no. 9.

and arson, which were raising anti-Japanese sentiment and deteriorating international opinion, thus resulting in the loss of Japanese forces.

The following examples illustrate how comfort stations were typically installed at the command of the military leadership in occupied territories.<sup>14</sup> The Japanese China Central Area Army ordered the installation of comfort stations in its contingent units in December 1937. The Shanghai Expeditionary Force had the Office of the Chief of the Second Section draft the installation and the operation plan for the comfort stations and set up comfort stations in Nanjing under the command of Colonel Chō Isamu (長勇). During the same period, Chief of Staff of the Tenth Army, Terada Masao (寺田雅雄), mobilized military police to set up comfort stations in Huzhou (湖州). Although no record has been found, it was likely that Lieutenant-General Okabe's army underwent the same process to install comfort stations in the Northern China Area Army.

Finally, there was a case where more comfort women were dispatched because troops were transferred or engaged in battles. This was the case of the Third Dulishan (獨立山) Artillery Regiment. Originally, this regiment belonged to the Third Division of the Second Army, but after participating in the attack on Nanchang (南昌), it was transferred to the 16th Division to be part of the attack on Wuhan (武漢), and was then stationed in Yingshan (應山). This regiment already had its own comfort station, but since it frequently moved to different locations to participate in battles, its superiors gave instructions to increase comfort women in order to raise soldiers' morale and prevent rapes in their occupied territory.<sup>15</sup>

### 3. Recruitment of Comfort Women

Comfort women were recruited by and large in one of two ways depending on the comfort station locations: 1) the occupying troops recruited them directly from their stationed areas; or 2) they were recruited from Japan, Ko-

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<sup>14</sup> Yoshimi Yoshiaki-Hayashi Hirofumi, *Comfort Women of Japanese Army* (Tokyo: Otsuki Shoten, 1995), 16-17.

<sup>15</sup> Yoshimi Yoshiaki, *A Sourcebook of Japanese Military Comfort Women*, 219-23.

rea, or Taiwan and were transferred to the war zones. The following case of comfort stations installed in China demonstrates in detail the process of comfort women recruitment in occupied territories.

### 1) Recruitment in Occupied Territories

The most noticeable difference between recruitment in an occupied territory and that in a colony is that in the occupied territories the military directly conducted the procurement of comfort women. Each expeditionary force instructed its contingent units to install comfort stations, then the commissariat, accounting department, and military police conscripted prostitutes under the supervision of the rear or the deputy chief of staff of each division, brigade, or regiment. Even in such cases, it was common for the force to request assistance from local influentials, a request that could not be refused as subjects in an occupied area. To avoid STDs, troops also forcibly conscripted local women who were not prostitutes. They even abducted women or girls at times during so called "crackdown" missions.<sup>16</sup> As for the Korean comfort women, most were recruited in Korea. Very few cases were from occupied territories according to their testimonies. In fact, Kim Hak-sun was one of the latter cases. She was abducted by Japanese soldiers on her way to Shanhaiguan, China with her stepfather and was sent to a comfort station in 1941 when she was only 17 years old.<sup>17</sup>

### 2) Recruitment in Japan, Korea, and Taiwan

Having private contractors at the forefront was the most typical form of comfort women recruitment in Japan, Korea, and Taiwan. Nevertheless, the Japanese government and military were involved in the process of supervising and controlling private contractors. First, in Japan, the recruitment began when expeditionary forces or the Ministry of War requested the Home Ministry to send prostitutes for their comfort stations. In re-

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<sup>16</sup> Yoshimi Yoshiaki, *A Sourcebook of Japanese Military Comfort Women*, 112-19.

<sup>17</sup> The Korean Council for Justice and Remembrance for the Issues of Military Sexual Slavery by Japan, ed., *The Korean Military Comfort Women, Who were Taken by Force (I)* (Seoul: Hanul, 1993), 35-37.

sponse to the request, the Home Ministry designated to each prefectural government the number of prostitutes to procure. After receiving this order from the central government, the local police began to choose private contractors who were to actually carry out the recruitment.

A document that illustrates this process clearly is an official notice from the Home Ministry to five prefectures.<sup>18</sup> Two men, Kumon Arifumi (久門有文), a major in the army's aviation squad and a staff officer from Furushō's (古莊) Army of the South China Expeditionary Force, and an unnamed manager of the Recruitment Division of the War Ministry came to the Home Ministry to request 400 comfort women to send to the South China Expeditionary Force (the 21st Army). In response to the request, the Home Ministry issued the aforementioned notice in November 1938, specifying the number of comfort women each of the five prefectures were required to recruit, including 100 women from Osaka, 100 from Hyogo, and 100 from Fukuoka. The notice also instructed the local police to designate private contractors to procure comfort women. Prior to this, in February 1938, the Home Ministry had restricted the recruitment of comfort women to only prostitutes in the profession of 21 years of age or older. In addition, it instructed the local police to employ credible procurers who could run comfort stations. Accordingly, the 400 Japanese comfort women dispatched to the 21st Army were most likely prostitutes of 21 years of age or older.

As in Japan, the recruitment process in Korea also began with a request from an expeditionary force to the Government-General Office of Korea or the Commander Office of the Japanese Army in Korea. It is likely that the Government-General of Korea also assigned each province the number of comfort women to procure and had local police designate private contractors to recruit women, but no specific document to evince this has been found so far. Nevertheless, there is credible testimony that supports the view that the Government-General of Korea was involved in

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<sup>18</sup> 支那渡航婦女に関する件、内務大臣決裁書類：昭和13年(下). Catalogue Reference: 平9警察 00286100, no. 24 (<https://www.digital.archives.go.jp/img/pdf/1022670>).

comfort women recruitment in Korea.

Hara Zenshirō (原善四郎), a former rear deputy chief of staff of the Kwantung Army, wrote in his book that the Kwantung Army drafted a plan to conscript 20,000 Korean women for comfort stations around July 1941 and made a request to the Government-General of Korea which recruited 8,000 Korean comfort women in response.<sup>19</sup> No other record has been found so far to underpin this claim, but it is highly plausible to believe that the Government-General of Korea was in fact deeply involved in the recruitment of Korean comfort women.

Another record that indirectly supports the Government-General of Korea's involvement in the recruitment comes from the Home Ministry's document<sup>20</sup> with reference to Taiwan, a colonial state of Japan, as was Korea. The document contains the following statement: "With assistance from the Government-General of Taiwan, about 300 Taiwanese comfort women are ready to be shipped." This shows, with no doubt, that the Government-General of Taiwan was directly involved in the comfort women recruitment process and suggests that the same is true in the case of colonial Korea. There is another interesting statement in the document: "Designate a reliable agent (procurer) discreetly and have them recruit and transport comfort women to the destined places." Thus, the Japanese government and the military tried to hide their supervisory role over the whole process of comfort women recruitment by putting forth civilian agents.<sup>21</sup>

The documents discussed below also indicate that the Government-General of Korea was fully aware of the entire process of recruiting and transporting comfort women. These documents are correspondences be-

<sup>19</sup> Shimada Toshihiko, *Kwantung Army* (Tokyo: Chuko Shinsho, 1965), 176; Senda Kakou, *Japanese Military Comfort Women* (Tokyo: Sanichi Shobo, 1978), 102-03.

<sup>20</sup> 支那渡航婦女に関する件, 内務大臣決裁書類・昭和13年(下). Catalogue Reference: 平9警察00286100, no. 24 (<https://www.digital.archives.go.jp/img/pdf/1022670>).

<sup>21</sup> Yoshimi Yoshiaki, *A Sourcebook of Japanese Military Comfort Women*, 142-43. These two documents between the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Government-General of Taiwan also gave a hint of their attempt to maintain secrecy regarding the comfort women. These handwritten messages contain written and crossed-out phrases exemplified by those in parentheses in the following sentence: "(It is not good to issue passports) to comfort women and transport them (by military vessels)."

tween the Japanese consulate in Hankou (漢口) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in November 1939. Three months later, the Chinese city had been seized. One of the letters requested the Ministry to restrict those sailing to Hankou since the city was already crowded with 2,289 consulate-registered Japanese, 258 diners, cafés, tea rooms and restaurants, 220 general stores, and twenty comfort stations licensed by the commissariat, the military police, or the consulate. In response, the Ministry promised to limit the number of people crossing the sea to Hankou.<sup>22</sup> This document from Hankou was also delivered to the Government-General of Korea through the Ministry of Colonial Affairs (拓務省).<sup>23</sup> This fact suggests that the Government-General of Korea was supervising and controlling the maritime transport of people including comfort women.

Like the Government-General of Korea, there is also testimonial evidence that indicates the Japanese forces in Korea's involvement in comfort women recruitment. In November 1944, United States Infantry Colonel Wilendes Swift, who supervised the Southeast Asia Translation and Interrogation Center, submitted the report titled "Psychological Warfare: Interrogation Bulletin," based on his center's interrogations of Japanese prisoners. The report included accounts of prisoners who had managed wartime comfort stations.

Some Japanese restaurant owners in Seoul were asked in 1942 by the headquarters of the Japanese forces in Korea to manage comfort stations in Burma, and a prisoner was one of them. The Commander Office of the Japanese forces in Korea granted those civilian agents a license to recruit comfort women and a reference to request local military offices to provide them with as much food and medical supplies as possible. The prisoner recruited twenty-two unmarried Korean women between the ages of 17 and 29, some of whom had been trafficked, and boarded with them on a ship at Busan Port on July 10, 1942. On this voyage, 90 Japanese agents and 703 Korean comfort women boarded seven different ships after being provided

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<sup>22</sup> Yoshimi Yoshiaki, *A Sourcebook of Japanese Military Comfort Women*, 118-20.

<sup>23</sup> Yoshimi Yoshiaki, "Sending Japanese Military Comfort Women and the Government-General of Korea," *The Report on Japan's War Responsibility* 5 (September 1994): 32-36.

with free boarding passes from the Commander Office of the Japanese forces in Korea.<sup>24</sup>

Private contractors and the Japanese military recruited comfort women from Korea by and large using the following four methods: (1) job scams, (2) human trafficking, (3) kidnapping and abduction, and (4) arrests by authorities. It is difficult to pin down the exact method in more than a few comfort women cases, but overall, it can be said that job scams were the most commonly used in Korea.<sup>25</sup> Another point to note about Korean comfort women is that a large number of them were underage. According to a 1993 survey, approximately 90% of the 175 known Korean comfort women had been minors at the time of their first recruitment.<sup>26</sup>

#### 4. Transportation of Comfort Women

##### 1) Documents Required for Voyage

Both designated agents and recruited comfort women were required to carry a number of certificates on board to China. One of them was an identification certificate, which the local police chief issued at the request of the resident in Japan, Korea, or Taiwan before a voyage to China. As it had been in the midst of the Second Sino-Japanese War since September 1937, Japan required everyone to have an identification certificate in order to control civilians' entries to China. Accordingly, comfort women were also required to carry identification documents, but with the consent of the Japanese government and military, they were actually exempted, being classi-

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<sup>24</sup> Yoshimi Yoshiaki, *A Sourcebook of Japanese Military Comfort Women*, 458-59.

<sup>25</sup> For more information, please refer to Yun Myungsuk, "Formation of Korean Comfort Women during the Second Sino-Japanese War," *Bulletin of the Society for the Korean Historical Science* 32 (October 1994): 89-118.

<sup>26</sup> For more reference, see Jeong Jin-seong, "The Formation of the Japanese Military Comfort Women Policy and Its Change," in *The Second Korea-Japan Joint Research Council Report*, The Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan and The Center for Research and Documentation on Japan's War Responsibility, ed. (Seoul: The Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan and The Center for Research and Documentation on Japan's War Responsibility, 1993).

fied as a group affiliated with the military, along with their contractors.

Later, with the outbreak of the Pacific War in 1941, when comfort stations were expanded to Southeast Asia, voyage certifications of comfort women and private contractors became an issue again. In response, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs enabled comfort women to travel with military-issued identification certificates instead of passports.<sup>27</sup> This simplified protocol for comfort women and contractors conversely suggests that they could not go to Southeast Asia without permission from the military and were treated differently from other civilians. The Taiwan document discussed in the previous subsection also displays the imperial Japanese government's intent to hide the existence of comfort women.<sup>28</sup> The document included the following message, in which the phrases in parentheses were written and crossed out: "(Since we do not issue passports) for the agents and comfort women, issue them military certificates and transport them (using military vessels)."

Meanwhile, the local police provided conveniences to comfort station personnel regarding the issuance of identification certificates. Background checks, which were ordinarily necessary in order to issue an identification certificate, were dispensed with in the case of agents designated by the Home Ministry (police). In addition, agents designated by the expeditionary force were treated in the same way as military employees and automatically received a travel certificate to China (or an identification certificate) authorized by consulates without the consulate police checking their backgrounds.<sup>29</sup> With this travel certificate to China, one could eschew any background check in practice, even from the police in Japan.

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<sup>27</sup> Yoshimi Yoshiaki, *A Sourcebook of Japanese Military Comfort Women*, 143.

<sup>28</sup> 支那渡航婦女に関する件, 内務大臣決裁書類・昭和13年(下). Catalogue Reference: 平9警察00286100, no. 24 (<https://www.digital.archives.go.jp/img/pdf/1022670>).

<sup>29</sup> "Statement of Reasons to Travel to China (渡支事由證明書)," a travel certificate to China, was a document issued by a Japanese consulate in China for Japanese or colonial citizens returning to China. This certificate was required by local police chiefs in their homeland to apply for a shipboarding permit to China. In principle, comfort women recruiters were also required to submit a military-authorized certificate to receive a consulate's travel certificate to China, but in practice the step of obtaining consulate-issued travel certificates was passed over in various ways.

The following episode illustrates the special treatment that comfort women staff received in terms of traveling. A private contractor, running a comfort station attached to the Shioda (鹽田) Corps and the Hayashi (林) Regiment of the South China Expeditionary Force in Guangdong Province, returned to Taiwan in June 1940 to bring back more comfort women.<sup>30</sup> This private contractor recruited six more comfort women and requested the police of Takao Prefecture (高雄州), Taiwan for an identification certificate to sail back to the army base in Guangdong. Although this contractor did not have a travel certificate issued by the Guangdong consulate—something that every civilian needed in order to return to Guangdong—and although he only had military-issued identification, the Takao police facilitated his return with a special issuance of his identification certificate for an interesting reason. The stated reason for this special treatment was as follows: “Matters pertaining to comfort stations must be treated with in urgency; it was difficult for the contractor to go to the Guangdong Consulate to obtain a travel certificate, as the consulate was too far from the barracks.” To be certain, the privileges that other ordinary civilians could not receive at that time were given to comfort station personnel by the Japanese government and the Japanese military.

## 2) The Home Ministry's Supervision of Sea Travel

Civilians were required to carry police-issued identification certificates in order to travel by sea. Local police chiefs were required to check the identity, job, purpose of travel, qualification, and the duration of the stay of each applicant. In February 1938, the Japanese central government's Home Ministry sent out the following set of directions regarding comfort women to local governments: (1) Only recruit prostitutes 21 years of age or older, complying with international law, and who are without STDs; (2) Have comfort women visit their local police offices in person in order to apply for an identification certificate issuance and confirm the necessary qualifi-

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<sup>30</sup> Yoshimi Yoshiaki, *A Sourcebook of Japanese Military Comfort Women*, 130-32.

cations; and (3) Check if recruited women were kidnapped or trafficked.<sup>31</sup> These directions show that the Japanese government made efforts to a certain extent to prevent illegal recruitment on Japanese soil, but these efforts were not applied to Korea and Taiwan. It can be said that “the Japanese government did not take any preventive measures regarding the illegal recruitment of women in Korea and Taiwan” as they had done in Japan.<sup>32</sup>

The case of the private contractor for the South China Expeditionary Force also illustrates the different responses to illegal procurement of women in Japan and its colonies.<sup>33</sup> As discussed above, this contractor was able to obtain a travel certificate to China through the approval of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Government-General of Taiwan, and then the governor of Takao Prefecture, without the consulate-authorized certificate required for other ordinary civilians because he had a clear identity and purpose as a comfort station manager and recruiter of comfort women. According to this document, the comfort women he recruited from Taiwan were between the ages of 14 and 18 years old. In their testimonies, recorded in *Testimonies of Comfort Women from Korea: Forced Prostitution 1 & 2*, thirty-one out of thirty-four former Korean comfort women—that is, 91%—were under the age of 21 when they were first recruited.<sup>34</sup> These evidences indicates that the Japanese government clearly knew but turned a blind eye to the fact that underage girls were being recruited in Taiwan and Korea as wartime comfort women.

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<sup>31</sup> Yoshimi Yoshiaki, *A Sourcebook of Japanese Military Comfort Women*, 102-04.

<sup>32</sup> The Ministry of War was also aware of illegal acts by procurers of comfort women and had the responsibility to stop them. However, they did not take any actions to stop these illegal acts in Korea and Taiwan. Yoshimi Yoshiaki·Hayashi Hirofumi, *Comfort Women of Japanese Army*, 21.

<sup>33</sup> Yoshimi Yoshiaki, *A Sourcebook Japanese Military Comfort Women*, 134-37.

<sup>34</sup> The Korean Council for Justice and Remembrance for the Issues of Military Sexual Slavery by Japan, ed., *The Korean Military Comfort Women, Who were Taken by Force I* (Seoul: Hanul, 1993); The Korean Council for Justice and Remembrance for the Issues of Military Sexual Slavery by Japan, ed., *The Korean Military Comfort Women, Who were Taken by Force II* (Seoul: Hanul, 1993).

### 3) Responsibility of Transporting Comfort Women

Since the means of transportation has been discussed in Section 3 (Subsection 4), here the responsible bodies in the transportation of comfort women are investigated with reference to three documents. As the Home Ministry supervised the sea travel of its people in Japan, the military was the main agency which directed transportation or permitted boarding on military vessels. It is reasonable to speculate that the Government-General of Korea and the Japanese forces in Korea played similar roles. The Japanese forces in Korea provided free boarding passes to ships, in addition to other conveniences. Although it was private contractors who led and brought recruited women to designated military bases, this was because of the Japanese government's efforts to keep the existence of the comfort women a secret.

The first document concerns a case of transporting comfort women from Japan.<sup>35</sup> Four hundred comfort women were transported from Japan via Taiwan to comfort stations in China. They were recruited from five prefectures in Japan at the direction of the Home Ministry in response to a request from the South China Expeditionary Force. The Home Ministry and the Ministry of War provided contacts and gave directions for their transportation within Japan, but for travel to China, the army headquarters took charge. Both the government and the military authorities gave the contractor detailed instructions, from necessary means and a path of travel for precautionary measures. They also instructed the contractor to take the recruited prostitutes to Taiwan discreetly and transfer them to a fishing boat or use a ferry from Takao to Guangdong.

The second document is a case of transportation from Taiwan to Borneo.<sup>36</sup> At the request of the Japanese forces in Southeast Asia, the headquarters of the Japanese forces in Taiwan had its military police designate three contractors. They requested the Minister of War to allow those contractors to travel to China on March 12, 1942 and received permission on March 16 through the deputy chief of the Japanese force in Taiwan. The

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<sup>35</sup> 支那渡航婦女に関する件, 内務大臣決裁書類・昭和13年(下). Catalogue Reference: 平9警察 00286100, no. 24 (<https://www.digital.archives.go.jp/img/pdf/1022670>).

<sup>36</sup> Yoshimi Yoshiaki, *A Sourcebook of Japanese Military Comfort Women*, 144-46.

three contractors boarded a ship with fifty recruited Taiwanese women.

The third document concerns the transportation of Korean comfort women. The Japanese forces in Korea also designated contractors at the request of the Japanese forces in Southeast Asia and provided them with various conveniences. They transported recruited women on a 4,000-ton vessel.<sup>37</sup>

All of these records indicate that although civilian contractors transported recruited women to comfort stations in occupied territories, it was the Japanese government or the Japanese military that supervised the entire process behind the scenes.

## 5. Operations of Comfort Stations

### 1) Types of Comfort Stations

There were three types of wartime comfort stations depending on the relationship between the military and the private contractor, and the extent of the military's supervision and control. The first were direct military-operated comfort stations, which the military oversaw and managed directly without contracting any civilian agents. The second were military-affiliated comfort stations, which had contracted civilian agents but were in practice operated by the military. These military-affiliated comfort stations were the most common type and housed the largest number of identified Korean comfort women.

The third were military-designated private brothels, which were originally for civilians but provided services to occupying troops. However, as the presence of the Japanese forces expanded in occupied territories, many of these became military-affiliated comfort stations, especially at the rear of battlefields.<sup>38</sup> This status change subjected those brothels to the supervision and the control of the military but brought many benefits as well, thus the contracts were mutually beneficial to both the military and the brothel owners.

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<sup>37</sup> Yoshimi Yoshiaki, *A Sourcebook of Japanese Military Comfort Women*, 459.

<sup>38</sup> Yoshimi Yoshiaki, *A Sourcebook of Japanese Military Comfort Women*, 177-80.

## 2) Direct Military-Operated Comfort Stations

The most typical case of this type was the 'Army Recreation Center (陸軍娛樂所)' installed in Yangjiazhai (楊家宅), Shanghai in January 1938.<sup>39</sup> It was first managed by the Chief Office of the 11th Army Commissariat. It housed 109 comfort women, eighty of whom were Koreans recruited from a coal mining town in Kyushu. The center was built by the engineering corps (營繕部) of the same army and comprised of thirteen buildings, including a management office with barbed wire walls. The chief of staff office of the same army drafted and circulated regulations entitled "Military Recreation Center Regulations" for the center. According to these regulations, only military personnel could use this center, and they were required to buy a ticket at the management office, where they were to pay the comfort women. The fee was 2 yen and the time of use was limited to 30 minutes.

Two more examples of military-operated comfort stations were in Indonesia.<sup>40</sup> One was a navy-operated comfort station of the Balebale Coast Guard of the Second Navy. Its manager was the lieutenant colonel of the same division and the buildings were under the ownership of the same force, where the soldiers lived with 11 Indonesian comfort women. Another station belonged to the Kendari navy force unit, whose supervisor was a captain. The unit had 28 Indonesian comfort women who were living on food, clothes, and beddings provided by the troops.

## 3) Military-Affiliated Comfort Stations

These comfort stations were under the name of private contractors but their *de facto* managers were the military. The following examples illustrate how the military and the civilian contractors were associated in terms of the operation of the military-affiliated comfort stations. Two comfort stations were attached to the Nakayama Guards and the Toyama Regiment, the 13th Brigade of the Independent Infantry, and another was attached to

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<sup>39</sup> For more information, refer to Takasaki Ryūji, *A Sourcebook of Battlefield Reports by Japanese Military Doctors* (Tokyo: Fuji Shuppan, 1990), 55-85; Senda Kakou, *Japanese Military Comfort Women*, 37-65.

<sup>40</sup> Yoshimi Yoshiaki, *A Sourcebook of Japanese Military Comfort Women*, 373-74.

the Iloilo branch unit of the Visayas Office of the Philippine Military Administration Headquarters.<sup>41</sup> Their conditions and forms varied depending on the attached barracks, but they shared one common characteristic: civilian contractors were managers in name only, and the deputy or the administrative officer were *de facto* managers, supervising the entire operation of the comfort stations.

The civilian contractors had to submit a daily report, as well as a report early each month regarding the previous month's operations, to the military supervisor of the comfort station. The daily report recorded the names of comfort women, their incomes, and visitors by rank (officers, noncommissioned officers, and privates), while the monthly report meticulously recorded the monthly incomes and the work days of each comfort woman, as well as the income of each contractor. The military doctor of the garrison supervised all the sanitary and health matters of its comfort stations, including checking comfort women for STDs and even monitoring their diets. In addition, the accounting officer (主計官) supervised the bookkeepers of the stations. The civilian contractors were, on the other hand, in charge of supervising and controlling comfort women. They were to keep an eye on women's actions, including their outings. Should anything happen, they were required to report it to the military staff immediately and receive directions. They also had to submit daily and monthly reports to the military.

Regulations on the use of comfort stations also illustrate how military-affiliated comfort stations were operated. The regulations defined the time of use, fees, and off days, down to specific details. Comfort stations were open from 9:00 a.m. to midnight and hours of use were divided by ranks: privates could visit the comfort stations from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., non-commissioned officers and civilian workers from 4:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.,

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<sup>41</sup> 軍人俱樂部利用規定, 諸規定綴 (23A 独立歩兵13旅団) (広東) 昭和19年度. Catalogue Reference: 支那-大東亞戦争南支-99, no. 13; Suzuki Yuko, Yamashita Yon'e, and Tomomura Masaru, eds., *Complete Compilation of Documents on the Japanese Military Comfort Women I* (Tokyo: Akashi Shoten, 2006), 460-62; Asian Women's Fund, ed., *Government Investigation: Complete Compilation of Documents on Military Comfort Women 3* (Tokyo: Ryukei-shosha, 1997), 187-93.

and officers and cadets from 7:00 p.m. to midnight.

The service fees for comfort women were determined differently according to their nationalities; for instance, the service fee for Japanese women was 2 yen per hour, for Korean women 1 yen and 50 sen, and Chinese women 1 yen. The fees were paid to the management office in cash or military currency and the buyers received a numbered ticket, or sometimes paid the comfort women directly.

Comfort women were allowed one day off once a month and had to be tested for STDs every 7 to 10 days by military doctors. Their outings were very restricted. Before leaving the comfort station, comfort women were required to obtain permission in advance, and the areas and the times for them to freely go about were strictly limited as well. As such, the women's activities were thoroughly controlled by the military.

Meanwhile, the barracks regulations of the Second Independent Heavy Siege Artillery Battalion (獨立攻城重砲兵) in Changzhou (常州) specified directions, such as "Make sure to pay fees" and "Be cautious and do not use violence at the comfort stations."<sup>42</sup> The existence of these regulations suggests that it was not uncommon for soldiers to neglect paying fees or the use violence against women.

#### 4) Conditions of Comfort Women

Comfort women had to follow the regulations of their comfort stations. As mentioned above, many Korean comfort women were young virgins. For instance, Kim Hak-Sun testified that she had lost her virginity on the day of her arrival at the comfort station to an officer who had raped her. In general, they were required to work 10 hours a day. According to the survey by South Korea's Ministry of Health and Welfare, 8 out of 22 Korean comfort women had to serve 20-30 men a day on average. According to a study by The Korean Council for Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery, 11

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<sup>42</sup> 常州駐屯内務規定 昭和13年3月 獨立攻城重砲兵第2大隊, 獨立攻城重砲兵第2大隊 關係資料 常州駐屯内務規定警備間教育規定 (1938). Catalogue Reference: 支那-支那事変上海・南京-270, no. 2.

women out of 32 had a similar workload.<sup>43</sup>

The working and living conditions that comfort women experienced were detrimental to their health. In particular, venereal diseases caused them the greatest agony. As discussed previously, one of the reasons for the Japanese military to build comfort stations was to prevent venereal diseases among soldiers. However, a research report by a military doctor indicated that venereal diseases had become more rampant in barracks because comfort stations had increased the possibility of soldiers contracting STDs from women there.<sup>44</sup> It seems evident that many soldiers and comfort women suffered from STDs. A document with specific numbers sheds light on the severity of the situation: The medical corps of the 15th Division published “Health Service Reports” (衛生業務要報), which recorded the results of STD tests for women working at comfort stations in four to six cities in China, including those in Nanjing, for a duration of three months from December 1942 to February 1943. The report relates that the number of infected women increased monthly, from 71 cases out of 568 tested women (12.5%) in December, to 84 out of 540 (15.6%) in January, and then to 143 cases out of 628 (22.9%).<sup>45</sup>

The Japanese military made numerous efforts to eradicate STDs in its barracks, which included testing comfort women once a week, but their endeavors all failed. Kojima’s testimony illuminates one of the reasons for the failure to control STDs: He stated that Japanese soldiers, as “the great emperor’s troops,” considered it a great dishonor to contract a venereal disease, and thus, whenever they became infected, they tried to hide it.<sup>46</sup> Another report revealed that soldiers seldom used any STD prevention tools.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Yun Jeong-ok, “Wartime Comfort Women as Part of Japan’s Colonial Policy in Korea,” in *The Truth About Comfort Women in the Japanese Military*, The Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery, ed. (Seoul: Yeoksabipyongosa, 1997), 280.

<sup>44</sup> Yoshimi Yoshiaki, *A Sourcebook of Japanese Military Comfort Women*, 224-33.

<sup>45</sup> Asian Women’s Fund, ed., *Government Investigation: Complete Compilation of Documents on Military Comfort Women 3* (Tokyo: Ryukei Shosha, 1997), 213-25.

<sup>46</sup> Nishino Rumiko, *Japanese Military Comfort Women: Testimony of Former Soldiers* (Tokyo: Akashi Shoten, 1992), 89-91.

<sup>47</sup> Yoshimi Yoshiaki, *A Sourcebook of Japanese Military Comfort Women*, 271.

The amount of STD prevention tools was not sufficient, because soldiers also used them at unlicensed brothels, violating the strict ban of the military. Furthermore, soldiers were also reluctant to use these STD prevention tools.

Finally, the testing itself seemed to be inadequate. STD tests were usually conducted by military doctors, not by STD specialists, and even such non-specialist doctors were insufficient in number. Thus, ordinary medics or even senior comfort women sometimes performed the tests.<sup>48</sup> As can be seen, the once-a-week testing of STDs was oftentimes merely a routine name-only procedure.

Some accused comfort women as the main cause of the rampant venereal diseases in the barracks, but the truth was the other way around. Comfort women were subjected to rigorous testing for venereal diseases when recruited, so they apparently caught STDs from soldiers visiting the comfort stations. Thus, it must be remembered that comfort women—rather than their inflictors—were the most numerous victims of STDs.

## Conclusion: Implications of the Korean Wartime Comfort Women Issue

This paper has investigated facts revealing how the Japanese government and the military were involved in the overall comfort women policy, with a focus on “the violation of individual human rights by a state,” one of the four essential issues concerning Imperial Japan’s wartime comfort women system (discussed in Section 1). The remainder of this paper summarizes this investigation and concludes with Japan’s national responsibility in the wartime comfort system while offering an opinion on the current dispute over national reparations. Additionally, some facts that have not been in-

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<sup>48</sup> Center for Research and Documentation on Japan’s War Responsibility, “The First Report on the Issue of Japan’s Military “Comfort Waman”: The Historical and Legal Investigations of the Japanese Military Comfort Women Issue,” *Center for Research and Documentation on Japan’s War Responsibility* (March 1994). This manuscript was drafted by Center for Research and Documentation on Japan’s War Responsibility but not published.

cluded in the main text will be briefly presented below.

## 1. The Japanese Government's National Responsibility for Wartime Comfort Women

This paper has examined a number of documents that prove the Japanese government and the military's involvement in the installation and the operation of wartime comfort stations. These documents reveal that Imperial Japan's military drafted and directed the installation of comfort stations. The imperial Japanese military's involvement in recruiting women and girls for comfort stations was also evinced in various documents: the military directly recruited women in occupied territories, in colonies such as Korea, the Government-Generals and the headquarters of the Japanese forces designated civilian contractors, ignored their various illegal activities in the process of procuring comfort women and girls, and provided them with special conveniences such as travel permits. In addition, recruited women were transported via military or other Japanese national vessels. Comfort stations, whether owned by the military or civilian contractors, were directly run and managed by the military in practice. To conclude, borrowing the former comfort station manager Katsuki's (香月久治) words, "the military headquarters supervised everything including sales" of wartime comfort stations.<sup>49</sup>

The reality of the human rights' violations against the comfort women can be summed up as 'rape' and 'sexual slavery.' In the process of recruiting these women, various illegal methods were employed, including job scams and abductions. It is known that 22 Korean comfort women, including several minors sent to Burma (present-day Myanmar) were recruited through human trafficking, which violated the contemporaneous international law. Comfort women who were recruited through job scams were also mostly bound by a cash-advance contract by subcontractors and desig-

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<sup>49</sup> "Special Report: Korean Comfort Women—the Responsible of the Japanese Imperial Army," TBSテレビ, December 15, 1991.

nated procurers and thus, were victims of debt slavery, which again violated the contemporaneous international law.

From the moment they were recruited as comfort women, they had lost their physical freedom. They were forced to work 13 to 14 hours each day regardless of their will; when they refused, they were frequently subjected to violence. They were not allowed to move or leave freely. They had only one day off each month, and many women died suffering from venereal or endemic illnesses. Following campaigning troops to battlegrounds, they were not only forced to provide sexual services but were also placed at the risk of death. As in the case of STDs, the comfort women's health received little care and attention. Many comfort women were not paid, and when paid, they received military currencies which became useless with the defeat of Japan. It is a widely known fact that Japan did not compensate for any military scrips that they had issued during the war. These also clearly violated the provisions of international laws that ban forced labor, limit working hours, guarantee pay for labor, and maintain the health of workers.

Japan had a long history of managing public brothels and had a strong cultural tradition that regarded prostitutes as subhuman. Also, Japanese society at that time still maintained medieval sexism toward women. All these negative societal views contributed to the discrimination and the abuse of comfort women. Racial discrimination was also inflicted upon comfort women from colonies such as Korea, as exemplified by the lower service fees allotted to Korean comfort women, which were only about 70% of those of their Japanese counterparts.

## 2. Reparations to Victims

The numerous sufferings that comfort women had to endure were rooted in Japan's wartime comfort station policy, and the *de facto* supervisor of comfort stations was the Japanese government and the military. Accordingly, it is justifiable for comfort women to demand the Japanese government's acknowledgement of its national responsibility as well as its apology and individual compensation.

In response to these demands, the Japanese government has acknowledged only its moral responsibility, admitting the involvement of military and local authorities but not that of the central government. It formed The Asian Women's Fund and began the payment of "atonement money," but not individual reparations. Still, the Japanese government has denied any legal responsibility for Korean comfort women because, it claims, except for Taiwan and North Korea, it has already resolved all of the issues relating to reparations and property claims through the 1965 Treaty on Basic Relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea and thus has no reason to compensate individuals again.

With this being its position, even if Japan were to acknowledge its national responsibility, the issue of the Korean comfort women would be impossible to resolve without the Korean government's clarification of its stance on the 1965 Korea-Japan treaty. The Korean government must clarify whether the treaty has actually absolved Japan's responsibility toward individual Koreans and relinquished individual Koreans' rights to claims toward the state of Japan. Meanwhile, international law provides a legal interpretation that separates international reparations from individual rights to claim, an issue which this paper will leave to legal experts for further research.

The Asian Women's Fund that the Japanese government has established is clearly a recompense that eschews its national responsibility. Thus, most comfort women victims have been refusing to accept it. However, for the two aforementioned reasons individual compensation by the Japanese government is not likely to be accomplished anytime in the near future, and we must consider the fact that comfort women victims are in their senior years.

At present, Koreans demand that the Japanese government acknowledge its national responsibility, provide compensation to individual victims with an apology, and punish the responsible. This stance has its own justification, but seven comfort women victims are receiving the "atonement money" from the Asian Women's Fund at the moment. Therefore, we should ask ourselves if it is fair to demand the victims to refuse the money without shouldering their burden together. If Koreans want comfort women

to pursue the Japanese government's apology and individual reparations to the end, then we must share their pain and burden, providing them with mental and financial support.

The reality is not very positive. On October 18, 1996, an organization known as the "Citizens' Solidarity to Find the Right Solutions for the Issue of Japan's Wartime Sex Slaves" (henceforth, "Citizens' Solidarity") was launched in order to share the victims' burden and facilitate their cause demanding Japan's national reparations. The initial goal of this organization was to raise approximately 2 trillion 200 million KRW, which includes the 2 million-yen "atonement money" that Japan's Asian Women's Fund promised to pay for each of the 160 comfort women victims. However, only 5.5 million KRW was raised by the time the "Citizens' Solidarity" was dissolved on May 28, 1997.

Although civic movements for comfort women victims do exist, such as *Nanum ui jip*, or the House of Sharing, which provides a home and financial support for comfort women victims, I wish to emphasize that we must extend this civic effort to the national level in order to adequately support comfort women victims. Only then can we encourage the victims to refuse the "atonement money" and fight for Japan's reparations to individuals.

I personally believe that the decision to receive the Asian Women's Fund or not should be left to each individual victim. At the same time, no one should criticize the victims who have collected the "atonement money" paid as a moral recompense from the Japanese government while continuing to demand the Japanese government's legal responsibility for individual compensation. It is not difficult to imagine that serious conflict will ensue between the victims who want to receive the Asian Women's Fund and those who insist on refusing it among various groups that support the victims. In order to prevent such conflict and bring about Japan's national compensation to individual victims, Koreans as a whole must make efforts to share the victims' burdens. Additionally, more forceful demands must be made to the Japanese government in order to reveal the truth and disclose relevant documents, while Korean and Japanese researchers, including this author, must make efforts to find the truth.

### 3. Implications of the Wartime Comfort Women Issue

Finally, as a woman, I would like to discuss the implications that the wartime comfort women issue holds for Koreans. It took as many as 46 years for Kim Hak-sun to reveal that she used to be a comfort woman. For this period of time, she had to lead a life hiding her painful past.

Why did she have to keep her silence? She said that she could come out revealing her name because “no family member or others are left now to be harmed or ashamed because of my testimony.” In other words, one of the most important reasons that she remained silent that long was because of the long-held traditional Korean view of women, i.e. the view that women who are not able to keep their chastity and virginity have no worth as women. It is not an exaggeration that this ethical concept or ideology about women led the victims to remain silent about the brutal violation of their human rights in colonial Korea.

Koreans could not protect their country from the Japanese imperialists, thereby resulting in victims of wartime sex slavery living through all that suffering on their land. It cannot be denied that Korean society has held a negative view of the sex slavery victims thus far, without realizing its collective responsibility as a nation. At this moment, one lesson that the comfort women issue gives us is a thorough awareness of the value of human rights above all in which to view a woman not merely as a female but as an independent human being.

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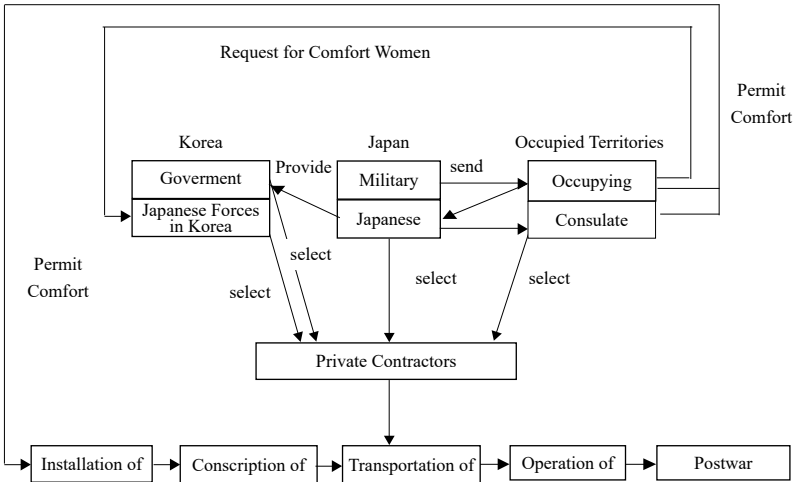
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## Appendix

### The Japanese Government's Supervision of the Wartime Comfort System 1 (Installation and Recruitment) - Korean Comfort Women -



## The Japanese Government's Supervision of the Wartime Comfort System 2 (Transportation and Operation) - Korean Comfort Women -

