

## Revisiting the “Comfort Women”: Moving beyond Nationalism

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Between 1931 and 1945, women from Japan, Korea, and China, as well as from other areas under Japanese occupation, were forced into sexual servitude at “comfort stations,” set up for the sexual release of Japanese soldiers. Ironically, the women were called “comfort women.” The cruelty with which the women were treated was not mentioned at postwar trials, and the issue was hushed up, and did not surface until half a century after the Second World War.

I became active in the movement initiated by Korean women activists to bring to light, and seek a resolution to the “comfort women” issue in September 1988, when, after completing my master’s degree at a Japanese university, I went to Korea to do further study in my specialty, Korean women’s history, at Ewha Woman’s University. While immersing myself in feminism and gender studies, I began to research the state-regulated prostitution system in Korea under Japanese rule, and became interested in the “comfort women” issue. Though I was a foreign student, I worked in the movement with enthusiasm from its start through its first ten years.

After a brief history of the “comfort women” system, I will discuss the problem I saw developing in the

approach taken by Korean activists. I was distressed that, as the movement took on an increasingly nationalist tone, the gendered aspect of the issue—namely, the state-sanctioned sexual exploitation and violence perpetrated against women—became diminished, even obscured. Finally I will reflect on a personal aspect of the process, on how working in this movement allowed me also to master my own identity crisis. As a person born of a Korean father and a Japanese mother, I had to learn to live in a world insistent on single national identities.

## **A History of the “Comfort Women”**

When the Japanese military intensified its invasion of the Chinese continent in the early 1930s, they began to establish “comfort stations.” By 1938 “comfort stations” had been established not only in China, but also in Manchuria, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, French Indochina, the Dutch East Indies, British Borneo, Burma, Thailand, Eastern New Guinea, Koror, Saipan, Truk, Halmahera, Guam, Taiwan, Korea, and Japan. As the locations expanded, so too did the nationalities vary of the women forced to have sex with Japanese soldiers. Just how many women were recruited is still unknown even today, but the foremost expert on the history of the “comfort women,” Yoshiaki Yoshimi, estimates the number between fifty thousand to two hundred thousand (Yoshimi 1995, 79).

One reason offered for the establishment of so many “comfort stations”—to prevent civilians from being raped in areas occupied by the Japanese Imperial Army—cited such incidents, as the Rape of Nanking.<sup>1</sup> The raping of civilians, officials believed, would damage the “dignity of the imperial army” and lead to retaliation from the local population (Hayao 1939, in

Yoshimi 1992). A second reason offered had to do with saving soldiers from sexual diseases, were they to frequent local brothels. In either case, providing for the sexual pleasure of soldiers was the essential reason for establishing “comfort stations,” referred to as “hygienic public convenience facilities” (Aso 1939).

Although “comfort stations” were run directly by the military as well as privately, Japan’s state-regulated prostitution system, established in the late nineteenth century, lay at their foundation. If the prostitutes seemed to be engaged in commercial transactions of their own volition, in reality, they were slaves bound by debts incurred by their impoverished families. As Japan continued its invasion of Asia after the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), this state-regulated prostitution system also spread. Norio Hayakawa has indicated that a similar system to the “comfort stations” had already been designed prior to the Russo-Japanese War, and that this practice could be traced back to the 1910s (Hayakawa 2002).

The system of prostitution adopted for wartime use “ranked” the women, using Japanese women for commissioned officers, and Korean, Taiwanese, Chinese, and Southeast Asian/Pacific women for noncommissioned officers and ordinary soldiers. Allegedly, many of the Japanese women had been prostitutes, and certainly many who were brought to the war zone came believing that they would be able to pay their huge debts. On the other hand, the same brokers also recruited poor rural Korean women, as well as young girls, many of them tricked by talk of good work opportunities, unaware of the “comfort stations.”

Korea had been aggressively colonized by Japan in August 1910, and had remained a colony until the defeat of Japan in the Second World War in August 1945. While brokers in the state-regulated prostitution system knew how to evade the laws related to

prostitution in Japan, they could even more easily mobilize Korean women for distant “comfort stations,” since applications of the rule of law were far less likely to be scrutinized in colonized areas (Totsuka 2004). One distinctive feature of the Japanese military’s “comfort stations” was that a large number of “comfort women,” particularly from colonized Korea, were mobilized to places to which the Japanese army was advancing. To manage the program all had to be involved—the military, government, police, colonial authorities, and the chain of those working in the sex industry. Further, the Japanese military’s sexual violence did not end with the “comfort station” system, for it was merely part of an organic structure of violence that included systematic rape and rape stations.

### **Breaking their Silence**

Among the Confucian norms firmly embedded in Korean society at that time was the duty of women to remain chaste. Unmarried women, therefore, who had left home, and been forced to work as “comfort women,” faced being labeled “defiled.” Even if they were somehow able to return home after the war, they could not reveal the truth about their experience. Were the truth known, women would despair.

In May 1990, Korean women broke the forty-five-year silence when a Korean women’s organization demanded that the issue be brought to light by the Japanese and Korean governments. The Japanese government first denied that it had any responsibility, arguing that civilian contractors had run the “comfort stations.” The campaign in South Korea continued to grow, and in the following year more former “comfort women” emerged to join in. The issue received media coverage throughout Japan and

Korea, and became an unresolved political issue between the two governments. The movement then spread rapidly through other Asian countries in which women had suffered similar abuse. Then women began to petition such international bodies as the United Nations and the International Labor Organization.

As the movement spread, documents surfaced revealing the Japanese army's participation, and the Japanese government admitted a certain degree of involvement in the "comfort stations." But it refused to make an official apology or to set up a legal mechanism for reparations, as demanded by the women. Previous conservative prime ministers from the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan had asserted that the "comfort women" had not been forced to have sex but, rather, had volunteered to prostitute themselves—and there are members of the Japanese Diet (national legislature) who continue to make this assertion today. For this view, the Japanese government has been criticized internationally. At a meeting of the United Nations Committee against Torture held in Geneva in May 2007, for example, a participant pointed out that the Japanese government should provide redress for the "comfort women." Bills criticizing the Japanese government have been introduced in the US House of Representatives (which passed a resolution in July 2007), as well as in the Canadian and Australian parliaments. Thus, the "comfort women" issue, first raised by Korean women's groups, has become an international issue of human rights.

### **My Involvement in the "Comfort Women" Movement**

Before going to South Korea in 1988 to start my studies at Ewha Woman's University, I had visited

former Japanese “comfort women” with Yuko Suzuki, a Japanese woman researching the issue. Through her, I met Professor Yun Jeong-Ok at Ewha in the fall of 1989, and my interest in the issue deepened further. Professor Yun had been single-handedly researching the Korean “comfort women” issue for the past ten years. I met with Professor Yun frequently. With several other graduate students, in 1990 we established a small research group in the Department of Women’s Studies. Previous to that, many of the same students had been instrumental in getting a Korean women’s organization to issue a statement demanding that President Roh Tae-woo take up the issue of the “comfort women” publicly, as an unresolved issue of the Second World War on his visit to Japan in May of that year.

In November of the same year, our research group succeeded in organizing Chong-dae-hyeop, the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan (hereafter “the Korean Council”), marking the beginning of a new phase for the movement. I became very involved in the research group and the Korean Council. The work was key to all my interests, and I felt very good working hard to facilitate communications between Japanese civil society groups and the Korean Council.

In the course of my involvement in the Korean movement, a number of conflicts and differences of opinion and approach arose. First was the conflict over the question of whether or not Japanese “comfort women,” who were mostly licensed prostitutes, should be included in the same category as the “comfort women” who were sex slaves. The second conflict centered on the Korean strategy of opposing the Asian Women’s Fund. Both were, in my view, intertwined with Korean nationalism—that is, the tendency on the part of Koreans to approach the issue of the “comfort women” as a national issue, and one of an affront to

national pride and honor. My position, on the other hand, was that at its core was the issue of gender.

The concerns of students at Ewha Woman's University, when we first began to call attention to the "comfort women" issue, can be summarized into the following two points: first, anger that Korea and Japan, both male-dominated societies, had neglected it because it was considered a "women's issue," and, second, the failure of both countries to adequately settle the past. It was not until the democratization of Korean society in the late 1980s, and the strengthening of the women's movement that followed, that an end was brought to the long held silence about the "comfort women" and the "comfort women" movement was founded. Exposure of the 1986 incident of sexual torture at the Buchon police station (in Korea)<sup>2</sup> in particular, gave the women's movement an opportunity to discuss gender issues directly, and an awareness of sexual violence increased in the early 1990s, together with an analysis of its social causes, part of the theoretical development of women's studies in Korea. The efforts of former "comfort women" to uncover materials about what had happened to them, and of Christian women's organizations who were interested through their earlier work opposing *kiisen* tourism (sex tours to Korea),<sup>3</sup> were also important in increasing public awareness of the issues.

In addition to demanding that Japan apologize and provide reparations, the movement's members also attempted, in the process, to confront Korean society's patriarchal character—the reason why the issue had not surfaced for half a century following the end of World War II. As the movement evolved, however, both those in the movement and the general public gradually came to emphasize issues regarding nation and state, and the issue of women's rights receded to the background.

## **“Comfort Women” versus “Prostitutes”—A False Dichotomy**

In January 1992, at around the time of Japanese Prime Minister Miyazawa’s visit to Korea, an entry for “*yoja chongshindae*” (female workers in military factories) was found in an elementary school record from the colonial period in Seoul. Under the headline “Even young elementary school pupils were drafted as *chongshindae*,” nearly all newspapers in Korea reported that twelve-year-old girls had been forced to become “comfort women.”<sup>4</sup> This type of reporting led to a new wave of anti-Japanese sentiment in Korea, and the “comfort women” issue was used to emphasize Japanese brutality. To increase nationwide outrage over the “comfort women” issue, and thus increase pressure on the Japanese government, the Korean women’s movement emphasized that this was by no means an issue limited to Korean women, but rather one that reflected a “national suffering.” Professor Yun Jeong-Ok, representative of the Korean Council, said the following in a newspaper interview:

The issue of women drafted for military sexual slavery by Japan is by no means past history nor an issue that concerns only women. It remains a problem today because the remnants of colonial history have not been fully dealt with. In the past, Japan trampled upon our people with their military uniforms and swords. Today, they are replaying history with their suits and money, under the pretext of *kiisen* tourism. The issue of women drafted for military sexual slavery affects not only women but also Koreans as a whole, and this state-sponsored violence continues today.<sup>5</sup>

In response, Japanese neo-nationalists subscribing to the so-called “liberal view of history” (*jiyushugi*



shikan), argued (and still continue to argue) that there is no evidence or testimony proving that the women were taken by force and deny any responsibility on the part of the Japanese government. This issue became the focal point for both Korea and Japan. In August 1993, in the Japanese government's second report on its study of the issue, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono commented that "recruitment, transfer, and control [of the Korean comfort women] were conducted generally against their will, through coaxing and coercion" and "They lived in misery at comfort stations under a coercive atmosphere." The Korean government took these comments as the Japanese government's general admission of the coercive nature of the system.

The point I wish to emphasize is that the focus of the issue, whether by the Japanese or Korean governments or its peoples, became whether or not the women *were forced to work* in the "comfort stations." This point of view logically led to the suggestion that the women could become "comfort women" of their own volition, so that there could be no responsibility on the part of the Japanese government. The argument was that the "comfort women" system was a variety of Japan's state-regulated prostitution system at the time, so that "comfort women" and licensed prostitutes were the same. Rejection of this argument by the Korean side is clearly stated in a statement issued by the Korean Council in response to the Japanese government's second report:

Unlike Japanese prostitutes licensed under the state-regulated prostitution system, the "comfort women" were sex slaves forced by the national authorities to provide sex to soldiers. The Japanese government's report states: "As for the origin of comfort women who were mobilized to war areas, aside from the Japanese women, those from the Korean Peninsula accounted for a large part." It is clear that the nature of forced

mobilization of Korean women as sex slaves is different from what happened with Japanese women. Japanese women became “comfort women” under the state-regulated prostitution system in Japan. They received money, made contracts, and could quit when their contracts were up. Including the Japanese “comfort women” in the report like this is an attempt to obscure the coercive nature of the military’s comfort women system.<sup>6</sup>

Because this statement emphasizes the coercive nature of the Korean “comfort women” experience, it asserts by comparison that this was very different from the case of Japanese “comfort women” who were originally prostitutes.<sup>7</sup> Not only was this assertion based on a misconception, but it also led dangerously to the logic that because Japanese “comfort women” were originally prostitutes, they could not be considered sex slaves under the “comfort women” system. This began to sound similar to male-centered assertions by the Japanese right wing in their bifurcation of women into categories of “virgin or prostitute,” and “forced or voluntary,” in their attempt to downplay the criminality of the “comfort women” system.

This perception of the “comfort women” held by most Korean activists and scholars differed critically from my own. As I discovered in the process of debates, it was based on a misconception of Japan’s state-regulated prostitution system that existed at the time in Japan and in its colonies, such as Korea and Taiwan, specifically, that the Japanese women were engaged in commercial transactions of their own volition.

Prostitution in licensed quarters had been allowed in Japan since the sixteenth century. Most of the women were trafficked. The Maria Luz incident <sup>8</sup> in 1872 became a trigger for the Meiji government to declare the so-called Emancipation Decree for Prostitutes,

which banned human trafficking, restricted apprenticeships, and rendered advanced loan contracts invalid. The government and society at the time, however, did not consider prostitution itself inhumane. The year after the decree, Tokyo Prefecture issued Official Decree No. 145 on regulations for brothels, prostitutes and female performers, and the modern state-regulated prostitution system took shape. The core logic behind the ordinance was that prostitution was allowed if it took place “with the desire” and “from the intentions” of the person in question.

Can it be claimed, however, that such women’s desires and intentions were the result of an exercise of their “free will”? Under the prevailing patriarchal legal order, women were not recognized as being entitled to the same social and legal rights as men, and the patriarchy extended also into regulation of the home. Even applying for a license to engage in prostitution required the consent of a close male family member, and in the case of a minor, the consent of the parents or grandparents. Adult women were not acknowledged as individuals with the ability to make their own decisions. Clearly, a woman’s will could easily be dominated by the family patriarch. No doubt, her freedom was extremely limited. Furthermore, selling one’s daughter into prostitution was one way to relieve family poverty, and some may have considered a daughter virtuous to sacrifice herself for her family. Perhaps women internalized such values. Perhaps women had no choice but to become prostitutes to save their families.

A contract for sexual services was not made on free, equal, and fair terms between the prostitute and customer, for the brothel owner held the real power in the exchange of money. The prostitute was not in charge of the commercial transaction, but merely the “goods” being exchanged. This treatment of the women was nothing short of slavery. Prostitutes lived

in designated quarters and needed permission from the police to leave the area. In 1900, the Interior Ministry issued a decree whereby prostitutes could freely leave the trade, the first law to expressly state this, but doing so was difficult in practice. Except for the rare circumstance in which a woman could borrow money to pay back her debt (in most cases incurred by her family) all at once, she was a caged bird until discarded as disabled or diseased. Were she to attempt escape, she would risk her life.

The Japanese state-regulated prostitution system was, in short, a contrivance to evade the law prohibiting slavery, using the pretext of the women's "free will" to justify human trafficking, the exploitation of licensed prostitutes, and the slave-like conditions of their service. My effort to explain this, and to point out the pitfall of attempting to make a sharp differentiation between "comfort women" and women in "voluntary prostitution," was not very successful at the time, though over the years I have gained more understanding. As complex, was a second problem inside the movement: the incapacity of either government to respond to the women as victims of sexual violence.

### **The Asian Women's Fund: Response to Women's Suffering**

From the beginning of the movement, the Japanese government adamantly refused to offer an official apology or to provide reparations. Instead in 1995, the Japanese coalition government created by the Liberal Democratic Party, Socialist Party, and Sakigake Party set up the Asian Women's Fund, through which it tried to demonstrate "moral responsibility."<sup>9</sup> However, it met full opposition from the Korean government and from Korean activists in particular, who saw it as

merely “hush money” and an attempt by the Japanese government to evade responsibility. Given the reality of conservative Japanese politics at the time, the establishment of this fund can be regarded to some degree as a demonstration of sincerity directed at the victims who survived the war.

Problems arose when some Korean women decided to accept the Japanese payments. As part of its efforts to obstruct the Asian Women’s Fund, in October 1996, the Korean movement established the Coalition of Citizens for Resolving the Issue of Sexual Slavery under the Japanese Military, composed of figures from different spheres of society. They began collecting their own relief funds domestically in Korea to try to discourage women from accepting money from the Asian Women’s Fund.

The call for funds was promoted as a way for “healing the sacrifices and wounds through the support of our people” and “caring (for the survivors) with our own hands.” Opposing the Asian Women’s Fund was a point of struggle not only for the survivors but also for Koreans as a whole, for the message claimed that defending the “comfort women” victims was the same as defending national pride. The character of the movement was made manifest in a public address on March 1, 1997, as part of Movement Commemoration Day<sup>10</sup>, calling for funds from fellow countrymen to help the former “comfort women”:

The Japanese Government continues to deny the facts constituting their crime and evade legal responsibility, including the payment of reparations. Taking advantage of the poor economic circumstances of the victimized *halmoni* (Korean word for “old woman”), it is offering consolation payment to the poor, elderly women through civilian funds, sacrificing them yet again for its own political ends instead of taking legal responsibility for its crimes. This ridicules the dignity and human rights of the

victims, as well as our national pride...Calling to mind the past sufferings of our people under Japanese colonial rule, we must now care for the *halmoni* with our own hands, and together heal the wounds from the unfortunate past. We intend to protect our *halmoni* so that they are not hurt again by imperialistic Japan's dirty money, so that our national pride is not insulted. This will be the beginning of our efforts to make Japan deal with the dregs of the colonial past and complete the establishment of our independent nation.

This meant, then, that rejecting the Asian Women's Fund was a movement "together to heal the wounds from the unfortunate past," and those who chose to accept the money were seen as abandoning the national movement, and thus were disqualified from receiving domestic funds. While there were some survivors who were able to benefit from the movement both materially and spiritually, and regain their national identity, the survivors who were disqualified expressed dissatisfaction at being alienated by the organizations that purported to support the victims.

I had no objection to the collection of domestic funds as a way to oppose the Asian Women's Fund started in Japan, but I was opposed to the exclusion of women who had accepted payment. I believed that, were there true concern for our compatriots, it should be directed at the victims, and that the movement should not prioritize national pride but, rather, the interests of the victims. The fact that they were Korean nationals was not the central issue, I believed. Their suffering was physical and mental, through sexual violence, which had no simple ending, but continued to cause survivors great agony. To help these women required an understanding of their suffering and the provision of professional treatment. One might suggest that activists wanting the trust of survivors needed a keen understanding of their years of suffering.

My own understanding of the situation of “comfort women,” though by no means complete, includes sharp regret for the fact that nationalist interests have overwhelmed the actual lives of the women themselves, not to mention the discrimination they have suffered. I found the work of Judith L. Herman (1996) on the trauma suffered by raped or battered women and survivors of war zones or forced detention camps very useful in this regard. The “comfort women” became sex slaves because of ethnic discrimination under colonial rule and a society that looked down on women. It is very difficult to treat the trauma sustained from sexual slavery when national issues—unresolved issues regarding colonial rule—are placed at the forefront. At the same time, activists have incurred suffering not only from confronting the Japanese government’s adamant denial of its culpability but also from their strained relationship with the survivors. The pain experienced both by Korea’s “comfort women” survivors and by activists is a legacy of the dual suppression endured both as colonized subjects and also as women. Both the colonial experience and the “comfort women” experience have left behind deep and complicated wounds that endure despite the passage of time.

### **Moving beyond Nationalism to Resolve My Identity Crisis**

When I initially went to study at Ewha Woman’s University, I had one other purpose in mind: to explore my identity. This crisis of identity began with the revelation, just prior to my graduation from elementary school which was run by Chongryon, a pro-North Korean organization in Japan,<sup>11</sup> that my mother—who I had always assumed to be a Zainichi Korean (Koreans or those of Korean roots residing in

Japan), as was my father, who had been born in Korea during Japan's occupation of that country and lived in Japan since the end of the Second World War,<sup>12</sup> was in fact Japanese. And because my parents had not legally married I was registered in my mother's family register,<sup>13</sup> and my brother and I had Japanese nationality. The revelation forced me to change my view of life radically, and led to the collapse of my sense of values, upon which essential elements of my identity were based. After having taught me that Japan was an enemy, my parents placed me in a Japanese middle school, at which point I began to use the Japanese name "Eiai Yamashita," the name that was recorded in the family register but one with which I felt no familiarity at all, rather than my Korean name "Choi Yeong-ae."

From then on, I found it difficult to find a comfortable space either in the community of Zainichi Koreans or the Japanese community. My identity was always divided between the North Korean, Zainichi Korean, and Japanese communities. Later, in college, when I joined Zainichi Korean groups, I always used my Korean name, which raised further confusion in my mind. Around that time I attended a series of monthly public seminars held by the *Ajia no onnatachi no kai* (Asian Women's Association, which later became the Asia-Japan Women's Resource Center), and when I spoke about my name and identity problem at one of the seminars, a woman suggested I use "Yeong-ae Yamashita," a combination of my Korean given name and my Japanese mother's family name. I had never thought of this before, and I felt as though a new door had opened for me. Using my new "double" name, however, did not solve my problem of identity, since neither Japan nor Korea accepts dual nationality, and both profess to be homogeneous states. Moreover, I continued to feel strong pressure from both the Japanese community and the Korean residents in



Japan to choose either my Korean or Japanese first and family names.<sup>14</sup>

Although I had traveled to Korea several times, I had never lived in South Korea, had never fully experienced its culture and atmosphere. I hoped to resolve my crisis in my father's native land where I could acquire his Korean language and culture, and become fully "Korean."

The conflicts of opinion with my Korean colleagues in the course of my participation in the "comfort women" movement rekindled my identity crisis. On numerous occasions when I voiced differing views, I was told, "You are not Korean, so you can never understand our way of thinking." This is when I realized that I was reliving what my Japanese mother had experienced in the past with Zainichi Korean women's groups. When I was young, my mother was an active member of a branch of the organization of Zainichi Korean women and even served as an officer. In the summer of 1966, however, the organization decided that all Japanese women, including my mother, could no longer serve as officers. My mother told me that the reason given to her was that the Japanese and Korean wives were "of different blood" so they could not both be at the heart of the movement. She was very hurt by this, and left the organization. My father could not understand her pain, and this led to the beginning of their separation.

A feminist perspective gave me important hints to finding solutions to the dilemmas I confronted and also helped end my identity crisis: I realized that the four groups I had tried to identify with—the Zainichi Koreans, Japanese, North Koreans and South Koreans—were all male-dominated societies. The insistently exclusive nature of both Korean and Japanese social ideologies compels persons of mixed heritage, like myself, to choose between their dual identities. Having clearly understood this led me to think that it was not worth being troubled by it

anymore. Similarly, I began to see my differences with colleagues in the Korean movement in a new light. I realized that rather than identifying totally with them, I had to acknowledge our differing views. I had to understand their ways of thinking and their backgrounds from which such differences may have arisen. Most of all, I need to engage in dialogue to build relationships of trust.

## **The Movement Continues**

Twenty years have passed since I participated in the Korean movement in 1990 that raised the issue of “comfort women” in Korea, Japan, and internationally. In that time, the movement has changed. The Korean sector of the movement is struggling to provide care for aging survivors. Weekly Wednesday demonstrations before the Japanese embassy in Seoul allow young people to learn about the movement’s history. And another aspect of the movement focuses on establishing a museum to prevent such crimes from happening again. Today some Korean women cartoonists see “comfort women” not simply as a national issue, but rather an issue of sexual violence in war. Despite all the changes, what remains the same is Japan’s denial of legal responsibility. In addition, Korea and Japan remain male-dominated societies.

Because of the “Korean Wave” or craze for Korean culture that was sparked by a Korean television romance drama series called “Winter Sonata” that aired in Japan in 2003, and the fact that I share my name with the internationally famed Korean actress Yeong-ae Lee, my name “Yeong-ae,” which was so unfamiliar in the past, no longer seems so strange.

Further, with the influence of Hines Ward<sup>15</sup> in 2006 and the increase in migrant workers,<sup>16</sup> we can see a

recent move toward dispersing the myth of homogeneity in Korea.

The struggle to resolve the “comfort women” issue will no doubt continue in Korea and Japan, and in other countries where women were victimized. It goes without saying that the goal of the movement is not only to obtain an official apology and reparations from the Japanese government. Such actions would ameliorate the suffering of the survivors, and would begin to uncover the truth. With the lessening of tensions and the rise of active exchanges between North and South Korea, we can also hope for useful change. As nationalism, globalization, and conservative patriarchal ideologies continue to manifest themselves in different ways around the world, those involved in the “comfort women” issue must join together under the banner of feminist thinking. The future calls not just for a solidarity that goes beyond borders, but for awareness-based mutual understanding and feminist solidarity.

## Notes

- 1 Many women were raped during the Japanese invasion and occupation of Nanking (modern-day Nanjing) in 1937. According to the testimonies of foreigners living there at the time, more than twenty thousand women were raped (Matsuoka 130). Individual soldiers as well as groups carried out rapes, and other crimes such as robbery, massacres, and arson were also committed. It is said that the Japanese military formally established the “comfort stations” because of fear that these incidents would lead to a Chinese backlash. (Hayao 1939).
- 2 Kwon Insuk, a university student at the time, was arrested in June 1986 by the Buchon police for forging an identification card to work at a factory, and while

under investigation, sexually tortured. Kwon publicized what had happened and took the case to court. The incident became a trigger for the strengthening of the democratization movement, leading to the struggle for democracy the year after.

3 A *kiisen* was a type of prostitute from the Choson Dynasty (1392 to 1910). Originally these women not only performed sexual services but also had skills in medicine, needlework, singing and dancing, etc. After Korea became a Japanese colony, they assumed the role of entertainers performing singing, dancing, and sexual services. The Korean government actively promoted *kiisen* tourism from the 1970s to 1980s as a way to acquire foreign currency. Most of the clients were Japanese men. Women from Christian women's groups and female university students organized protests against *kiisen* tourism in the 1970s.

4 *The Dong-a Ilbo*. January 14, 1992. The term "*yoja chongshindae*" refers to women who, toward the end of the war, were forced under Japanese government decree to work in military factories. Most of the young women drafted from Korea were in their early teens. Misunderstanding of the term resulted in falsely equating "*yoja chongshindae*" to "comfort women," though in fact they were clearly different.

5 *The Dong-a Ilbo*. "Of course there must be reparations at the national level for the women drafted for military sexual slavery." January 16, 1992; *The Korea Times*, January 16, 1992.

6 Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan. "Our response to the Japanese government's second report on its study of the issue of women drafted for military sexual slavery" (in Korean). August 4, 1993.

7 The notion that the Japanese "comfort women" were all prostitutes is an inaccurate stereotype. For details see Yamashita (2009).

8 A dispute between Peru and Korea in 1872 that occurred when a Chinese "coolie" laborer jumped ship

from the Peruvian ship Maria Luz when it docked in the port of Yokohama. Japan let the man go, reasoning that the slave trade was unjust, to which Peru pointed out that Japan's sex trade system was problematic. This incident led the government to pass the so-called Emancipation Decree for Prostitutes the following year.

**9** The coalition government created in 1994 by the Liberal Democratic Party, Socialist Party and Sakigake Party accepted moral responsibility for the "comfort women" and set this fund up in 1995. The main undertakings of the fund were to give the former "comfort women" funds collected from the Japanese people and conduct health and welfare schemes for the women. In executing these programs, the Japanese government expressed its "apologies" and compiled materials on the "comfort women" as historical evidence, to be used as a lesson of history. Many survivors who sought legal compensation and an apology, however, rejected the fund. The fund ceased its activities in March 2007.

**10** In March 1, 1919, leaders gathered to read the Korean Declaration of Independence and demonstrations against the Japanese took place throughout the country, calling for the independence of Korea. This is commemorated as a public holiday, and various events, both public and private, are held every year to celebrate it.

**11** In 1945, the Korean Peninsula, having been liberated from Japanese colonialism, was divided along the thirty-eighth parallel by the United States and the Soviet Union. On August 15, 1948, the Republic of Korea (South Korea) was unilaterally created in the American military-administered southern half of the peninsula. In response, on September 9, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) was established. Chongryon was created in 1955 as an activist group of Koreans in Japan who supported the

policies of Kim Il Sung, the leader of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

12 For more about the life of my father and his family prior to liberation, see Choi Suk-ui 1990.

13 The family register is a record kept for each family unit that details date and place of birth and names of parents and children. This forms the basis for the family in Japanese society. Under the old civil code, women who wed would be recorded under their husband's register, but after the war, the law was changed to formally allow a choice of whose register to be recorded under. In most cases, however, the woman is recorded in the man's register and the woman and children take the man's name. Children who are born out of wedlock are registered in their mother's register and take their mother's name.

14 Since the beginning of Japanese colonial rule of Korea in the 1910s, the Japanese had discriminated against Koreans, and after the war, consistently attempted to assimilate Korean residents in Japan. To become naturalized, Koreans were required to change their names and abandon Korean culture and become "more Japanese." Many people had no choice but to adopt Japanese names to avoid social discrimination. Thus, the recovery of their original names became the struggle for second and third generation Zainichi Koreans, and this became a measure of how much one was able to restore their "Korean-ness." The surname was particularly important, though there was a tendency to be forgiving if one's first name was Japanese. For this reason, Korean activists in Japan never welcomed my strategy of using a combination of names, with my surname being Japanese.

15 Hines Ward is an American football player who was born to a Korean mother and US military father. He was selected MVP player at the 2006 Super Bowl, making him popular in Korea as well. On a visit to Korea, he announced the establishment of a fund for

mixed-race children in Korea and criticized the discrimination in Korean society against them.

16 As of 2006 there are about one million foreigners living in Korea (including illegal residents), making it 2.5 times higher than ten years ago, when it stood at three hundred and eighty thousand. Of this, three hundred thousand are industrial trainees. There is a rapid rise in international marriages between Korean men and Asian (Chinese, Vietnamese, Filipina, Thai) women, and in the children they produce. One out of ten marriages is an international marriage, and there are approximately ten thousand women who migrate through marriage.

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