

CHINA DAILY

4 SATURDAY, APRIL 1, 2000

PRICE: 80



Chen Yabian, 73

REN LONG/Xinhua

An unforgettable past: Participants of a three-day International Symposium on Chinese "Comfort Women" watch an exhibit on Thursday featuring pictures revealing whereabouts and current life of some Chinese "comfort women" — a term for the women who were used as sex slaves and tortured by Japanese invaders in late 1930s and 1940s. The symposium, the first in China started on Thursday and ends today.



Women condemn atrocities

Former sex slaves cry out for apology and compensation

By ZENG MIN
China Daily staff

SHANGHAI: "Down with Japanese imperialism! To hell the right wing in Japan!"

Slowly standing up from her chair, Wan Aihua, grey-haired and short, shouted these words while raising a trembling hand in the air making a fist. Tears streamed down her bony face.

"My torture was deeper than the sea, and I found no words to express my rage against the Japanese who raped me, beat me and reduced me to a donkey," she said. She was too angry and overcome with emotion to talk about her experience any further.

Like many other Asians forced to be sex slaves, dubbed "comfort women," for the Japanese army during the War of Resistance against Japanese Invasion, Wan has broken the silence to ask for justice.

She spoke on Thursday at an opening session of the three-day International Symposium on Chinese "Comfort Women." The first in China,

this seminar brought together more than 170 experts from China, the United States, Singapore, Japan and elsewhere to discuss helping women.

Joining Wan, 72, from North China's Shanxi Province, two other victims have broken their silence to reveal their past.

Also speaking were Chen Yabian, 73, from South China's Hainan Province and an 83-year-old Shanghai resident Lu Xiuzhen.

They called for Japan to look directly at their wrongdoings during the 1930s and 1940s, make a formal apology, compensate the victims and bring the victimizers to justice. Wan fell into the hands of the Japanese army in 1943. She was hung from a tree to bath in the summertime heat, and beaten by Japanese soldiers every day until she nearly fainted. At night she was locked in a cave and raped by soldiers. She tried to escape three times and made it out in January 1944.

However, the escape did not end her nightmare. The torture had left her body bruised and scarred all the way up to her head and ears. She spent three years in bed and remains ill to

this day.

Chen Yabian tells another story.

She was put into a windowless cottage by the Japanese army when she was only 14 years old.

Every day she was forced to have sex with the soldiers. If she refused, the soldiers would grab her neck, slap her face, kick her in the stomach and stomp on her body until she complied.

"I was like a machine," Chen told reporters while she cried. "My uterus was deformed and I was exploited almost to where I could not be a mother." She became pregnant seven times but only one baby survived.

Experts at the seminar were impressed with the women's openness.

"I was very impressed by their brave act to speak out and I hope that more victims in China can follow suit in the future," said Su Zhiliang, a leading sponsor of the seminar.

Su, is also a professor and president of the China Research Centre on Chinese "Comfort Women," and is tracking Japanese invasion's impact on women in China.

Su said China suffered the most but that few people know

about it because the victims have traditionally considered it a shame to expose their pasts to the public.

Su said on Thursday that more than 400,000 women from China, the Philippines and the whole Korean peninsula became sex slaves for the men in the Japanese army. Half this number were from China.

"The 'comfort women' issue was among the most condemned atrocities in the 20th century," he said.

Su suggested building a museum to pay tribute to the women and a social welfare institution to help them. Su said Shanghai, home to the first "comfort women house" where Japanese soldiers raped Chinese girls, should lead these efforts. In Shanghai, 83 such houses have been discovered to date.

Su added an official apology and compensation from Japan is needed because most victims are in their 70s and 80s.

And the quest for recognition goes on. "Even when I die and the case is still not over, my children and my grandchildren will fight for justice," Wan and Chen said together.

"We will fight until justice comes forward," they vowed.