

Ms Kim Bok-Dong's Testimony

The First Time I Heard "Chong Shin Dae"

There were only 5 daughters in our family (no sons). When I was young our family had no financial problems. Back in those days if you mentioned my father's name, Kim Kyong Dal, in the Yang San, Nam Bu Dong area there was no-one who didn't know him. In Yang San, if it wasn't our rice field you couldn't farm it. But our father used other people's security deposit and it went wrong. So we lost all our property. At that time my father was ill and people threatened to take him to the police station if he didn't repay the money. So my mother and grandmother were afraid and gave their stamp (signed) to say they would give the money without father knowing. As a result they took everything away when father died. But there was enough left for the rest of the family to eat and live.

Farming and marrying off the daughters, even after my father died with no man in the family, we still managed to live OK.

My older sisters, all being of marriagable age, got married quickly to avoid being taken away by the Japanese military. As I was the 4th daughter and only 16 years old everyone assumed I would not be detained. Thinking I was only a young girl I went around freely, even taking the cow out to graze. But they came asking for me. At that time it was 1941. At that time the regional officials were very powerful so if you didn't do as they said you were told you could not live in that region. One day the official came with a Japanese person and said "you have to go with the Chong Shin Dae". The Japanese man was wearing a yellow uniform with no sign of what rank he held. He was a half caste Korean so he could speak Korean well. He didn't just take me away but demanded my mother's stamp (signature) on some document. In those days women could not read so my mother conceded to the demand believing what she was told that I would have to work in a factory and would be free after three years.

In the End I Left My Home Town

From Yang San I went to Pusan, where there were 20 other young girls my age. They all had given the same stamp and had come to work in a factory. So I was unknowingly unconcerned. They took us to a big storeroom with mats on the floor and told us to stay there. After a few days we were moved to Shimonosekki (Japan), and stayed there about one week. Next we went to Taiwan where we stayed for 2, 3 or 4 months. We didn't do anything there, just waited. I think we were waiting for orders. We lived in a normal Taiwanese house. Saying they were Japanese police Japanese people came and went, maintaining some kind of contact. We were allowed to come and go as we wished.

It seemed the contact was not working out well. As they said we were going to a military uniform making factory I assumed the decision of what district had not been finalized so that's why we were waiting so long.

First Experience of a Comfort Women's Life at Guangdong

From Taiwan we went to Guangdong and as soon as we arrived military doctors gave us a full check up. It was a venereal disease check. To take my clothes off and expose previously unexposed parts of my body in front of an unknown man, to spread my legs to a military doctor and to lie there on the table made me extremely afraid and wonder what this was all about. If it was a young girl today at 16 years they would know what was happening (having had some sexual education etc) but at that time at 16 you knew nothing and were really a child. I didn't even know what a man was. To prevent the examination I kicked alot but saying it was compulsory they forcibly removed my clothing and carried out the checkup. When the doctor checked me he seemed to be questioning something but I didn't know why.

After the examination we were taken to the "Comfort House". The "Comfort House" was an empty 15 storey building. On the first floor were soldiers and from the second floor was the "Comfort House". If you went as far as the 15th Floor it was clean and tidy like people could live there. In Guangdong we were not free to go outside. If we went out we might be detained by Guangdong soldiers so when we went out soldiers carried guns and came with us. The soldiers made a bathroom for us inside the "Comfort House".

From the second day they forced us into full-scale "Comfort" work, servicing the soldiers. At the beginning I resisted receiving men. For this they didn't give me food and beat me. I could not continue to refuse. Thinking even if I resist I am hurt I decided to do as I was told. But, good grief, I could not endure this sexual victimization, having had no experience of men. My internal sexual organs were torn and swollen. I cannot explain the suffering. Even speaking about this fact is humiliating. My only thought was to escape or die. But I could not escape.

So this was our factory.....?

There were many women at that place. We were not allowed to gather together but were divided in different areas. The Comfort House was located outside the army base. Ordinary soldiers would come out at 8 o'clock in the morning and went back in at 5pm. At 7pm the higher officers came out. On week days I received usually about 15 men, from Saturday to Sunday it was terrible. On week days there was time to sit and relax but on Sundays it was unspeakable. They came in and went almost straight back out and then the next one came in and the next person and so on. It's impossible to remember how many soldiers came in. It was 10s of soldiers. Maybe more than 50. When each soldier came in he carried a small ticket and a condom. In the evening I would take the tickets to the administrator and he would check them off. He was Japanese. I didn't know I should receive money for the tickets. Instead he gave us our food and bought us clothing and cosmetics when we needed them. He never gave us money. He said if the Japanese win the war he would give us a sizeable sum of money.

During rest time all the young girls gathered and sat together and cried. Thinking we could go home if the Japanese won, we prayed for a Japanese victory.

They prepared and gave us food, and their level of hygiene was very high.

Also we had a thorough venereal disease check up once a week. I never caught venereal disease. Hygiene was that good there was no venereal disease but I sustained many injuries. When that happened I rested until I recovered and was then sent back to receive soldiers again.

To Hong Kong, to Malaysia, to Java, to Singapore

After almost two years like that I went to Hong Kong. This side was Hong Kong and that side was the sea, known as Kewrew (?). While we were there I heard many Japanese soldiers died when they tried to advance up the peninsular because the local people put oil on the water and set fire to it. From there we went to Malaysia, after transferred to Java, and then we proceeded to Singapore. The Singapore Comfort House was a long building partitioned off into small rooms. It was extremely hot. And then

We were in one place for two months then transferred to another place for two months. We kept moving following the battle. The front line fighting was only 8 kilometres away from us and we could hear the gunfire. If the soldiers occupied a new area we would follow into that area. And as there were some soldiers in the mountains we would have to go, in groups of 10, to the mountains to service them for one week at a time. We went backwards and forwards like this.

Each time we moved by ship we travelled in the lower hold of the same craft the soldiers were on.

I had many photographs taken with the soldiers during that time, but I have none left now. During the "Comfort House" period I was called Ganaemura Fukuyo or Yoshiko. If I wanted to change my name I did so regularly when we transferred to a new place. But the name I used for the longest time was Ganaemura Fukuyo.

At that time all the groups had house names. When a Unit moved there would be discussion as to which group of girls would be sent with them. I was in Ko-ah house. We followed behind and followed behind and so on. We always kept the house name wherever we went. From Hong Kong we continually had a Chinese woman with us and a number of Japanese women. These women were much older. We did not relate to the Japanese women.

Liberation News

Liberation was announced. Japan lost. The Japanese Commander put us in the 16th Military Hospital. At that time there were almost 50 women who went into the hospital. We were from different groups but we were all put in the one hospital. They taught us basic nursing skills, made us do the cleaning and even taught us how to give injections. They would bring in zucchinis and tell us to pretend it was a person's body and gave it an injection. It seems they taught us this as there were many patients and not enough helping hands. So even now I know how to give an injection and I know about different medicines.

While I was at the hospital my older cousin's husband came and found me, carrying a photograph of me. Before we had left Taiwan for Guangdong I had sent a letter and that photograph to my family to let them know I was alright. When my cousin's husband was drafted to the South Pacific in the supplies division my mother gave him the photograph and told him to check every place he came across where there were Korean women, search for me and bring me home. I didn't know this man's face but I knew for sure this was the photograph I had sent home when I was in Taiwan. When I asked who he was he said "Oh Hak Suh's son-in-law". Oh Hak Suh is my uncle. At this stage my cousin's husband was already in a receiving centre.

Receiving Centre Life

My cousin's husband said let's go quickly to the receiving centre. If you went to a receiving centre it meant you were quickly able to go home. At first the hospital said they wouldn't send me to the receiving centre, that you couldn't go as an individual. But due to my cousin's husband's persistence and insistence that he had promised to take responsibility for me and take me home they eventually let me go. Saying they wanted to go together some twenty other girls from the hospital followed me and went to the receiving centre. At the centre there were more than 200 hundred women. There were tall people with large noses. That was my first experience of seeing an American soldier. At the receiving centre men were on one side and women on the other, divided by wire netting and then off in other store room areas scattered around also. Men would come and give us food and sometimes the US soldiers would come in with some other people for some kind of investigation.

The meals at the centre consisted of cold rice boiled up and mixed in with flour. The US soldiers didn't interfere at all. We dealt with meals in our own groups. There were a number of Korean men responsible for the security of the women and they controlled and allowed visits with those you wanted to see. I met my cousin's husband regularly. They also sold food at the receiving centre. If you had money you could buy your food. They even accepted clothing in exchange for food. When we were at the receiving centre they recorded all our names and addresses.

We weren't allowed to use our Japanese names. In the mornings we sang the Korean national song "Dong Hae Mul and Paek Du San" (East Sea water and Paek Du Mountain) and they gave us badges of our national emblem. They didn't ask us to do anything else. Every now and then a US soldier would come and investigate. They would empty our bags saying they wanted to know what goods we were carrying. If people leaving the receiving centre were found to be carrying gold necklaces or goods of any value they were not allowed to leave, so before anyone got on the boat they would give anything of value to those left behind and tell them to sell it and buy food.

Boarding the Boat to Return to My Homeland

After about one year in the receiving centre I boarded a boat for home. We

were on board the boat for an incredibly long time as well. There were almost 3,000 people on board, hundreds of women and hundreds of men. Many had been Comfort Women, and there were a lot of women who had come independently with their husbands to run some kind of small business. We had been given preference in coming out first as not everyone could come out together, and the others would come later. It seemed those who had entered the centre first were the first to leave.

In Pusan we spent a week on board the boat not allowed to go ashore. One person had died of cholera on the journey so they wouldn't let us get off as it is an infectious disease. Although we couldn't get off my cousin's husband knew "everybody" on the Pusan coast because fishing was his family line of business. So we wrote a letter and told our family of our boat's arrival, and my cousins and older sisters got on a boat and came out to visit bringing Kim Chi and other food which we shared with others on the boat. After more than a week investigations proved the person's death was not from cholera and we were allowed to go ashore. When we went ashore it was night time. Carrying the few belongings we had we were sent into a room and told to hand over all the money we had from any country. The investigators were Korean and US. We gave them everything we had. They then gave us each a train ticket and 1000 Korean Won.

From My Return to My Hometown Until Now

When I returned home I was 23 years old. Having left at 16 it had been 8 years. My older sisters and younger sister had all gone to Japan with their families and only my mother was left alone keeping the house at Yang San.

I was alone in our home town. After I had gone many others had also been taken away. Because we all kept it inside I don't know who had gone to the comfort houses. They all just said they had been working in factories or hospitals. In fact, I also said I had been at the 16th Military Hospital all the time. In the rural areas there were no doctors so when I gave injections to the elderly people and knew all about medicines people believed that I had really been at the hospital all the time.

The only people that knew I was really with the comfort houses were my mother and oldest sister. Later my other sisters found out through them. My sisters all had children and were living well which made me very jealous..... at first even my mother didn't know my secret. Because she kept on talking about trying to marry me off I told her. So then my mother gave up on trying to make me marry.

There were girls from our group in Tong Yong and in Ko Jae. Those girls hadn't learnt anything else but this foul work so many fell into prostitution. At age 25 or 26 there was nothing they had the ability to do but that. If you asked them didn't it make them disgusted they said it was the only thing they had learnt.

I started up a drinking house, because after all maybe that's all I had learnt how to do. But it was difficult to run this business alone. There was a lot of talk about the daughter from that house having gone to Japan and then

come back to run a drinking house on her own. So after a bit I met an older man whose marriage had failed and got married. My husband didn't know about my history either. It's now 5 years since he died. I feel sorry for him. I couldn't bear children and so he died without even one child to follow on. (With no children there is no-one to carry out the ancestral ceremony for him.) He had lots of neices and nephews on his side of the family that me really loved. He was a good natured person who couldn't even drink alcohol. I went to the hospital to find out why I couldn't have children and they said there was nothing wrong with me but they could perform a curette. The doctor didn't know about my history.

After my husband died I continued to run the drinking house. Now the building has been pulled down and with the compensation money I moved into this apartment I'm living in. I am now looking for a job. What I want these days is that I can live quietly like this with my old wounds left alone, unprovoked. Before I die I have to also receive my compensation money.