

STORY OF SONG SIIN DO
Korean Former "Comfort Woman" Resident in Japan
By
Support Group for Lawsuit of
Korean Former Comfort Women Resident in Japan



June 1993
The World Conference on Human Rights
Vienna, Austria

Song Sinn Do's History before a "Comfort Station"

Song Siin Do was born in Chung-chong Province, Korea, on August 29th, 1922. Her father died when she was 12 (hereinafter the age is counted in the Chinese way). After his death, she moved to Shindonan(?) with her mother and younger sister because her mother became a "concubine" to a man who was running a pharmacy there.

When she was 16, she was forced to get married to a stranger who was 10 years senior to her. Having loathed the first wedding night, she ran away from the bridegroom. However, she could not stay at her mother's house, so the following morning she headed for Taejon to see her friend.

In Taejon where she was working as a housemaid, she was lured by an elderly Korean woman to work at the battle-grounds. The woman told Siin Do that "if you work at the battlefield for Imperial Japan, you can make a lot of money and live on your own without marriage." Her previous sour experience convinced her that she wanted to become independent. Although she did not know what she would do for a job, she followed that Korean woman. Actually, she ran away from the bridegroom to avoid the "wedding night," involving sex, and decided to stand on her own legs. Therefore, working as one of the so-called "comfort women" was the very last thing on her mind.

She was then taken to Pyongyang where there were many girls about her age or their late teens brought together from different places. During the journey, she felt uneasy because she was unable to get a direct answer when she asked the woman what kind of a job she would be doing. However, after seeing so many girls and knowing she was not alone, she felt somewhat relieved.

In fact, Pyongyang was like a transit point for "comfort women." Siin Do and a dozen or so girls were now handed over to a Korean man, a "flesh traffic trader," in Pyongyang and taken to Tianjin, China. The trader said to the girls: "Buy kimono's and things you want without worrying about money." However, they learned later that all those expenses covering food, drink and accommodation became their debt at high interest. Siin Do found herself to be deeply in debt for a striped kimono and other small articles which she had bought at that time.

Life at a "Comfort Station"

In Wuchang:

Passing by Tianjin and Hankou, China, Siin Do and some other girls arrived in Wuchang. Presumably, it was in 1938, right after the Japanese Imperial Army's invasion of Wuhan. In Wuchang she was taken to an army "comfort station" which was a magnificent two-story brick building. It seemed that the building, previously, was a store ran by a Chinese merchant, but the army remodeled it in order to use it as an army comfort station. In the building, a huge pot for cooking was in the kitchen, and there was also an office and a dining room on the first floor. The comfort women were to work on the second floor.

When Siin Do first arrived there, she saw a man lying down at the corner of the first floor. After taking a closer look, she found that it was a dead body. This shocking incident brought her to the poignant realization of the fact that she indeed was in the battlefront. The comfort women were even ordered to clear the undisposed corpses. Siin Do and other girls were also ordered to wash down the dried blood on the walls.

The partitions dividing each of the comfort women's rooms on the second floor were made by a soldier who was a carpenter. By using these partitions, many tiny rooms, barely containing a bed and a small drawer, were produced one after another. This comfort station was named "Sekai-kan," or a world house, of which the manager was a short Korean man. In Wuchang there were two other comfort stations, called "Yamato-kan" and "Kotobuki-kan."

A dozen comfort women were forced to serve at "Sekai-kan," all of them were Korean women. Almost all the comfort women with whom Siin Do had encountered there were Korean. They, however, were told: "Don't use the Korean, or you'll get a slap in the face." So, they were strictly prohibited not to talk to each other. "Sekai-kan" increased the number of women and eventually opened up another branch comfort station.

The new arrivals needed to apply to the army for permission to work as comfort women, but soldiers thronged "Sekai-kan" before they were granted permission. The usage of comfort stations was limited to soldiers only, and "Sekai-kan" was used by the 6th and 9th divisions, allegedly

renowned for their military prowess. Soldiers had to buy coupons to enter a comfort station. They picked up a "name tag" at the "office" and received a coupon, tissues, and a condom in exchange for the money. The coupon carried the name of the woman and the room number on it. Customarily, soldiers were not allowed to pick and chose a woman. Regardless of their choice, they just had to enter the woman's room of whose number they were given.

A timetable was set according to their ranks; the day time for soldiers, early evenings for low-ranking officers, and late nights for high-ranking officers. The soldiers who disregarded the rules had to face heavy imprisonment. In other words, the rules for using the army comfort stations were part of the army's rules per se. In fact, military policemen regularly patrolled the facilities. If soldiers got wild at a comfort station, they were reported to MPs.

Upon the arrival of Siin Do and other girls in Wuchang, they were sent to go through a venereal disease test. This was the time when Siin Do first understood what she would do for a job. She ran away from home because she hated the thought of having sex with her bridegroom. The shock she felt at that time indeed was beyond words, having to face this ironic ending after the long journey.

Siin Do was the youngest at "Sekai-kan," not having reached even menstrual age. When she was forced to have sex with a soldier for the first time, she did not know what to do except just run away from him full of tears. The first soldier, Sergeant Hashimoto, who entered her room presumably felt sorry for this little girl after seeing her despair, then left the room with doing nothing. However, the manager of "Sekai-kan" flew into a rage shouting, "if you don't like this business, you clear up your debts," when he heard the story from Hashimoto.

As mentioned earlier, all the expenses covering food, drink and accommodation before "Sekai-kan" already became her debts at high interest. Although she never received an outfit allowance or any other allowances, by the time she reached Wuchang her debts were multiplied up to an amount which she could not pay back without working as a comfort woman for a couple of years. As far as calculations went, comfort women were supposed to receive wages; the women without debts should have received wages on a fifty-fifty basis where the latter fifty percent went to the management and those with debts, 40 percent of what they earned. However, in reality she never received these "wages" in

hand, which could be used for her own convenience, but her debts swelled each time she bought a kimono.

She was often severely scolded by the manager, but she had no choice but to stay at "Sekai-kan" because she could not speak a word of Chinese, did not know her whereabouts or how to take a train. And on top of these, she did not have any money, and was surrounded by the enemy. The circumstances were telling her that she had to submit herself to fate, to work as a comfort woman for the soldiers, but she could not accept the situation and wept bitterly. Then one day, she succumbed to her fate, but at the last minute, she could not surrender herself to the soldier in the actual situation of rape and ran about in tears to escape from him. Because of this kind of resistances, she was brutally beaten by the people in the office and had a bloody nose. Occasionally, she was not fed or locked up in a small room. Eventually, there was a limitation to her resistance, and she gradually became a "tool" to absorb the discharge of the soldiers' sexual energy. Even after these incidents, she kept lamenting her fate and whining out anywhere she could, in the toilet and/or bathroom.

Siin Do was coerced to give sex to ten or more soldiers everyday, no break even during her menstrual periods. On Sundays, comfort stations were thronged with soldiers, and the sound of combat boots echoed throughout the house. Particularly, during the few days when a regiment in transit was billeted, comfort women were too busy even to have a bite to eat. On those busy days, her vagina and other parts were swollen and turned red, but she had to bear the pain. There were soldiers who behaved selfishly and imposed their extremely one-sided sex on her without even taking off their gaiters. Some of them could hardly wait for their turn and yelled, "Let me do it quick," then they started to masturbate themselves while standing beside her. Every time she saw these soldiers who behaved worse than animals, she felt that she could not go on with this life any more.

She was named "Kanedo," her "professional name," and had it tattooed, which still remains, on her left arm. After coming to Japan, she tried many times to erase it with needles but had no success. She still feels embarrassed by this tattoo from time to time, for example at a public bath. VD tests were carried out once every week by army doctors. For many comfort women, climbing up to a gynecological examination rack was very humiliating and a disgraceful thing to do. Those women who contracted VD had to get a injection called "606." Yet, army doctors made no exception of visiting comfort stations themselves for pleasure.

Soldiers were obligated to use condoms, but there were many soldiers who did not follow the rules. Consequently, some comfort women became impregnated, but they were not allowed to take a rest. Unless they kept working, they would be thrown out of the house. Siin Do herself was impregnated but had to continue to provide sex, and as a result when she was 7 months pregnant, she delivered a stillborn baby. She was all alone when she pulled the fetus out of her womb using all the strength that she had. She buried the little dead body, which color had turned to a lifeless purple, at a nearby mountain.

When comfort women became exhausted and refused to give sex, they often received violent assaults by the soldiers, beating and kickings, and were often threatened with swords. She has a scar on her thigh groin from one of those assaults. On her back she also has another scar, about 10cm long, from a sword. On top of these, she is also deaf in her right ear. All these gashes on her body are from her experiences of being forced to work as a comfort woman. There were also soldiers who demanded "abnormal" sex, and if she refused to comply, they would often draw their swords and threaten her life. In despair she had no choice but to submit to their demands.

In some cases, depressed soldiers became so desperate that they forced comfort women to commit double suicides, saying "I would rather kill myself here together with you than be killed by a bullet." Siin Do, however, had a strong desire to survive under any circumstances. Therefore, she was afraid of a forced double suicide more than anything.

At comfort stations, there were women who contracted tuberculosis and VD or developed malaria. When they suffered from these diseases, they were moved to a hut. Some women died from shell attacks. There was a woman who out of despair killed herself by taking cresol, a disinfecting agent. Right before her death, she was badly beaten because she refused to submit to the soldiers due to her illness. There were other women who killed themselves; one hang herself and another committed a double suicide with a soldier with a hand grenade. There was another woman who was very sick from a contagious disease. She turned down a soldier's request, but her refusal upset him. He hurled a stone at her stomach and killed her.

Siin Do and the other girls were not allowed to go out freely. They only had one holiday per month. Every time they went out, say for shopping, the manager or people from

the office accompanied them to prevent them from running away. In any event, it was impossible for them to flee. There was no guarantee of successfully escaping in the area which was surrounded by the Chinese army, once she had escaped from the Japanese army's territory. Also, she would have no money and no idea where she was, so far away from home, nor could she speak a word of Chinese. In order to survive she had to put up with life at the comfort station however inhumane it was. There was never a woman who had successfully fled from "Sekai-kan." Sinn Do was systematically, collectively, and repeatedly raped by soldiers while being confined in the comfort station. In other words, she was assaulted not only physically but also mentally. Under these hopeless circumstances, her dignity as a human being was irrevocably damaged, and this is also true to other comfort women as well.

In Yuezhou:

Siin Do lived at "Sekai-kan" for three years, then was sold to a manager of a comfort station which serviced the Navy because she became pregnant. She did the washing and cooking for other women at the comfort station, and was moved to Yuezhou after her delivery. She left the baby in the care of other people in Hankou. Even abandoning the baby, her breasts swollen with milk and she felt so miserable to see them. But, she knew that there was no way to rear the baby by herself. In Yezhou she was continuously forced to provide sex. She was taken to other comfort stations in Anlu, Xuanchang, Shashi, Yingshan, Xianning, Changan and other places.

From those places she was taken to different posts as one of the troops' designated comfort women, following the troops everywhere they went, usually five or six comfort women for every 150 soldiers. They were those veteran women who worked at comfort stations for quite some time, and Siin Do was one of them. She was scared to death every time she had to follow the troops to the battlefield, but she had no choice but to tail along with the soldiers. There were times when she was so frightened, that she urinated while walking.

Since no doctor accompanied the troops, she was asked to check the other women whether or not they had developed VD. In most places she went, there was no shelter, so she was forced to provide sex in a tiny hole dug up along the

slope of a hill with just a blanket on the ground. She sometimes had to work under a rain of shells. Even under those circumstances, she could not go running for safety because most soldiers would not stop their sexual assault saying: "I don't care what will happen. I will soon die anyway. I am happy to die this way." In winter she was almost frozen to death with her bare bottom exposed to the cold. Customarily, after satisfying their carnal desire, the soldiers went on subduing the enemy in the neighborhood. Siin Do and other women were coerced to march with the soldiers and go through cruel treatments in extremely dangerous places. The situation of the war was getting worse and worse, everything went unfavorably against the Japanese imperial army, and the life of the comfort women became more miserable and harsher day by day.

One time, the army forced the comfort women to be present at the scene where some Chinese war prisoners were being executed by Japanese soldiers. The blindfolded war prisoners were ordered to line up in front of the dug up holes, and then their heads were chopped off with swords. Their blood splashed everywhere as their heads fell down into the hole. Soldiers habitually held a party after an execution. Even after witnessing this kind of atrocity, Siin Do and the other women were asked to entertain the soldiers.

When the troops were away, Siin Do and the other women were posted on sentry in pairs with battle helmets and military pants in order to make up a slender defense. Since there was a fear that the enemy might attack them anytime, they had to pretend as if they were men. They were really scared. Although the women were driven to go through this kind of relentless life, their services and labor were hardly ever compensated. When she was forced to work as the troops designated comfort woman, she was not even paid "nominal wages." Even at the comfort station, her nominal wages were sucked up under the name of "defense contributions," and nothing left in her hands.

After Wuchang, Siin Do went from one comfort station to another. During that period, she gave birth to two babies, including one delivery in Hankou. She left the babies in the care of other people right after the delivery each time. Although she had another pregnancy, she had to abort the fetus with a folk medicine by herself. She did this after two months into her pregnancy, drinking the juice squeezed from roots of scallion for three days without any meals. She knew if she did not do this she would be thrown out. In

any event, she was not allowed to rear a child at the comfort station.

Since the War ended in Japan's Defeat

In August 1945, Siin Do was informed that the war was over by the mistress of the comfort station. The Japanese army deserted the comfort women without letting them know of Japan's defeat. Soon after, a sergeant, named "I," from the "Mine" troops came to see her and asked: "As I have completed my term and retired from service, let's get married." At that time, she was uncertain about her future and did not know how she could go back to Korea after being abandoned by the troops, so grasping at straws, she decided to go to Japan with him for survival's sake. He named her, Junko "I."

Siin Do and Mr. I left Xianning and made it over into the former Japanese settlement in Hankou. During the journey, they made a bare living by taking shelter at a scanty hut, begging food from the local Chinese people, and doing the washing for small wages. They looked like real "bums" with lice on their heads.

The lives of the former comfort women were in the depths of misery after being left behind in this strange land. Some of them married Chinese men in order to save their own lives. Some women sold their bodies to Chinese soldiers to survive. Some, like Siin Do, went to Japan after marrying Japanese men. There was a woman, supposedly a comfort woman, who out of despair tried to kill herself and her twenty-day-old baby. She died but the baby survived. When the head of a repatriation party called for a person who could nurse the baby, Mr. I asked Siin Do to adopt the child. She refused his request saying that she abandoned her own children because she could not take care of them. Against her will, however, Mr. I kept the child because the child's mother left a lot of money and valuables in her wicker trunk. After spending all the money and valuables, he threw the baby into the water of the Yangtze River while Siin Do was asleep.

In May 1946, Siin Do and Mr. I arrived in Hakata, Japan, on a repatriation ship. When they reached land, they were so faint from hunger, they bought dried cuttlefish and gobbled it down. As soon as they safely arrived in Japan,

Mr. I called off his promise and said that he had no intention to marry her. After all she went through, she was eventually cheated and abandoned by him. In utter despair she tried to kill herself by jumping off a moving train but failed. A Korean man with whom she happened to encounter introduced her to another Korean man, "Mr. H," who was managing a construction camp. She eventually started to help him in the kitchen at the construction camp.

From that time on until Mr. H's death, Siin Do lived together with him without any sexual relations. While he was still alive, there were days when she drowned her grief and sorrows in heavy drinking. She could not help it, though she knew it would cause him a lot of grief. Scenes of the battlefield always appeared in her nightmares. Since his death, she has been living all by herself because she has no relatives. To this day, the sense of guilt has never left her mind that she deserted her two babies in China.

During her seven year life as a comfort woman, from age 16 to 23, she was totally deprived of freedom of mind and body as a "sex slave" by the Japanese imperial army. Throughout that period her life itself had always been at stake. When Japan lost the war, she was abandoned in China without any means to go back to Korea, and the circumstances forced her to live in Japan regardless of her will.

Translator's Note: The words "comfort women" and "comfort station" are euphemism, actually meaning "sex slaves" and "army brothels." At these army brothels, however, hard cash was rarely involved instead military payment certificates were used.

Former 'comfort woman' files lawsuit seeking apology

A South Korean woman living in Miyagi Prefecture filed a suit with Tokyo District Court against the government Monday seeking an apology and compensation for being forced to provide sex for Japanese soldiers during World War II.

It is the first suit filed by a former "comfort woman" living in Japan.

Yuko Nakashita, one of the lawyers representing the woman, said, "We did not specify the amount of money for compensation because if the Japanese government really feels sorry, they will provide an appropriate amount

of compensation."

Song Siin Do, 71, said she was sent from Pyongyang to China in 1938 when she was 16 and forced to provide sex for Japanese soldiers for seven years.

She was left behind in China when the war ended, she said.

"I wanted to tell people my experiences while I am alive. I hope the same thing will never happen again," she said.

Nakashita said the Japanese government has an obligation to pay compensation to So.

Cho Sei Young, second secretary of the South Korean

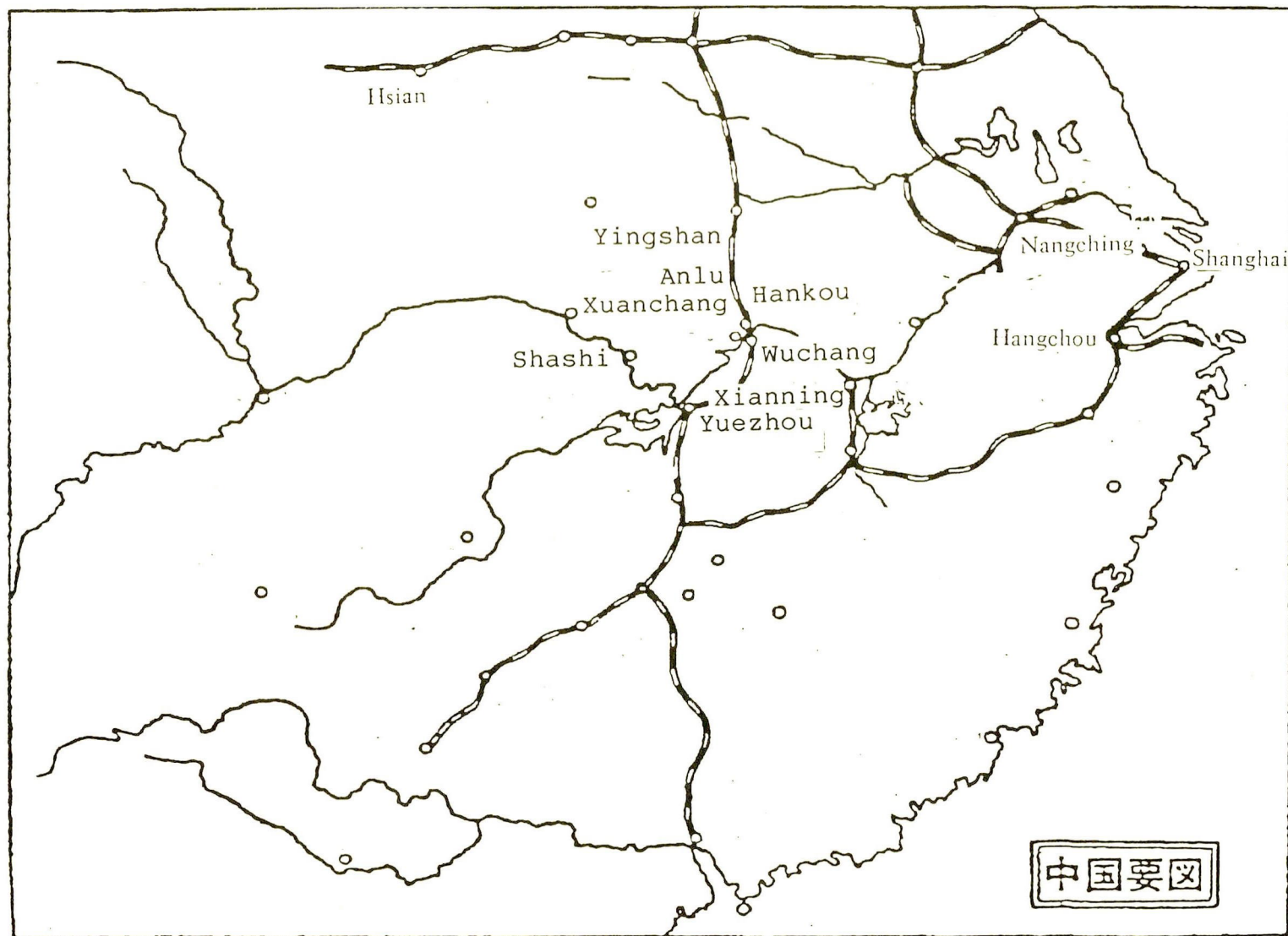
Embassy in Tokyo, said "The South Korean government supports the plaintiff from the bottom of its heart."

He said that So is one of five South Koreans who were comfort women and are currently living outside South Korea. A bill which will enable the South Korean government to pay ¥1 million each to former comfort women is likely to be enacted this month, he said.

Historians estimate that about 100,000 to 200,000 women, mostly from the Korean Peninsula, were forced to provide sex for soldiers of the former Imperial Japanese Army.



To be taken in the 1960s.



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