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Asian-Pacific Feminist Coalition Politics: The *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu* ("Comfort Women") Movement

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This article examines the *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu* issue from an Asian-Pacific feminist perspective. The *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu* were women (primarily Korean) who were drafted by the Japanese military during the Pacific War, ostensibly to serve as laborers, but mostly to serve as sex slaves. They are referred to euphemistically as *Jūgunianfu* (military "comfort women") in Japanese, and *Chōngshindae* (Women's Volunteer Labor Corps) in Korean. This article discusses (1) historical links between Japan's Pacific War military sex slaves and their contemporary parallels, (2) reasons why the military sex slavery issue has been buried for almost half a century, (3) the social context for politicization of the issue, and (4) global feminist and grassroots coalition politics: the *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu* movement in Korea and Japan that has recently spread to other East and Southeast Asian countries.

Historical Links and Contemporary Parallels of Japanese Colonial Expansion and Sexual Exploitation of Women

KARAYUKI-SAN (FOREIGN-BOUND WOMEN)

There is a thread of continuity in Japan's colonial and neocolonial capitalist expansion and the systematic commodification of women's bodies. Officially sanctioned red-light districts existed in Japan from as early as 1617.¹ This long tradition of legalized prostitution only became illegal in 1956, when the Law for the Prevention of Prostitution was passed.²

During Japan's colonial expansion, women went abroad to serve as prostitutes for Japanese soldiers.

way to India and even Africa. From the beginning of the Meiji period (1868–1912), daughters of poor Japanese peasant families from two peninsulas of Kyushu were recruited as overseas prostitutes, a practice that continued to the end of the Taishō period (1912–1926).³ These women were known as *Karayuki-san* “foreign-bound (lit. ‘China-bound’) women.” The wartime conscription of women to serve as sex slaves for the Japanese overseas military units can be considered a continuation—or culmination—of this Japanese system of officially sanctioned prostitution.

MILITARY SEX SLAVES OF THE PACIFIC WAR

Some terminological questions need to be clarified before discussing the historical origins of Japanese military sex slavery, the establishment of *wianso/iansho* (“comfort centers”), the methods of procurement, and the working conditions and treatment of military sex slaves during and after the war.

1. Terminology. During the Pacific War, the Japanese euphemism for military sex slaves was *Jūgunianfu* (military “comfort women”), and that term has continued to be used in postwar Japan. Koreans, on the other hand, have more commonly used the term *Chōngshindae* (women’s “volunteer corps”), rather than *Chonggunwianbu* (military “comfort women”), to refer to the same women. Women who did only factory or service work were referred to as *Kūro Chōngshindae*. When first recruited, many women and their families were told that the women were going to work in factories or hospitals at manufacturing or service jobs. But once they were transported to the occupied territories and the battlefield, they realized that they had been deceitfully drafted as military sex slaves.

To make matters more complicated, some of the *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu* performed nonsexual labor during the day and sexual services at night. In addition, some women in their early teens were initially employed as factory or service workers, then forced into sexual slavery within a year or two. Consequently, in Korea, the term *Chōngshindae* has been used interchangeably with *Chonggunwianbu* (“military comfort women”).

In order to avoid ambiguity, the Korean Council for Women Drafted by Japan for Sexual Slavery (hereafter, the Korean Council) has decided to reserve the term *Kūro Chōngshindae* ([women’s] “labor volunteer corps”) for those who performed only manual labor as factory workers, domestic workers, and nurses; and to use the term *Chōngshin-*

is thus equivalent to *Chonggunwianbu* (“military comfort women”).⁴ We will hereafter defer to both Japanese and Korean customary usage and use the terms *Chōngshindae* (in Korean) and *Jūgunianfu* (in Japanese) to refer to sex slaves drafted by the Japanese Imperial Army during the Pacific War.

2. Historical Origins of Japanese Military Sex Slavery. The Japanese Imperial Army first recruited military prostitutes during the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905) and the Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895). The personal testimonies of some former military sex slaves who went public in both North and South Korea indicate that 30 women, 20 of them Korean, were drafted and taken to the Guangdong area of China soon after the Japanese landed troops in Shanghai in 1932.⁵ More recently, the Fact-Finding Team for the Truth About Forced Korean Laborers found documents in the National Archives in Tokyo that provided evidence of the Japanese Imperial Army’s direct operation of military brothels (employing mostly young Korean women) starting as early as 1933.⁶ However, military sex slavery did not become an official, large-scale operation until after the Nanjing Massacre of December 1937.

After the Japanese army invaded China in 1937, attempts were made to obtain prostitutes in order to prevent soldiers from gang-raping women in the occupied territories of Manchuria. Because of the reluctance of procurers to release Japanese prostitutes in large numbers, and the rapid spread of venereal disease among Japanese prostitutes and soldiers, young Korean women were drafted as military sex workers. Korean women were known to be socially secluded and strictly indoctrinated with the Confucian ideals of virginity and feminine chastity. In fact, in the southern province of Chōlla, the Japanese police formed a Virgin Girls Club (*Ch’ōnyōhoe/Shojokai*) to provide draftees for the military brothels in accordance with the Draft Order for Virgin Girls.⁷

3. Institutionalization of the “Comfort Centers.” After the Nanjing Massacre of December 1937, in which 115,000 Chinese civilians were killed, the first military *wianso/iansho* (“comfort center”) was set up in Shanghai. For the first such establishment in Shanghai, eighty of the 104 women recruited in 1938 were Koreans, most of them daughters of Korean migrant coal miners in northern Kyushu, Japan.⁸ These early military brothels were initially managed by the Japanese Imperial Army’s Recreation Division. However, due to the negative reaction of the public, many were later handed over to private firms under the direct supervision of the military.⁹ Between 1938 and 1945, the Japanese Imperial Army

military factories, and construction sites. Some documents and personal testimonies have surfaced in recent months that establish the fact that, during the Pacific War, *wianso/iansho* were present in colonized Taiwan and Korea, and in the occupied territories of Manchuria, Sakhalin, Guangdong, Myanmar (formerly Burma), the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Sumatra, Papua New Guinea, and the Pacific Islands, as well as in the Japanese islands of Kyushu, Honshu, Hokkaido, and Okinawa.¹⁰

4. *Social Backgrounds and Methods of Procurement.* It is believed that from 80 to 90 percent of the estimated 80,000 to 200,000 *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu* during the war were Korean women. As early as 1941, 20,000 Korean women were in China alone as sex slaves to 700,000 Japanese soldiers.¹¹

During the early years of the war, they were recruited mostly from impoverished peasant families in Kyōngsang and Chōlla provinces in southern Korea. However, as the war intensified and spread to Southeast Asia and the South Pacific, women were recruited indiscriminately from cities and villages in all parts of Korea, especially toward the end of the war. Since the most sought-after draftees initially were unmarried women between 17 and 20, fearful Korean parents hurriedly married their daughters off during the war, even to men of undesirable or dubious backgrounds. Consequently, after the war, there was a tremendous increase in marriage annulments and divorces among Korean wartime brides.¹² However, toward the end of the war, females as young as 12 and as old as 30—even married women and nursing mothers—were forcibly sent to the battlefronts as *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu*.¹³

The Japanese Army lured, threatened, and kidnapped women from farms, schools, streets, restaurants, marketplaces, wells, riversides, factories, and even from family homes to supply the sexual needs of the military.¹⁴ Recruiters lured some women and their families with false promises of well-paying jobs in factories, military bases, and hospitals, and three meals of white rice a day.¹⁵ Others were threatened by recruiters and sometimes persuaded even by their own families to offer themselves to save their fathers and brothers from being conscripted into the Army or to work in the coal mines and other forms of slave labor in Manchuria and Kyushu, Japan.

5. *Wartime Working Conditions and Postwar Treatment by the Japanese Army.* In general, *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu* were treated as sexual commodities and slaves rather than as human beings with basic human rights. For instance, since women had no official place in the Japanese military except as nurses, the "comfort women" were shipped to

battlefronts and to mining towns, military factories, and construction sites like food rations, simply labelled "military supplies," without any record of their names or identities through which they could be traced.¹⁶ Upon arrival, the women were pressured into sexual slavery in a way that resembled gang rape. Japanese soldiers referred to them as *niku-ichi* "29-to-1," a reference to the number of men each woman was expected to service each day. In truth, the number was more likely to be 40 or even 100 men a day. In one story, one woman is said to have had sex with as many as 300 soldiers a day, especially on those days when military units received new arrivals of *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu*, or when military units were transferred to new locations.¹⁷ Probably for this reason, Japanese soldiers referred to the "comfort centers" as "sanitary public lavatories."¹⁸

Many women who tried and failed to escape were killed, as were some women who became pregnant or contracted venereal disease. In an attempt to cover up the presence of *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu*, the army massacred many of them as it retreated. Others were merely abandoned without knowledge of Japan's defeat. Some were offered to the Allied Occupation Forces as military prostitutes.¹⁹

Under these atrocious, inhuman working conditions, it is not surprising that some researchers estimate that as many as 75 to 90 percent of *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu* became casualties of war, as a result of diseases such as gynecological infections, venereal disease, and tuberculosis, or mental disorders caused by poor physical and medical care, desertion, and physical and sexual violence committed against them by the Japanese military.

6. *Postwar Treatment by the Confucian Culture of Korean Society.* Japan's defeat in 1945 did not mark the end of the ordeal for the "comfort women" who survived. Since many of them had become physically and mentally ill as a result of their enslavement, they lacked the health or resources to return home, or else they were too ashamed to return. Of those who remained in place, some resorted to prostitution in order to survive. Those who managed to return to Korea also led a bitter existence. Some of them also became prostitutes because no other alternatives were available.²⁰

Considered "fallen women" by a Confucian society that regarded lifelong chastity for women as more important than life itself, some committed suicide aboard ships carrying them to Shimonoseki, rather than face a homecoming of humiliation and social isolation.²¹ Most of the survivors were impoverished and remained unmarried or barren, some no doubt wishing they had died in the war.

C. JAPAYUKI-SAN (JAPAN-BOUND WOMEN)

The *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu* issue is not merely a question of past history that has been buried for almost half a century. It has an important impact on present-day Korean and other Asian and Pacific societies and some implications for the future, since it is interconnected with military expansion, colonialism, capitalist development, and patriarchal social organization.²²

During the 1970s, Japanese men visited Asian countries such as Korea and Taiwan for so-called "sex tours" in pursuit of cheap female sexual companions. During the 1980s, Japanese men have also been able to enjoy cheap (or exotic) sexual encounters without even leaving the country because of the many young *Japayuki-san* ("Japan-bound" women) from the Philippines, Thailand, Taiwan, Korea, Hong Kong, Indonesia, and increasingly from Latin American countries such as Brazil in recent years. These women, also known as *dekasegi kankō no josei* (female migrant [sex-]tour workers), have been coming to work in Japan's entertainment industry, as waitresses, bar hostesses, performers, and often as unwilling prostitutes.²³

According to statistical records covering the period from 1980 to 1985, the number of 15-to-34-year-old women coming to Japan from the Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand, and Latin America has surpassed the number of men in the same age range.²⁴ Nearly one half of all Filipinos entering Japan were "entertainers" in 1989.²⁵ However, many of these "entertainers" end up working as bar hostesses and being forced—as illegal aliens—into degrading sex-related work.²⁶ They are being recruited, with or without their prior knowledge, to work as prostitutes in Japan's flourishing sex industry, as well as in the international tourist trade in their homelands, catering to Japanese, European, and American male visitors, including American soldiers stationed in military bases in the Philippines, Korea, and Okinawa. As poor foreign women from the poorer Asian countries, the *Japayuki-san* occupy the lowest rung in the Japanese social hierarchy. The international division of labor, based on racial, sexual, and economic stratification, places Asian migrant women in an extremely vulnerable situation.²⁷

D. SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES AMONG KARAYUKI-SAN, CHŌNGSHINDAE/JŪGUNIANFU, AND JAPAYUKI-SAN

There are many points in common among the *Karayuki-san*, the *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu*, and the *Japayuki-san*. Because of the historical continuity and some structural similarities among the three groups, it is important to analyze how military and economic expansion exploits

the colonized, the economically disadvantaged, and women by understanding the relationship between the specific characteristics of recruitment patterns and the degrees of sexual enslavement of women.²⁸ All three groups consist of women who are daughters of economically disadvantaged families from colonized/neocolonized Third World countries.²⁹

A significant feature for all three groups of women is the intervention of the militaristic/patriarchal state and/or state-backed sex industry in their procurement. Both their recruiters and the recipients of their sexual services have been ruling-class and colonial, military men. The sex industry cooperates with the state and benefits from government support.³⁰ During the Pacific War, Japanese soldiers in military uniforms, using the power of their weapons, took colonized women to occupied territories and war zones for sexual exploitation. Currently, many Japanese men in business suits, using the power of their currency, sexually exploit women from other Asian countries, either by making sex tours to those countries or by luring them into Japan's own sex industry.

Despite differing contexts and circumstances, the everyday living and working conditions of these three groups of women show similarities: inadequate housing, either low wages or none at all, long working hours with few days off, lack of freedom, inadequate medical and welfare benefits, and, for many, the need to do extra manual labor in addition to their sexual labor.³¹

The important factor that distinguishes the "comfort women" from the other groups is that they were directly recruited by the Japanese Imperial Army. In fact, Imperial Ordinance no. 519 (the *Josei Teishin Kinrō Rei* "Women's Volunteer Labor Ordinance"), issued on August 22, 1944, gave official recognition to the already well-established practice.³² The proclamation was issued in an attempt to shore up the flagging morale of the Imperial Army.³³

The conscription of the *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu* and the institutionalization of the *wianso/iansho* within the framework of the Japanese Imperial Army thus amounts to a state crime approved by the Emperor, administered by the Japanese colonial military government, and supported by the prevailing sexist, racist, and classist attitude that young, poor, colonized women are sexual commodities at the mercy of men and the state.³⁴

There is some evidence that the *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu* were considered by the Japanese Army to be the female counterpart of *kamikaze* soldiers, who offered their lives for the Emperor. One photograph shows a group of "comfort women" wearing plain white headbands (*hachimaki*) with a picture of the Japanese flag (*hinomaru*) and the word *kamikaze* printed on them.³⁵

Furthermore, it may be postulated that Japan's institutionalization of *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu* was one facet of its attempt to control the Korean population by assimilation, on the one hand, and dispersal overseas, on the other. Many thousands of young Korean men and women were drafted as soldiers, coal miners, factory workers, and as sex slaves. Some have even speculated that the *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu* policy was genocidal insofar as it left thousands of young Korean women of childbearing age infertile.³⁶

Why Has the Issue of *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu* Been Buried for Almost Half a Century?

There are several reasons why the issue of *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu* has been ignored in Korea-Japan relations for almost half a century.

CONFUCIAN CULTURAL IDEOLOGY

In Korean tradition, a woman's chastity has been considered more valuable than even life itself. The feminine ideal requires virginity before marriage and chaste behavior after marriage. A woman who loses her virginity becomes "damaged goods," unmarriageable and socially ostracized. This Confucian ideology leads the victims of sexual exploitation to silently endure their *han*, the unresolved pain and anguish caused by injustice inflicted on the innocent and the powerless. The internalized oppression resulting from Confucian socialization made it almost impossible for most of the surviving *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu* to return to their home villages and families, or even to talk about their experiences.³⁷ Thus the former "comfort women" who returned to Korea but stayed away from their families and hometowns, and even those who stayed in the foreign lands where they worked as sex slaves during the war, kept silent for almost half a century. Until they began in recent years to receive support and encouragement from feminist organizations in Korea, the former *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu* have been unable to realize that they are survivors rather than merely victims of sexual violence.

DENIAL AND IRRESPONSIBILITY OF THE JAPANESE GOVERNMENT

During the war, the Japanese Army intentionally camouflaged the presence of the *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu* by not keeping accurate or honest records, instead labeling them as military supplies. Immediately after Japan's defeat, the military appears to have destroyed most of the documents showing that the Imperial Army played a direct role in recruiting the "comfort women" and in administering the "comfort centers."

The Japanese government avoided raising the issue during the drafting of the 1965 treaty normalization relations between Korea and Japan. Even as recently as July 1992, the Japanese government announced that there was no available hard evidence (*tegakari*, something that could be grasped in the hands) proving that the Japanese Imperial Army had engaged in forcibly recruiting Korean women into military sex slavery during the Pacific War.

THE MILITARISTIC/CAPITALIST SOCIOPOLITICAL STRUCTURE AND THE INDIFFERENCE OF KOREAN SOCIETY TOWARD THE ISSUE AFTER THE WAR

The militaristic postwar sociopolitical structure in South Korea, caused by the division of the country after the Pacific War, actively promoted sex tourism in order to obtain foreign currency and, consequently, may have been in no position to criticize the Japanese government over military prostitution during the war.³⁸ Moreover, during the negotiations for the 1965 treaty, leaders of the Korean government were eager to gain Japan's economic and technical assistance in reconstructing after the Korean War. Such assistance was urgently needed for restoring the political stability that had been undermined by the division of the Korean peninsula after the Pacific War. Therefore, Korean government officials, many of whom had cooperated with the Japanese colonial government officials during the war, did not bring up issues related to the Japanese colonization of Korea, such as the *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu*.³⁹ It is also probable that the Korean people in general did not want to recall the painful experiences of Japanese colonization and did not feel any particular empathy with the "comfort women," since the majority of the latter were daughters of marginalized, poor Korean farmers.

CLASSISM OF KOREAN WOMEN AND RACISM AND CLASSISM OF JAPANESE WOMEN

The class consciousness of upper- and middle-class Korean women, and the sense of racial or ethnic superiority on the part of Japanese women, prevented either group from identifying strongly with the *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu* and taking up their cause as a feminist issue until the late 1980s. In addition, the internalized oppression caused by Confucian and Shintoist patriarchal socialization led ordinary Japanese women to identify more closely with male relatives who fought in the Pacific War than with either Japanese prostitutes or poor, rural, colonized Korean *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu*. Some women even thought it unnecessary to bring up the subject insofar as it could be considered one of the necessary evils or "unfortunate incidents" of a brutal war.⁴⁰ Per-

haps they rationalized that anything can happen in times of war, and that there has always been a relationship between militarism, on the one hand, and prostitution and/or sexual violence against women, on the other.

The Social Context for Politicization of the Issue: Recent Global and Korean Feminist Grassroots Movements

The past decade or so has seen a global explosion of women's activities. The progress of these activities has been marked by such milestones as the United Nations Decade for Women conferences held in Mexico City in 1975, Copenhagen in 1980, and Nairobi in 1985. A more important aspect of these global feminist activities is the emergence of ongoing local, regional and international feminist movements and structures. They range from the establishment of women's centers, hotlines, and shelters for battered women, to the creation of various international networks dealing with women's issues such as violence against women and sexual trafficking in women.⁴¹

According to a 1991 report by the Center for Women's Global Leadership, Douglass College, New Brunswick, New Jersey, "violence against women, one of the least recognized human rights issues in the world, despite being perhaps the most pervasive and insidious form which occurs in every country and among all ethnic and economic groups, has been the focal point of global feminist networking."⁴² Violence against women consists of rape, battery, homicide, sexual harassment, sex torture, terrorism, incest, compulsory heterosexuality, forced prostitution, sexual mutilation, sex tourism, low-paid labor, the depiction of women as sex objects in pornography and commercial advertisement, state violence, and the disproportionate undernourishment and impoverishment of women and female children.⁴³

In South Korea during the mid-1980s, Kwon In-Sook, the first woman in Korea's history to publicly come forward and file a lawsuit against the police for attempted rape, made the general public aware of the injustice of sexual violence against women. A network supporting Ms. Kwon arose from the organized efforts of the Federation of Korean Women's Associations and other grassroots organizations concentrating on the democratization movement.⁴⁴ The Federation, currently chaired by Rev. Cho Wha Soon, a pioneer in the women's labor union movement, designated 1992 as the Year of Sexual Violence Against Women, and introduced a legislative bill on sexual violence against women, including wife battering. On June 20, 1992, the annual conference of the Korean National Association of Women's Studies, held in Seoul, focused on the theme "Woman and Body."

Over the last decade and into the 1990s, national unification became an important goal of the Korean feminist movement, as it focused on the economic, social, and psychological impact on women of families divided between South Korea and communist North Korea.⁴⁵ They also focused on other divisions based on socioeconomic class and regional origin. The democratization movement during the 1980s also made Korean feminists painfully aware of the interconnection between gender, class, and neocolonial and political oppression, and how they are manifested in the daily experiences of poor rural-born, working-class women, such as workers in multinational corporations and the sex industry.⁴⁶ The formation of the Federation of Korean Women's Associations in 1987 prompted political action, which connected sexual discrimination across classes to national issues of unification and the democratization of the Korean society.⁴⁷ The Federation also gained global recognition and had widespread impact on feminist communities around the world, especially in the feminist theologian community.

Global Feminist and Grassroots Coalition Politics: The Chŏngshindae/Jūgunianfu Movement

Even though works on the *Chŏngshindae/Jūgunianfu* by Japanese journalists, historians, and former recruiters had begun to appear in the early 1970s, most former soldiers of the Japanese Imperial Army waited until recently to tell their stories anonymously on "hotlines" set up between January and March 1992 in Tokyo and other cities in Japan.⁴⁸ Some former soldiers in their late seventies and eighties called the hotlines because they wanted to tell their stories before they died.⁴⁹ Even though books had already been published on the topic, it was the Korean Church Women United and the Japan Women's Christian Temperance Union who first made the general public aware of this long-suppressed history and made it into a political issue, helping spread the movement to other parts of Asia, such as North Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Thailand, and Myanmar (Burma).⁵⁰ Their activities, and the Japanese government responses to them, focused world attention on the *Chŏngshindae/Jūgunianfu* as an instance of the gross violation of the human rights of women by the Japanese Imperial Army.

RECENT EVENTS: DIRECT ACTIONS OF WOMEN'S COALITION POLITICS

This darkest page in the history of Korea-Japan relations became a political issue after a coalition of Korean women's groups, Japanese women's groups, and the Uri-Yŏsŏng network of Korean women residing in Japan conducted investigative exposure trips, public forums, and television programs both in Korea and Japan that featured the personal tes-

timonies of former Korean "comfort women." The Korean groups collected their oral histories, retrieved public records, and collected research data to reveal the truth. The coalition group in Japan raised funds for a network of lawyers supporting the lawsuit filed against the Japanese government by nine Korean former "comfort women."

The following paragraphs will present a chronology of important events that galvanized the *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu* movement in Korea and Japan, a movement which later spread to the Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand, North Korea, and other parts of the Asia/Pacific region.³¹

On January 7, 1988, upon hearing of the Korean government's plan to send an emissary to Emperor Hirohito's funeral, over 200 members of women's groups—Korean Church Women United, the Korean Association of Women Theologians, the Women's Studies Research Committee of Ewha Woman's University, the Advocacy and Research Committee on the *Chōngshindae* Issue, the Federation of University Women Students, the YWCA of Korea, and the Federation of Korean Women's Associations—drafted a protest letter that included a statement on the issue of the *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu*. Then the members staged a demonstration march at Tapkol Park (formerly Pagoda Park), the site where a nationwide demonstration was launched for national independence against Japanese colonial rule on March 1, 1919.³²

In February 1988, Professor Yun Chung-ok and two members of the Korean Church Women United made an investigative exposure trip to Japan, visiting Fukuoka in northern Kyushu, Sapporo and Hakodate in Hokkaido, Tokashiki Island in Okinawa, and Kashiwa-shi on the outskirts of Tokyo. In 1989, Professor Yun also made exposure trips to Thailand and Papua New Guinea.³³

In April 1988, the International Conference on "Women and Tourism," sponsored by the Korean Church Women United, was held on Cheju Island, Korea. Korean and Japanese women have been writing and demonstrating both in Japan and Korea against sex tourism since the 1970s.³⁴ As early as 1977, the Asian Women's Association was formed to protest the Japanese sex tours to South Korea. It holds monthly study meetings, engages in protest actions, and maintains links with other women's groups both in Japan and abroad. And in April 1986, the Japan Women's Christian Temperance Union opened a shelter called HELP to provide assistance to migrant women workers in Japan.³⁵ A workshop held in 1985 entitled "Solidarity Among Migrant Women" at the NGO (Non-Governmental Organizations) Forum in Nairobi, Kenya, organized by the World Council of Churches, had already called for strengthening international solidarity and government involvement to deal with the

flow of women overseas.³⁶ At the 1988 conference on Cheju Island, Professor Yun Chung-ok of Ewha Woman's University made a presentation on the *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu* issue that enabled participants from Korea and Japan to make the historical connection between the *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu* and sex tourism.³⁷

In June 1990, the Korean Church Women United responded in anger to a Japanese Diet member's announcement that the *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu* would be treated as unrelated to other issues involving Koreans recruited for forced labor by the Japanese colonial government.

On June 6, 1990, in response to a question raised by a Socialist Diet member, Motooka Shoji, a government spokesperson stated that the recruitment of "comfort women" and the operation of "comfort centers" were the responsibility of private agencies and not those of the government.

On November 16, 1990, the Korean Council for Women Drafted by Japan for Sexual Slavery was officially formed under the leadership of Professor Yun Chung-ok. The Korean Council is a coalition of 36 women's organizations dedicated to exposing the truth about this aspect of the Japanese colonization of Korea and restoring the human dignity of the victims who have had to live in *han*-ridden silence and shame for almost half a century.³⁸

However, the most important event, which raised the consciousness of people everywhere, including many Japanese, was the first public testimony by a former Korean *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu*. On August 14, 1990, a female Korean atomic bomb victim brought Kim Hak-soon, a 67-year-old, childless widow and former "comfort woman" in Manchuria, to tell her story at the offices of Korean Church Women United. This woman's courageous decision created the momentum to unleash a series of activities and an outpouring of angry responses in both Korea and Japan.

In a series of public forums in December 1991 sponsored by the Japanese Women's Network Group, she told audiences in several Japanese cities her story.

My whole body and soul still shiver just thinking and talking about my experience as a *Chōngshindae* woman, even when I saw the Japanese flag, the *hinomaru*, as I was boarding the Japan Airlines flight to come here.

As a living witness, my blood boiled when I heard the Japanese government denying its role in the *Chōngshindae* system on the television newscast and their refusal to teach history correctly to younger generations.

As a former *Chōngshindae*, when I refused to have sex with soldiers, they said that they would kill me because I was under orders from the Emperor, the commanding officer, and the soldier himself, a soldier of the Japanese Imperial Army.³⁹

It took just one courageous woman's action to raise public awareness and encourage other former *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu* and their relatives to come forward with their stories. In addition, some former Japanese government officials and schoolteachers, who were directly or indirectly responsible for recruitment, have come forward publicly to ask for forgiveness.⁴⁰

Since 1983, Yoshida Seiji, a former chief of the National Service Labor Recruitment branch office in the southern Japanese port of Shimonoseki in Yamaguchi Prefecture, has written two books on his war crimes involving Korean *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu*. He was the first Japanese to publicly confess and to apologize to Koreans on visits to Korea in 1983 and again in August 1992 as an invited guest of the Fraternity of Survivors and Relatives of Pacific War Victims of Korea. He considers the *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu* to be "the most serious war crime in the twentieth century." He admitted that between 1942 and 1945, with assistance of the Japanese police, he had "hunted"—mostly in the Chōlla provinces—approximately 5,000 Koreans, including 1,000 Korean women aged 18 to 30, some of them nursing mothers, and then handed them over to the Japanese Imperial Army at Shimonoseki.⁴¹

On December 6, 1991, three former "comfort women," joined by six more on April 7, 1992, filed a lawsuit in Tokyo district court in conjunction with lawsuits filed by thirty-five members of the Fraternity of Survivors and Relatives of Pacific War Victims of Korea. The first public hearing of this lawsuit was held on June 1, 1992, at the Tokyo district court.⁴²

On January 8, 1992, members of the Korean Council marched in protest in front of the Japanese Diet. The following Wednesday, January 15, 1992, members of the Korean Council were joined by 400 people, including members of the Fraternity of Pacific War Victims' Families and six other organizations, in the first of a series of a weekly demonstrations in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul, the longest-running weekly demonstration in South Korea's history.⁴³ Professor Yun Chung-ok announced that the Korean Council would continue the weekly demonstrations until the Japanese government meets the six demands in the lawsuit made by the nine former *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu*.

On January 17, 1992, the public outrage created by testimonies from former *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu*, and the discovery by Yoshiaki of Chūō University of wartime documents at the Self-Defense Department a few days before Prime Minister Miyazawa's visit to Seoul, prompted Miyazawa to issue an apology during his visit. He was also obliged to promise that the Japanese government would conduct an investigation and publicize its report on the issue of Korean *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu*.⁴⁴

Between January and March 1992, the Korean Council installed a hotline in Seoul to encourage women victims, relatives, and those responsible for drafting *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu* to come forward with their testimonials and records. During the three-month period beginning January 24, a total of 390 people responded, of whom 155 were either victims or their relatives, including 74 former "comfort women" who came forward and entered their names in the government's registry of surviving *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu*.⁴⁵ Members of the research committee of the Korean Council have conducted life-history interviews of 39 former "comfort women."

During the same period, between January 14–16 and March 30–31, 1992, hotlines were set up in Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto, and Fukuoka by the Japanese Women's Network Group (a network of sixteen Christian and women's groups in Japan), a coalition of three groups of Korean women resident in Japan, and other Japanese grassroots organizations such as Nihon no Sengo Sekinin o Hakkiri Saseru Kai (Association for Japan Taking Clear Postwar Responsibility). The Osaka hotline alone, *Jūgunianfu* Number 110, received 230 calls on March 30–31, 1992. Sixty-one of the callers, most of whom were Japanese military personnel and associated civilian workers, confessed personal involvement in the Japanese military's *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu* system.⁴⁶

One of the purposes of these hotlines was to gather facts from former "comfort women," Japanese soldiers, officials, and citizens who were involved in the *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu* system in order to raise the political consciousness of the general public and compel the Japanese government to accept the demands made by the plaintiffs in the lawsuit filed by the Korean former "comfort women."

In 1992, the Japan Women's Christian Temperance Union submitted a petition with 4,150 signatures to Nobuo Ishihara, the Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary, in support of the demands made by the Korean Council. The petition requested that the Japanese government conduct an investigation, integrate these findings into Japanese history textbooks, publicly apologize, compensate the survivors by recognizing the Japanese Imperial Army's official involvement and the brutality committed against the victims, and erect a monument on the behalf of the victims.⁴⁷ The Women's Christian Temperance Union and other women's groups also undertook a fundraising project in support of the lawsuit filed by nine former "comfort women."

On February 4, 1992, Professor Grant Goodman of the University of Kansas released documents entitled "Comfort Women and Comfort Center Management Regulations," recorded on February 1943 in Manila. These documents clearly state that comfort center management fell under the supervision of Japanese military communication officers.⁴⁸

Between February and March 1992, Professor Lee Hyo-jae of the Korean Council addressed audiences in New York City, Washington, D.C., and Los Angeles, at the invitation of Korean American Women United and the Women's Association for the Commemoration of the March First Korean Independence Movement.⁴⁰ On April 1, 1992, the latter Women's Association launched a petition drive aimed at building a monument for *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu*. The Los Angeles chapter of Korean American Women United subsequently sent three delegates to Pyongyang for a September 1-6, 1992, meeting entitled "Women's Role in Peace in Asia."

On May 2, 1992, a mutual support group of former "comfort women" called the Mugunghwa Chamae Hoe [Hibiscus Sisters Association] was formed in Seoul, Korea.

On May 13, 1992, the Human Rights Commission of the United Nations announced in Geneva that it would conduct a fact-finding investigation on the *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu* issue. Furthermore, the Commission's Working Group on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, composed of the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women and the International Abolitionist Federation, placed the issue on the official agenda for its August 15, 1992, meeting. Three delegates from the Korean Council and one former "comfort woman" testified at the meeting.⁴¹

In June 1992, Professor Yun Chung-ok and members of the *Jūgunianfu* Investigation Group (*Jūgunianfu Mondai o Kyūmeisuru Kai*) made trips to former Manchuria to locate the graves of "comfort women."

On July 6, 1992, a Japanese government spokesperson offered an apology that admitted official Japanese Army involvement in the recruitment of "comfort women" and the administration of "comfort centers." However, the statement neither recognized forced recruitment nor offered any compensation to the individual victims. At a press conference the next day, the Korean Council denounced the insincere attitude of the Japanese government and the inadequacy of any statement that denied the coercive patterns of recruitment and sexual enslavement.⁴²

Also in July 1992, documents surfaced from Indonesian war-crime tribunals held in Sumatra. This was the first documented evidence of forced recruitment, and revealed that a total of 300 Dutch women had been coerced into Japanese military sex slavery under the threat of death to themselves and their families.⁴³

On August 10-11, 1992, nearly 100 women participants, including nine former South Korean *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu* and 30 delegates from Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, the Philippines, and Thailand, met in Seoul under the sponsorship of the Korean Council. The participants founded the Comfort Women Issue—Asian Solidarity Conference

to continue networking, cooperative research, and advocacy work. Calling this issue the most atrocious crime committed against women, these participants from six Asian and Pacific countries passed a resolution with five demands to be sent to the Japanese government, other relevant governments, nongovernmental women's groups, and the United Nations Human Rights Commission.⁴⁴

Between August 3 and 28, 1992, four Non-Governmental Organizations, including the World Council of Churches and the International Education Development testified before the UN Human Rights Commission's Subcommission for the Prevention of Discrimination and the Protection of Minorities, calling the Japanese *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu* system a crime against humanity that violated the human rights of Asian women and the international agreement prohibiting forced labor that Japan signed in 1932. In response to the testimony, the Subcommission decided to request that Professor Theo van Boven, a UN-appointed expert on compensation for victims of gross violations of human rights, to prepare a report by August 1993. He subsequently visited Japan and Korea between December 3 and 11, 1992, to conduct investigations.⁴⁵

On September 1-6, 1992, women of Korean and Japanese ancestry from South Korea, Japan, and the United States, attended a conference in Pyongyang entitled "Women's Role in Peace in Asia." This was the third in a series of conferences initiated in February 1991 by Japanese women and Korean women residing in Japan. At this conference, four North Korean and four South Korean former "comfort women" gave their personal testimonies. Some of the North Korean women testified to being drafted as early as 1929, much earlier than the South Korean women.⁴⁶ Such conferences have provided a valuable opportunity for Japanese and South Korean women from nongovernmental organizations to meet face to face with North Korean women who share their two major concerns: national unification and the *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu* issue.⁴⁷

On October 13, 1992, infuriated by the Japanese government's attitude, a coalition of Korean women's groups submitted an open letter to Japanese Prime Minister Miyazawa protesting the proposed establishment of a welfare fund for former *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu* and demanding that Japanese government representatives visit surviving women victims and to take responsibility for respecting the human rights of the people of the Asia-Pacific region. The Japanese government issued no response.⁴⁸

Summary and Conclusion

The central task of those engaged in active research on the *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu* issue is to recover evidence and rewrite the true his-

tory of these ordinary Korean women, whom Professor Yun Chung-ok calls "the central figures of the history of Korea." A combination of documents from official archives and personal testimonies from surviving witnesses has made it increasingly difficult for the Japanese government to deny any official role in the forcible and/or deceitful recruitment of large numbers of women as sexual slaves for the Japanese military and colonial government. The true picture is slowly emerging.

For feminists, there is a broader need to place this issue in a comprehensive analysis of the sexual exploitation of women and to build a global political coalition to liberate women from sexual, economic, political, and racial oppressions. Japan's colonial and sexual exploitation of Korean and other Asian and Pacific women is not just past history. Its postwar economic strength has allowed Japan to continue exploiting foreign women as a source of cheap labor and sexual services, no longer just overseas, but in Japan itself.

The *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu* issue is on the cutting edge for the contemporary women's movement in Korea, Japan, and other parts of the Pacific and Asia. For the first time in the history of Korea-Japan relations, Korean and Japanese women have engaged in formally organized coalition activities with the common goal of recovering and correcting Japan's official accounts of its colonial history.¹ It is hoped that such coalition politics will help bring about a reconciliation between Japanese women, Korean women residing in Japan, Korean women elsewhere, and women in other Pacific and Asian countries by leaving a legacy of shared struggle for justice, peace, and freedom to future generations.

Monetary restitution for the "comfort women" would be welcome, but not before the Japanese government officially acknowledges its crimes against humanity and issues a formal apology. When a young male Japanese reporter asked her how much she was seeking in compensation, Shim Mija, one of the former "comfort women," gave the following angry response before fainting at a March 1992 public forum in Japan.

I did not come all the way here to ask for money. Neither any kind of apology by anybody nor any amount of money will bring back 69 years of my lost life. I struggled hard to survive, waiting for this day when I could tell the truth to the whole world so that others' lives will be saved. We can save all of our and our children's lives by including the living truth of my experience in history books for future generations so that this kind of injustice against all of our humanity will not be repeated again!"

Nevertheless, the Japanese government is considering setting up a

The government also recently said it planned to include a yet-undetermined amount of money in the next year's budget to create a foundation that would funnel money through the Japanese Red Cross.² In response, the Korean Council strongly protested the idea of the Japanese government paying *mimaikin* for damaging women's bodies, finding it extremely humiliating. Instead, it announced plans to raise funds from Koreans in order to conduct its own investigations and to pay for living expenses, medical bills, and housing for *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu* survivors in order to be able to refuse Japan's token handout. A nationwide fund drive is to begin on March 1, 1993, on the anniversary of the March First (1919) Korean independence movement. Among the recent donors was a Buddhist monk who turned over all of his life savings and a Buddhist lay woman who donated a piece of her property to be used to provide housing for surviving *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu*.³

Korean women residing in Japan, who have been actively involved in this issue, feel that they came to understand more clearly their own present social condition by placing their *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu* foremothers within the larger framework of Japan's historical colonization and contemporary neocolonization which they still experience in their everyday lives.⁴ Japanese feminist historian Suzuki Yuko writes, "Japanese women also have an obligation to see justice done for our Korean sisters. Our own liberation is bound together with correcting injustices done to these Korean sisters, thus affirming our own identity as women and as caring human beings."⁵

Indeed, it is only by retrieving and validating the whole experience of the *Chōngshindae/Jūgunianfu* that all of our humanity can be restored. Only then can we revitalize our strength and enlarge our vision, enabling us to continue our common struggle to change the world into a better and more humane place to live for us all and for future generations.

NOTES

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Han is unresolved resentment against injustice suffered by the oppressed, as defined by Hyun Young Hak; the suppressed, amassed, and condensed experience of oppression so that it forms a kind of "lump in one's spirit," as defined by Han Nam Dong; or a sense of unresolved resentment against injustice suffered, a sense of helplessness because of the overwhelming odds against one, a feeling of total abandonment ("Why has thou forsaken me?"), "a feeling of acute pain of sorrow in one's guts and bowels, making the whole body writhe and wriggle, and an obstinate urge to right the wrong," as defined by Hyun Kyung Chung, "Han-pu-ri Ritual," in *We Dare to Dream*, ed. by Virginia Fabella and Sun Ai Lee Park (Hong Kong: Asian Women's Resource Centre for Culture and Theology, 1989), p. 138.

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