

Chapter 5: On the “Involvement” and “Responsibility” of the Japanese Government and the Japanese Army

Japanese army’s involvement does not equal evil

Of those who criticize the comfort women system, some regard any involvement of the Japanese army, in whatever form it may be, as evil. In fact, many papers and comments conclude with proving that there was Japanese army involvement in the comfort women system.

The logic behind this is that by demonstrating involvement of the Japanese army, which is, as a given, itself evil, with the comfort women system leads to the inevitable conclusion that the system is evil. Then, critics state that the Japanese army established the evil comfort women system and was responsible for it.

Of course, this is a logical stretch and absurd. As described earlier, the Japanese army did not violate either international or domestic laws. Accordingly, it did not do anything deserving of punished. If any illegality was conducted, a victim must exist but there were no victims of the Japanese army. The International Military Tribunal for the Far East followed this line of thinking.

On the other hand, there were victims of unscrupulous Korean recruiters. Very often, Korean comfort women were either cajoled, deceived or threatened into becoming comfort women, or by “coercion in the broad sense of the word,” but these were what unscrupulous Korean recruiters did, not the Japanese army. If comfort women were victims, they were victimized by unscrupulous Korean recruiters and not by the Japanese army.

Some women who have claimed to have been Korean comfort women have said that they were physically abused or forced to perform sex, but according to Park’s *Comfort Women of the Empire*, in most cases, acts of abuse and force were committed by Korean recruiters.⁽⁵¹⁾

As Lee details in *Anti-Japan Tribalism*, Korean recruiters in those days were ranked--retail, wholesale and central market. If a request was made to a recruiter of the central market rank, he could gather a substantial number of women from recruiters of

retail and wholesale market ranks.⁽⁵²⁾ At the same time, there was a black market of unscrupulous recruiters who illegally deceived Korean women into prostitution and were sold into the sex industry in Korea, Manchuria and China.

There were such networks of recruiters well before the Japanese army established comfort stations. I want to emphasize this point: these networks were not built for the Japanese army comfort women system but existed much earlier. Nonetheless, Lee gives harsh criticism—that these networks were built because Japan introduced commercial prostitution into Korea.

The Japanese army used networks of Korean recruiters to gather women who could obtain the five needed documents. Some claim that the Japanese army used certain recruiters either as tools or conspired with them.

This would be true if the Japanese army specifically chose unscrupulous recruiters and ordered them to gather women by means that bordered on fraud or even kidnapping them, but in fact there was no need to go that far. Also given the aforementioned rank structure of recruiters mentioned by Lee, fraud and force were unnecessary.

In some cases, the army may have specifically asked recruiters who were able to gather many women in order to fill a quota but it would not be appropriate to say that recruiters were used as tools or that the army conspired with recruiters.

The Japanese army received various goods from various traders. The army checked traders to see if they met army standards and delivered requested quantities. This relationship cannot be considered using traders as tools or conspiring with traders. If the army had ordered the traders to steal for securing the necessary quantities, it would be a totally another matter.

The Japanese Government and the Army cracked down on recruitment that bordered on fraudulent or kidnapping

In reality, the Japanese army issued many notices that cracked down on recruitment by unscrupulous brokers in order to prevent women from becoming comfort women through fraud or kidnapping. Just a little thought will show that conspiring with

unscrupulous recruiters involves risk from the perspective of preventing venereal diseases as well as inclusion of problematic comfort women.

In the first place, Japan, including Taiwan and Korea, had a law prohibiting human trafficking. In fact, human trafficking was out in the open in Korea. There was no need to go through the trouble of breaking the law to gather problematic comfort women. The reasons are, as Ramseyer pointed out, that there were brothels around Japanese army camps and prostitutes followed armies.

The Japanese army wanted comfort women with low likelihood of venereal disease infection, healthy and unlikely to cause problems.

Even with the law in place and enforcement by the police, the Japanese army issued notices. This is because a decision was made to establish new comfort stations and so many comfort women needed to be recruited. Thus, the army intended to prevent any increase in illegal acts committed by unscrupulous recruiters who might view recruitment as an opportunity.

If such illegal acts occurred frequently and got a lot of press, then the establishment of comfort stations would have come to the attention of the general public, which in turn would have evoked the anxiety of women involved in home-front defense. Of course, inclusion of high-risk prostitutes should also be prevented.

Accordingly, at least the Japanese army, apart from some exceptions, did not assist in illegal recruitment of comfort women and were not responsible for “coercion in the broad sense,” bordering on fraud or kidnapping. If there had been women who became comfort women by “coercion in the broad sense,” for all that, this would have been the fault of unscrupulous Korean recruiters and not the Japanese army.

Furthermore, if women who had been deceived or kidnapped were headed for either active battle zones or occupied areas, Japanese authorities would have demanded the presentation of five documents (a license for prostitution, a letter of consent, a personal background report, a sealed certificate and a copy of a family register) in addition to the contract and thoroughly checked them. This was intended to prevent risky comfort women from entering comfort stations.

Nagai Kazu, a professor at the Faculty of Literature, Kyoto Tachibana University gives an example of certain people commissioned by the Consulate General of Japan in Shanghai, lacking a recruiter's license, who recruited comfort women in Tanabe, Wakayama Prefecture. They were arrested but soon released. Nagai argues that the Japanese authorities eased up on the crackdown.⁽⁵³⁾ However, we do not know if the women gathered were exempted from examination of their five documents. Most likely, they underwent an examination.

The reason the recruiters who arrested in Tanabe were commissioned by the Consulate General of Japan in Shanghai, but did not have a recruiter's license, is probably that there were no recruiters in Shanghai, where licensed prostitution had been abolished. Accordingly, as a special measure, the Consulate General commissioned those without a license, of which the Home Ministry and local police stations were notified. The Home Ministry and the police were ready because both had been notified.

While unusual, this was hardly normal. Not all of those cases were allowed to pass as special measures. Around the same time, in Miyagi and Yamagata Prefectures, the police issued warnings of brokers trying to recruit women. The recruiters in Tanabe were arrested. Sure enough, crackdowns were strictly enforced.

More importantly, for preventing problems like the one in Tanabe, the Japanese army issued a notice *Gun'ianjo jugyofuto boshu ni kansuru ken* ("Regarding the Recruitment of Military Comfort Women"), which was intended for subsequent cases wherein army expeditionary forces needed to commission brokers to recruit comfort women and prescribes cooperation with the local police in mainland Japan and the colonies.⁽⁵⁴⁾

This indicates that the Japanese army did not constantly overlook illegal acts committed by recruiters. In other words, there was no "conspiracy" between the Japanese army and recruiters except in exceptional cases.

Many "private comfort stations" in the East Indies

To the argument that "there was no forceful taking away by the Japanese army," there are those who counter this with the "Semarang Incident," in which Japanese army officers took women from internment camps for local residents to set up private comfort

stations and had them entertain soldiers. One of the victims was Jan Ruff O'Herne, who appeared on TV in Australia and in other countries.

Similar cases were said to have occurred in the East Indies (currently Indonesia). The question in these cases is whether the comfort station was established with the consent of the upper echelon of the local military. In the Semarang Incident, they set up “private comfort stations” without the knowledge of their superior. When these came to their superior’s attention, these “private comfort stations” were ordered to close.⁽⁵⁵⁾

This incident shows that this was not a crime committed by the Japanese army but a crime committed by specific officers. In fact, the officers faced a war crime trial after the war and were convicted.

In the East Indies, there were many other cases in which some people in the Japanese army established private comfort stations without the permission of the local commander. These facilities were said to have housed women who had been “forcibly abducted” by kidnapping and threats, in addition to those who were persuaded to be comfort women by village heavyweights and elders.⁽⁵⁶⁾

There were few regular comfort stations available in the East Indies, where many residents follow Islam, which prohibits prostitution, and women married young, which made it quite difficult to recruit comfort women. These are the probable reasons why private comfort stations were established in the East Indies.⁽⁵⁷⁾

The Dutch government's investigation stated that there were no “orders by the home government or local army commander.” What is the Japanese army’s responsibility, where many “private comfort stations” were established in the “East Indies”?

One thing that is certain though is that army-approved comfort stations did not violate either domestic or international laws and were not regarded as violations of the laws of war.

Illegally recruiting comfort women to establish and operate private comfort stations constituted a war crime, as the Semarang Incident illustrates, and army officers who ordered their establishment were brought to justice when they were caught. However, of Japanese army commanders or expeditionary armies did not give orders to establish

private comfort stations and were not tried. That is, these cases were not due to the Japanese army but due to individual crooked officers.

Ironically, Indonesia, where many of these “private comfort stations” were, displayed the most benign attitude to Japan in terms of the comfort women issue. The Asian Women’s Fund sought to pay compensation claimed by 22,234 women. The number of Japanese troops who were in East Indies is said to be about 20,000. Regarding this matter as serious, the Indonesian government requested that the compensation be donated to welfare facilities for the elderly and not to individuals.⁽⁵⁸⁾

After this, Indonesia refrained from condemning the Japanese government, lodging new claims and arguing that the comfort women issue is a “women’s human rights issue.” The Netherlands, Indonesia’s former colonial master, deals with this issue in the same way.

If a war crime was committed by the Japanese army, the Indonesian government and the government of The Netherlands held the Japanese government accountable and demand compensation. But if there was no war crime, then neither did anything about it. That is, even comfort stations housing local women, not to mention approved comfort stations housing Japanese or Korean comfort women, did not become an issue unless the women were taken illegally.

Setting up and operating comfort stations itself is not illegal and hence women who were there were not victims of a crime. There is no blame that the Japanese army shoulders for establishing comfort stations.

Yoshimi’s theory undergoing changes

Yoshimi, who wants to make comfort stations evil by some means or another, supported “forceful mobilization” thinking. Then, once it was found out that there was no forceful mobilization, he advanced “coercion in the broad sense.”⁽⁵⁹⁾ After this also turned out to be a failure, he brought up what Hata calls the “new Yoshimi theory.”⁽⁵⁹⁾

The “new theory” states that the comfort stations did not provide the four freedoms, namely freedom of “residence,” “movement,” “retirement” and “declining serving customers.” Therefore, the comfort women were slaves.

The fact is that there were other freedoms, other than that of freedom of residence and this is evident in the Japanese Prisoner of War Interrogation Report written by the United States Office of War Information Psychological Warfare Team.⁽⁶¹⁾

It should be noted, however, that the freedom of “declining service customers” was not really allowed since the work was basically prostitution. This is a matter of common knowledge in countries where prostitution is legal even in the present time, when people uphold “protection of women’s human rights”.

Regarding “freedom of residence,” because comfort stations were provided as incidental army facilities and were located in battle zones, granting the women “freedom of residence” is realistically impossible. Saying that the women had no “freedom of residence” and were therefore “sex slaves” is unreasonable.

After failing to produce evidence to support the “comfort women forceful mobilization” line of thinking, Yoshimi brought up “coercion in the broad sense.” When this also came to a dead end, he set forth the “new Yoshimi theory” to claim that the women were “sex slaves because they did not have the four freedoms.” How his thinking undergoing changes paradoxically proves that the comfort stations were not evil.

Notes

(51) Park Yu-ha *Comfort Women of the Empire* Asahi Shimbun Publications, 2014, pp. 105 - 110

(52) Lee Young-hoon *Anti-Japan Tribalism* 269 - 270

(53) Nagai Kazu *Nihongun no Ianjo Seisaku ni Tsuite* (Regarding the Comfort Station Policy of the Japanese Army) <http://nagaikazu.la.coocan.jp/works/guniansyo.html>

(54) *Gun'ianjo jugyofuto boshu ni kansuru ken* (Regarding the Recruitment of Military Comfort Women) March 4, 1938, Yoshimi Yoshiaki ed. *Jugun Ianfu Shiryō-shū* (A Collection of Documents on Military Comfort Women), pp. 105 - 106

(55) Jan Ruff O'Herne, Watanabe Hiromi transl. *Orandajin "Ianfu" Jan no Monogatari* (Japanese translation of *Fifty Years of Silence: The Extraordinary Memoir of a War Rape Survivor*) (Mokusei-Sha, 1999) p. 212, Digital Museum “The Comfort Women Issue and the Asian Women's Fund” “Women made to become comfort women – Netherlands” <https://www.awf.or.jp/e1/netherlands.html>

- (56) Asian Women's Fund ed. Kurasawa Aiko "*Indonesia ni Okeru Ianfu Chosa Hokoku* (Report on a Comfort Women Investigation in Indonesia) p. 98
https://www.awf.or.jp/pdf/0062_p089_105.pdf
- (57) "*Indonesia ni Okeru Ianfu Chosa Hokoku* (Report on a Comfort Women Investigation in Indonesia) p. 98
- (58) Digital Museum "The Comfort Women Issue and the Asian Women's Fund"
'Report of a Study of Dutch Government Documents on the Forced Prostitution of Dutch Women in the Dutch East Indies during the Japanese Occupation,'
<https://www.awf.or.jp/pdf/0205.pdf>
'Projects by country or region – Indonesia' <https://www.awf.or.jp/e3/indonesia-00.html>
- (59) Yoshimi Yoshiaki, Kawata Fumiko "*Jugun Ianfu*" o Meguru 30 no Uso to Shinjitsu (30 Lies and Truths surrounding "Military Comfort Women") (Otsuki Shoten 1997) pp. 17 - 23
- (60) Hata Ikuhiko *Ianfu Mondai no Kessan* (The Bottom Line of the Comfort Women Issue) pp. 27 - 28
- (61) Japanese Prisoner of War Interrogation Report, United States Office of War Information Psychological Warfare Team https://www.awf.or.jp/pdf/0051_5.pdf