

Chapter 5. Diary of a Japanese Military Brothel Manager

My approach to reading the book

Obviously, Japanese women have engaged in prostitution abroad, most notably in the form of the so-called *karayuki-san* who travelled the world plying their trade in the late nineteenth century. It is likewise fairly apparent that Korean women under Japanese colonial rule also engaged in prostitution both in Korea itself and overseas. To demonstrate this point, I will now examine the diary of a "receptionist" at comfort stations in Singapore and Burma (modern-day Myanmar) and will consider what it can tell us about the relationship between the Japanese Army and prostitutes.

In August of 2013 the publication of the book, *Diary of a Japanese Military Brothel Manager*, caused a major sensation in South Korea. Naturally, it sparked my interest as well. In South Korea, it was widely regarded as being "definitive evidence" of the forced recruitment of Korean comfort women by the Japanese Army. In Japan the only newspaper to cover it was the *Mainichi Shimbun*. Although the *Mainichi Shimbun* did quote portions of the diary, I suspect almost no one in Japan is aware of this book outside of a small group of researchers. I wanted to transcend Korea-Japan relations and to find out what the diary was really all about.

I bought the book immediately and after reading it over once I took it up as a text for discussion with my weekly reading circle. There were those who were apprehensive about the fact that I had brought in a book about such a touchy subject, but I insisted that the sensitive nature of the subject material was what made it so interesting. Then, over the course of the next six months or so, I analyzed its contents thoroughly while making detailed notes.

Before I read the book, I had made the decision that I would think about it in a purely objective manner, not for the purpose of reconciliation, peace, or understanding between Korea and Japan. In other words, I would read it without taking into consideration the political rights or wrongs of colonialism, nationalism, pacifism, and other -isms.

One must bear in mind that research is not possible if one starts with the presumption that colonialism is absolutely evil. Most of the now-independent nations of Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Oceania were colonies of the Western powers at some point in the past. Likewise, parts of Asia were colonized by the Japanese, but no matter how bad one might think that was, a researcher should simply treat facts as facts.

The problem is that, in South Korea, Japanese colonialism is regarded as the root of all evil, and South Koreans still will not discuss the reality and consequences of Japanese rule. By its very nature, scholarship must be free from the shackles of nationalism and patriotism. This is what "academic freedom" is all about. However, in research regarding colonialism, a considerable number of taboos and sacred cows remain. Many people fail to surmount

these obstacles in a skillful manner and instead conduct their research by consciously avoiding them.

During the 1980's, when I was teaching in South Korea, it was normal that a professor would start off any lesson on Japan by casting aspersions on Japan. The catchphrase referred to in these lessons was "One must know one's enemy in order to defeat one's enemy", as Sun Tzu said in *The Art of War*. I found this attitude to be somewhat unfair, and so during my lectures I touched on such issues as the maintenance of infrastructure, the improvement of rice crops through selective breeding, and the development of education which occurred under Japanese colonial rule. I wanted to do away with the presumption that Japanese colonialism was "the root of all evil".

This would be the start of my long ordeal. Unfortunately, the situation that I have described above has not taken a turn for the better since then, and actually has been made worse by the deterioration of Japan-Korea relations.

How the diary came to be published

The diary was written by Mr. Bak (1905-1979), who, from August 20, 1942, worked at the "front desk" of comfort stations in Burma and Singapore. He made entries in his diary over a span of two years, from January 1, 1943 to December 31, 1944.

The diary was a unique document, portrayed in South Korea as being definitive evidence of the forced recruitment of Korean comfort women by the Japanese Army. Out of curiosity, I went to find the original diary in Seoul because I wanted to clarify whether or not the forced recruitment of comfort women really was a fact.

I traveled north of Seoul and then, by heading in the direction of Panmunjom and my own hometown, I went to find the man in possession of the original diary. The diary's current owner was a sculptor, Oh Chae-hyeon, the curator of the Time Capsule Museum in the city of Paju, who had bought the diary a long time ago at a used bookstore. Oh told me that the diary covered thirty-six years and that its twenty-six volumes were being kept under his care. To read the whole thing, it would likely take several years. In book form, it was called *Diary of a Japanese Military Brothel Manager* because it excerpted two years of entries relating to Mr. Bak's time at the comfort stations.

Photo Caption: The original copy of *Diary of a Japanese Military Brothel Manager* (owned by Oh Chae-hyeon of the Time Capsule Museum in Paju).

Photo Caption: The owner of the diary Oh Chae-hyeon (at left) with the author.

Thanks to Mr. Oh, I was able to look through the original diary with my own eyes. I proceeded to ask him if I could meet with Mr. Bak's descendants, but he responded that this would not be possible. It was very disappointing to me, but I accepted his explanation.

Diaries are not intended to be made public

A diary is an informal and personal document in which an individual records his daily experiences. However, it might not necessarily be “daily,” as there are times when a day or two might be skipped due to various circumstances, and the subsequent entry will summarize several days’ events. In comparison to an official logbook, a diary is similar in some ways but different in others. In the case of a diary, the author's unvarnished secrets and true intentions are fully exposed.

A useful reference for reading Mr. Bak's diary is the *Diary of Takami Jun*, the first volume of a two-part volume published by Keiso in 1966. After being conscripted into the Army's Propaganda Unit, Takami Jun kept a diary during the Japanese Army's invasion of Burma, which commenced in January of 1942, and many of his diary's dates and locations line up with those in Mr. Bak's diary. Takami spent about a year in Japanese-ruled Rangoon where he was involved in the editing and publishing of newspapers and magazines as well as censoring Burmese books and films. He carried out key duties that are typical to a public relations team, such as propagandizing to the locals through both publications and events, while justifying Japan's invasions as being part of "the liberation of East Asia".

When Takami published this diary after the end of the war, he felt conflicted.

In the preface of volume one, he wrote, "I sincerely apologize to everyone for the indiscreet language used in this diary," and in the preface of part one of volume two he wrote, "In this diary, I seem to be providing proof that I collaborated with the national war effort, and thus some people might think that I would have been wiser to have quietly disposed of it. However, this is what I was really doing at the time, and so I decided to publicize all of it, without any alterations."

As you can see from Takami's reaction, people do not start writing a diary with the idea that it will one day be made public.

The format of the diary

Examination of the format of Mr. Bak's diary shows that each daily entry starts in the following style.

"The 18th year of Showa, May 22 (April 19 under the lunar calendar), It was cloudy and rained at night, 21C, 23C."

It starts with the regnal year and date, then the date under the lunar calendar, followed by the weather and the minimum and maximum temperatures in degrees Celsius.

The use of regnal years originated in China and spread across East Asia, but today they remain in use only in Japan and North Korea. For the date, Mr. Bak used both the solar calendar and the lunar calendar side-by-side, though at that point in time most people were already using the solar calendar.

The original diary was generally in Korean *hangul* script mixed with Chinese characters, but in some places the Japanese *katakana* script was used. In the book which was ultimately published, all this had been translated into Korean *hangul* by An Byeong-jik, professor *emeritus* at Seoul University. I did note that the Japanese which was used in the original diary contained some mistakes, like failures to distinguish the Japanese long vowels and voiced consonants, but it seemed no different from the level of Japanese I spoke, and I definitely related to it.

The translation of Japanese and Korean presents unique challenges, even apart from the translation of the words themselves. For example, *ri* in Japanese is about four kilometers, but the same unit of measurement in Korean is about four hundred meters. Mr. Bak himself sometimes confused the two.

"Our lodgings are only thirty or so meters from the seashore and are about two *ri* from the city of Singapore." (Diary entry of November 8, 1944.)

In this case, he was likely referring to Korean *ri*, meaning eight hundred meters, and not Japanese *ri* which would have meant eight kilometers.

"I was asked to go take a look at the fishing grounds around Singapore and so I headed down there to the waterfront fisheries over twenty *ri* away."

In this case, it also seems appropriate to assume that he meant Korean *ri*, or eight kilometers, as using Japanese *ri* would put the distance at eighty kilometers.

"I have heard that the Imperial Army has crossed the border between India and Burma and has now advanced into a position only one *ri* away from the stronghold of Imphal." (Diary entry of April 16, 1943.)

Here it's difficult to say whether he was referring to Japanese *ri* or Korean *ri*. In this case, I had to consult a map.

Also, Koreans use the verb "to play" to refer to all manner of rest and recreation. Because the word has so many uses, there are times when a precise translation into Japanese is difficult. For example, if the author writes that he "played in the comfort station," the meaning could be easily misunderstood.

The author, Mr. Bak, was born in Jinyeong, South Gyeongsang Province, and he had worked as a scribe and with the prostitution industry. Therefore, what was the reason that he wrote this diary and why did he keep it up to his death? It may have been purely his personal thoughts, which he didn't want others to know, or it may have been intended to be a record of his work and duties at the comfort station. It may also have been a combination

of the two. Speculating about the motivations behind the diary is endlessly fascinating to me.

A loyal subject

I will now quote from a diary entry dated January 1, 1943.

"The 18th year of Showa and the 2,603th year since the founding of Japan, January 1, Friday, Clear skies, 19°C, 21°C. This was the second New Year's Day since the start of the Holy War for East Asia. One hundred million people prostrated themselves in reverence, and celebrated in honor of the long life of the Emperor and the prosperity of the imperial family. I am very far from my hometown. I woke up at the Kanpachi Club, a comfort station in Arakan, Burma, and bowed in the direction of the Tokyo Imperial Palace in the east. I thought about my parents, siblings, wife, and children back at home and prayed for their happiness. The light of the eastern sky shined down on me auspiciously, blessing the nation with prosperity and the Imperial Army with martial fortune. My brother's wife and (REDACTED)-hwan together with some comfort women went down to the regimental headquarters as well as three or four other places to deliver their New Year's greetings in the hopes that we might enjoy another safe and happy year. Once night fell and my New Year's on the front lines was almost over, I dreamed about a year of good fortune. Because I had had trouble sleeping for the last several days, this night I slept soundly."

A diary, being a record of one's own life, can reveal, among other things, an individual's character, personality, and upbringing.

Did Mr. Bak ever consider publishing the diary? Would he have been fine with it being published? Did he think that it might be published one day? Writing in his diary was a daily ritual for him for at least in excess of thirty years, and perhaps he wrote the whole thing without seriously considering that someone else might read it.

However, why is it that he wrote so minimally about the war, the Japanese Army, and the comfort women? I suppose that something like an accident involving two comfort women was just a part of war. Why did Mr. Bak not write about the war, even while carefully noting down things like the remittances he sent to his two wives?

"April 29 (April 6 under the lunar calendar) Saturday, Clear skies. Today marks the Emperor's third birth date since the start of the holy war. His Majesty celebrates his forty-fourth birthday today. We common people sincerely celebrate for the long life of the Emperor. A ceremony took place in the public square in front of the Singapore municipal office. Today being a holiday, due to the Emperor's birthday, we were visited by many soldiers and the club had its best day since we set up shop, raking in over 2,450 yen in revenue. I finished my work at the front desk a little after 1:00 AM and then went to bed."

In writing the diary, Mr. Bak acknowledged himself to be a loyal subject of the Japanese Empire. In the portions quoted above he writes about "the Holy War for East Asia," "the

long life of the Emperor and the prosperity of the imperial family," and "blessing the nation with prosperity and the Imperial Army with martial fortune." I suspect that this represents how Koreans at that time viewed their country. The concepts of "holy war" and of the "Imperial Army" advocated within the Japanese Empire had taken root in the minds of many Koreans as well, who apparently saw themselves as "loyal imperial subjects".

Life as a "receptionist"

I shall now examine what sort of life Mr. Bak led at the comfort station. With the exception of one period between June 1 and September 30, 1943, he worked continuously as a "receptionist" at the front desk. He counted up the revenue and recorded it in his ledger, and it could be said that he was the "manager" of the comfort station. His diary provides some information about the administration of the comfort station, but he does not go into detail about his work at the front desk which he manned from 2:00 PM to about 1:00 AM. The following is what Mr. Bak did write in the diary about his work.

He rose early each morning and after breakfast he went shopping in the marketplace with his page. Upon his return, his duties included drawing up statements of income and expenditure, attending regular meetings, adjusting accounts, going on air raid watches at the office of the club association, managing the savings of the comfort women, distributing rations, participating in the Civil Defense Corps and celebratory events, procuring entry permits at the Military Administration Headquarters, remitting money to the field post office, Hua Nan Bank, Yokohama Specie Bank, and the Southern Development Bank, submitting the employment permits of comfort women, having his car checked, paying workmen, rationing rice, etc...

Mr. Bak appears to have also subscribed to newspapers and was well-apprised about the global situation.

"I paid two yen and fifty sen for newspapers in the month of May." (Diary entry of May 29, 1943.)

It also seems that he led a comfortable life, buying expensive suits, shoes, watches, and vehicles, as well as spending time at a movie theater.

"I bought nine yards of Western fabrics for seventy yen." (Diary entry of March 2, 1943.)

"I went down to the Hiranuma Tailor Shop and was fitted for a new set of clothes." (Diary entry of April 12, 1943.)

"I ordered four new outfits for the price of 355 yen." (Diary entry of October 31, 1943.)

"I purchased clothing worth over 350 yen from a wool clothing store owned by an Indian man." (Diary entry of December 13, 1943.)

"I promised to purchase a wristwatch from a Chinese man for the price of 750 yen." (Diary entry of June 20, 1944.)

"I called in an Indian street barber so that my hair could get trimmed." (Diary entry of February 19, 1943.)

"I watched a boxing match at the Great World Amusement Park." (Diary entry of March 18, 1944.)

"I bought a car and drove it back to work." (Diary entry of August 9, 1943.)

"Mr. Kanagawa showed me around and I got to see the Buddha statue which is the number one in Burma. This recumbent Buddha was truly amazing to look at. It was said to be over fifty-five meters long and over fifteen meters high." (Diary entry of January 26, 1943.)

Still, Mr. Bak was not an out of the ordinary individual and he lived his life honestly. I felt that he was a rather meticulous man, in that he wrote a diary entry every day, without fail.

Mr. Bak had two wives, one in Busan and one in Daegu. He supported both of his families, sending them money and communicating with both them and his in-laws by either letter or telegram.

"I sent a telegram to the father of my wife in Busan." (Diary entry of July 6, 1943.)

"I sent 2,000 yen to my mistress in Daegu last year." (Diary entry of December 6, 1943.)

"I sent 500 yen." (Diary entry of May 4, 1943.)

"I sent 600 yen." (Diary entry of June 14, 1943.)

One might ask what kind of position Mr. Bak must have held to be living this kind of life, and yet it appears that he was just the manager of a comfort station, organizing and administering things at the front desk, and was not a soldier or a civilian employee of the Japanese Army. Indeed, he seemed wary of military employees and always thought of his business as being independent from the men of the army.

"I went out to eat with army-affiliated civilians, but, starting from tomorrow, I won't be able to eat there anymore." (Diary entry of January 12, 1944.)

"I went to have dinner at Kikusui Restaurant with Oishi, Toyokawa, Mita, Oyama, and the gang, but I was told that only soldiers and civilian military employees were allowed to enter, so we stepped out onto China Street instead and had dinner there." (Diary entry of April 23, 1943.)

One can understand clearly from such entries that a separation existed between military employees and comfort station managers. Evidently, based on this account, the comfort women were likewise not employees of the military.

Even though the comfort women business was not a part of the military, it did have a tight connection with the military. Perhaps, upon reflection, it would be fair to say that the military and the comfort stations were in a "special relationship". Alternatively, one might say that the comfort stations were governed by the military administration of the territories occupied by the Japanese Army.

In addition, although the diary mentions many people bearing Japanese-style names, in most cases these were Japanese-style names taken by ethnic Koreans.

Homesickness

Mr. Bak was a long way from Korea, and throughout his diary there is a palpable sense of homesickness.

"This is the coldest time of the year in Korea, but here it feels like it's the middle of autumn." (Diary entry of January 2, 1943.)

"The climate here is very cool at daybreak, but extremely hot in the afternoon. Even when I go for a short walk, sweat pours down my body. The intense cold in Korea is probably fading away about now. In just a little over twenty days, the cherry blossoms will be blooming. That good time of year is approaching. In many foreign lands I spend time just imagining Korea's wonderful springs." (Diary entry of March 13, 1943.)

"This night, the fifteenth night of the lunar calendar, the full moon glistened brightly in the sky. In Korea, the best moon of the whole year appears on the night of October 15, when the weather is good and there isn't a cloud in the sky. When will I be able to see that moon in my native land again?" (Diary entry of November 12, 1943.)

"Recently the weather has been quite refreshing, just like the cool autumn breezes of Korea. If I don't close the doors at night and curl up in my quilt, the air even chills my skin." (Diary entry of February 24, 1943.)

In the published version of the diary the first entry starts with, "I greeted the new year in Arakan, Burma, near the border with India."

The city of Arakan, now Sittwe, in western Burma was a key base area for the Japanese Army during World War II. During the Arakan Campaign, lasting roughly four months between the end of 1942 and April of 1943, Japan's 55th Division won spectacular victories there over the British and Indian Armies.

Mr. Bak wrote the following in his diary about the situation in Burma.

"It is now a little over two years since the start of the Greater East Asian War. Japan has invaded and conquered the British colonial territories of Burma and Singapore, and then, on the front lines of the Burma theater, beat back the British-Indian counterattack from India and completely foiled their plans to retake Arakan. After that Japan intercepted the British Air Force, which was firing on our units blindly but tenaciously. Accompanying the military achievements of the Imperial Army is its divine mission to liberate Asia, which has progressed through the solemn declarations of independence issued by Burma in August and the Philippines in October, as well as the establishment of the Provisional Government of Free India." (Diary entry of December 31, 1943.)

He made no mention of what situation the Japanese Army might have been in at the time he was writing the entry.

Logistics and comfort stations

The relationship between the comfort stations and the military comes to light whenever the Japanese Army was on the move, but it is not clear whether the comfort stations transferred along with an army regiment on their own volition or under military order.

"I hear that the comfort station in Mandalay moved along with the army units to Prome and has set up shop there." (Diary entry of January 29.)

"After the arrival of the unit commander of the 55th Division, an order was handed down to transfer Mr. Kanagawa's comfort station to a place called Yeu near Mandalay. He ordered them to move, but I heard that the comfort women were all resolutely opposed to it and would not go." (Diary entry of March 10, 1943.)

"Ultimately, they couldn't overrule an order from the headquarters. The comfort station was moved to Yeu." (Diary entry of March 14, 1943.)

"Now I am being told by Mr. Kanagawa that the planned transfer from the divisional liaison office to Yeu is being temporarily put on hold." (Diary entry of March 16, 1943.)

"The comfort station in Arakan has moved along with the regiment and did business in Taunggyi."

"It seems like the women of the comfort station moved along with the unit one or two months later." (Diary entry of June 28, 1943.)

It would appear from statements like these that comfort stations were not appendages of the military.

The other comfort station manager who Mr. Bak mentions, "Mr. Kanagawa," was also a Korean. In the published version of the diary translated by Professor An, his name appears in the "List of Korean Comfort Station Managers".

Since he was not an employee of the military, Mr. Bak had no right to use the "unit cars" to transfer to a new location with a military unit, but it seems that he did often hitch rides on military-use vehicles.

"For four or five days the regular trains have not been in operation. The only trains running are the special military trains, so I have arranged to get a ticket to ride at the railway station headquarters so that I can ride them." (Diary entry of September 5, 1943.)

"I hitched a ride on a military train departing at 15:50 from Mokpalin bound for Martaban. I was told that the time we arrived at Martaban was around 2:00 AM." (Diary entry of September 11, 1943.)

"I hitched a ride with the head of the Health Department, a Burmese man." (Diary entry of January 22, 1943.)

"I got out of bed at the logistics barracks in Tavoy, ate breakfast, and then took a car owned by the supply unit up to the Nippon Express Motor Vehicles Division." (Diary entry of September 14, 1943.)

Photo Caption: From the documentary film *The War in Burma*.

"I went with Mr. Fujioka to the anchorage headquarters and applied for permission to come aboard. They told me that this time the ship would disembark in the evening, so I went back to logistics and brought some more people." (Diary entry of September 19, 1943.)

"I received a ticket to ride at the railway station headquarters and caught the military train departing at 22:40. We left Chumphon heading towards Singapore. It looks like we have already past the worst part of the trip. I didn't get a passenger train and instead was stuck riding alone in the freight car." (Diary entry of September 27, 1943.)

When Mr. Bak transferred to a new location, he utilized the standard means of transportation, usually trains, boats, cars, and carriages. The fact that he had to "hitch a ride" on military-use vehicles proves that he was not a soldier.

What's more, because he was not a soldier, he had no choice but to rely on civilian facilities even for the accommodations where he stayed during a transfer. For his meals he likewise made do with what his friends and acquaintances provided to him at their homes.

"Seven of us rode along with the team of Second Lieutenant Himura, commander of the Himura Platoon, in his unit car in Taungup, Burma. We departed from Taungup at 11:00 AM." (Diary entry of January 21, 1943.)

"We crossed two big rivers along the way and arrived at Magyi around 8:00. I paid a visit to the logistics department in Magyi and asked them for a room. I ate dinner there, had a bath, and then went to bed. Everywhere I go the logistics people treat me hospitably and I felt very grateful to them." (Diary entry of September 15, 1943.)

There was one time that he arrived late at night and slept at the logistics department.

"I made it there at about 21:00. I went to the logistics department of the Guard Force and set down all the luggage of my group there. Then I got something to eat and went to bed in their sleeping quarters." (Diary entry of September 12, 1943.)

"I went to the anchorage headquarters and paid for my board on the ship I was about to ride." (Diary entry of September 16, 1943.)

There was also a time that he lodged with four civilian employees of the military in a dormitory in Katong, Singapore.

"Our lodgings are only thirty or so meters from the seashore and are about two *ri* from the city of Singapore." (Diary entry of November 8, 1944.)

These lodgings were likely not military facilities, something also confirmed in other diary entries.

"I stayed at the home of Oyama Toraichi of Rangoon Hall." (Diary entry of January 23, 1943.)

"I had heard that Mr. Kanagawa, a friend from my hometown, will be in Pegu around the end of March. I went down to his place and stayed there for about a month. I was sorry to have made other people put up with me from that point."

"At the home of Arai and Yamamoto I made and ate my own meal and then went to sleep." (Diary entry of May 21, 1943.)

Thus, there is no indication here that he was taking advantage of military facilities.

In another such entry he wrote, "I went to Mr. Murayama's house in Insein along with Mr. Arai and Mr. Nakamune. I had dinner and stayed the night there. Without a fixed place to sleep and eat, I am, as usual, just going to the homes of people I know and taking advantage of their hospitality. I feel ashamed of myself." (Diary entry of May 19, 1943.)

The above passages suggest that Mr. Bak was not an employee of the military, but rather seems to have been in some form of partnership with the military.

The truth about the comfort stations

In the late nineteenth century, Japanese prostitutes, known as *karayuki-san*, exported the sex trade abroad, especially in the vicinity of eastern and southeastern Asia. For instance, it is well known that typical red light districts were established by Chinese and Japanese prostitutes in Singapore. However, Mr. Bak does not mention this topic in his diary.

Apart from comfort stations run by Koreans, there were also other comfort stations in the area of Arakan, including those run by Japanese and those run by residents of Arakan, described as "local people comfort stations" in a diary entry of June 19, 1943. In his diary entry of July 23, 1943, Mr. Bak says that between sixty and seventy Korean comfort women were working at those comfort stations.

Now that they were subjects of the Japanese Empire, this was probably the first time that Koreans were going abroad to do business. The diary makes it clear that several Koreans had wide-ranging business contacts in places like Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and East Timor, and in addition to comfort stations they operated a diverse range of businesses, including restaurants, cafeterias, rice cake shops, confectionaries, tofu dealerships, and oil refineries.

When people think of a comfort station, there are probably quite a few who instantly imagine a military camp or army tent. And yet, it seems that, for the most part, the comfort stations were actually located in ordinary civilian buildings. Furthermore, it would appear that they were not segregated into designated red-light districts.

"I have rented a house and factory for 500 yen monthly plus a deposit of 1,000 yen." (Diary entry of April 1, 1943.)

"I have been told that the Kanpachi Club, a comfort station in Arakan, Burma, was the home of Mr. Yamamoto. Ichifujiro, the comfort station run by Mr. Murayama in Insein just outside Rangoon, apparently is Mr. Murayama's home." (Diary entry of July 20, 1943.)

"I was told that the Kikusui Club, located at 88 Cairnhill Road in Singapore's residential district, is the home of Mr. Nishihara." (Diary entry of January 29, 1944.)

These comfort stations were also engaged in buying and selling, borrowing and loaning, and transfers of property.

"Mr. Murayama and his wife begged me to take over and run their comfort station, so I decided definitively that I would accede to his request." (Diary entry of August 15, 1943.)

"Ichifujiro was put under the control of the logistics department and Mr. Murayama and Mr. Arai have gone to the logistics headquarters. After the two comfort stations in Insein were transferred to its control, the army doctors from logistics even inspected the comfort women for syphilis. I went to the home of Chen Ruixin on Prome Road and signed a lease contract on a house and factory for 500 yen monthly. I paid him a deposit upfront of 1,000 yen. Then I went with Mr. Oyama to look for the location of Kikusui Restaurant before returning to Mr. Oyama's house and eating dinner. I returned to my quarters and went to bed. As of today I have struck a deal to jointly manage a cafeteria and an oil refinery with Mr. Oyama, and I have decided to move forward with prepping the enterprise. Regarding our deal from a few days ago, Mr. Murayama proposed to me that I manage his comfort station Ichifujiro until September and continue to hold onto it after September 1 until the beginning of October. However, I told him that I wouldn't be able to do that and so when he suggested that it be transferred to someone else, I agreed." (Diary entry of August 24, 1943.)

"Mr. Kanagawa of Kiyokawa Co. acquired a new business in China and is continuing to manage it." (Diary entry of April 13, 1944.)

These are examples of the sort of transactions that were taking place.

The diary commented on two comfort stations "affiliated with the air service" which were "put under the control of the logistics department," but what do these statements mean exactly? Was it a change of "affiliation" or a change of "control"? Does this mean that these two comfort stations were singled out? How was it possible for Ichifujiro to be transferred to Mr. Bak when it was already under the control of the logistics department? A comfort station could not be transferred to another manager if it was controlled by military logistics. Does "control" simply refer to "health control"?

Photo Caption: Map of Burma in 1943, with modern-day place names in brackets.

The truth about the comfort women

Administratively, it appears that the comfort women were treated as being "barmaids," as noted in the following passages.

"I got a permit for the barmaid." (Diary entry of June 16, 1944.)

"I received a medical certificate for the barmaid Song (REDACTED)-og." (Diary entry of June 28, 1944.)

"I received the diary of one of the barmaids." (Diary entry of December 14, 1944.)

It appears that the comfort women were referred to using words like "barmaid" or "workwoman" and that in administrative language the work was referred to as "employment," as shown in the following passages.

"I went to the official in charge of business at the Peace Preservation Section of the Singapore Police Department and applied for employment permits for the workwomen." (Diary entry of May 8, 1943.)

"I undertook the necessary procedures for her and made her a workwoman at the clubhouse." (Diary entry of June 9, 1944.)

It appears that it was not easy to leave the comfort women business.

"Haruyo and Hiroko had worked at Mr. Murayama's comfort station, but they left in order to live with their husbands. Logistics ordered them to return and now they are working as comfort women at Kinsen House." (Diary entry of July 29, 1943.)

Nevertheless, there were procedures to allow comfort women to quit work or take time off.

"Two comfort women, Junko and Osome, quit their jobs." (Diary entry of March 3, 1944.)

"The comfort workwoman Tamae is currently seven-months pregnant and so I gave her a leave of absence from work." (Diary entry of July 4, 1944.)

There were many recorded instances of comfort women quitting their jobs, being given leaves of absence, or returning home during Mr. Bak's time in Singapore, but not very many from during his time in Burma. The comfort women were given regular medical examinations and those infected by sexual diseases were hospitalized. They also received hospitable care during pregnancy and childbirth.

"(REDACTED), a comfort woman from Sakura Club, was suffering from considerable abdominal pain and in the afternoon I was told that she underwent surgery. During her seventh month of pregnancy there were abnormalities with the way the baby was kicking. She was admitted to Suzuki Hospital, but miscarried and was driven back here." (Diary entry of July 17, 1943.)

The diary suggests that there were also controls on soldiers entering the comfort stations.

"The military employee came to the clubhouse to see the barmaid Kikue, but was discovered by the military police." (Diary entry of September 9, 1944.)

Some entries show that the comfort women had individual savings accounts.

"I went to the Specie Bank and deposited the savings of two comfort women working at Mr. Murayama's comfort station." (Diary entry of April 14, 1944.)

"I deposited money for the workwomen." (Diary entry of June 16, 1944.)

"I deposited 32,000 yen at the Rangoon branch of Yokohama Specie Bank." (Diary entry of January 25, 1943.)

"At the request of a comfort woman, I withdrew six hundred yen from her savings for remittance and then sent it out via the Central Post Office." (Diary entry of October 27, 1944.)

The comfort women business perhaps provided psychological comfort, the sort of function also played by corporate recreational outings. It seems that "comfort" refers here to comfort and appreciation provided to soldiers serving on the battlefield. Alternatively, one might define them as brothels selling sexual pleasure. How should we distinguish these two?

One encyclopedia defines "comfort station" as "a brothel created or designated for use by soldiers and civilian military employees". The comfort stations described in Mr. Bak's diary were likewise basically brothels. They were part of a Comfort Station Association, referred to as a "geisha agency," just like the brothel guilds of Japan and Korea. The Comfort Station Association held regular meetings. Thus, the same system of *kisaeng* associations that existed in Korea also existed in Burma and Singapore. They were not treated as being a part of the military.

"I paid a total of 62 yen in dues to the Comfort Station Association, including thirty yen for myself and two yen for each of my sixteen comfort women." (Diary entry of August 10, 1943.)

Prostitution was run purely as a business. The primary customers of the comfort stations were soldiers and they also provided entertainment to military personnel.

"We have had fewer customers than ever before since January 2. We managed to sell only fourteen tickets to soldiers." (Diary entry of January 7, 1943.)

"I went with Mr. Arai, Mr. Murayama, and Mr. Kanagawa to the room of Warrant Officer Yamazoe, who works at the Aide-de-Camp's Office of army headquarters. We brought Mr. Yamazoe back to Ichifujiro so that he could have some fun." (Diary entry of September 8, 1943.)

"Our customer traffic has hit rock bottom recently. We aren't able to do any business. Because we are all just spending our time idly, the comfort women are also terribly bored. Even the comfort station owners are not allowed to go outside now and so we are feeling claustrophobic." (Diary entry of July 31-August 4, 1943.)

"Recently business at the comfort station has been slow and revenue has dropped considerably." (Diary entry of August 11, 1943.)

"Due to the recent epidemic, the soldiers have not been going out." (Diary entry of August 17, 1943.)

"Today, being a holiday on account of the Emperor's birthday, we were visited by many soldiers and the club had its best day since we set up shop, raking in over 2,450 yen in revenue." (Diary entry of April 29, 1944.)

Passages about the soldiers "going out" means that they were leaving their posts in their units and going out to the comfort station. This was the factor determining whether or not the comfort station would turn a profit.

Comfort stations under military administration

Singapore and Burma, where Mr. Bak worked, were territories occupied by Japan. The occupied territories were under military administration. The movement of comfort women and public health measures were among the areas controlled by the military, but this alone does not mean that the comfort stations were controlled by the military.

"We have halted operations. We were completely prohibited from going out and everyone stayed at home." (Diary entry of August 1, 1943.)

"An Indian man got the plague and now three to four cases have been reported. The soldiers are not allowed to go out." (Diary entry of March 22, 1943.)

"The military police came and said that we were to cease operations for one week and would not be allowed to go out." (Diary entry of July 31, 1943.)

However, the above passages do seem to indicate that under normal circumstances people could enter and leave freely.

"I got entry permits for the comfort women at the Military Administration Headquarters." (Diary entry of February 1, 1943.)

"The army doctors from logistics inspected the comfort women even for syphilis." (Diary entry of July 26, 1943.)

"I went to the clinic for comfort women and had a couple of unregistered comfort women examined." (Diary entry of July 29, 1943.)

"Mr. Sakaguchi, who is in charge of business at the municipal Peace Preservation Section, and Dr. Yoshioka of Nadeshiko Hospital stopped by at around 10:00 PM and inspected the business and its washing facilities." (Diary entry of July 3, 1944.)

Among Mr. Bak's other jobs were to distribute and sell supplies from army canteens and logistics, and to fill out travel documents for trips back home at the office of the municipal Peace Preservation Section.

"I bought white rice at the unit canteen to distribute to the coolies and workmen. I piled it all up in my cart, stopped in Katong, and then returned to the office of the East Asia Trading Co." (Diary entry of July 15, 1944.)

"I went to the official in charge of travel at the detached office of the municipal Peace Preservation Section and submitted repatriation travel papers, but there were problems with the forms so I brought them back with me." (Diary entry of July 20, 1944.)

The Peace Preservation Section in Singapore was the department responsible for government administration.

"I got travel papers for (REDACTED) Kanemoto and her younger sister, and applied to have them board a ship belonging to the Southern Navigation Company." (Diary entry of August 7, 1944.)

"I went to the official in charge of business at the Peace Preservation Section and had him issue the necessary certificate to apply for travel papers for a comfort woman at my clubhouse, Gim (REDACTED)-seon." (Diary entry of September 11, 1944.)

"The travel papers for Burma and back which I had recently submitted and the travel papers for within Burma for the comfort women Gim (REDACTED)-seon and Gim (REDACTED)-ae were ready with the official in charge of travel at the detached office of the Peace Preservation Section, so I left immediately, picked them up, and returned." (Diary entry of September 27, 1944.)

"I went to the official in charge of travel at the detached office of the municipal Peace Preservation Section and cancelled my travel papers to go to Rangoon, Burma. I submitted a notice for termination of employment for my job at the front desk of Kikusui with the official in charge of business at the Peace Preservation Section." (Diary entry of October 10, 1944.)

"My travel papers were ready and I received a message to come pick them up from the detached office of the municipal Peace Preservation Section, so I left right away, took them, and returned." (Diary entry of November 2, 1944.)

"I submitted an application for travel papers so that Hidemi can return home." (Diary entry of November 6, 1944.)

"I submitted an application for travel papers for the waitress Lee (REDACTED)-bong with the official in charge of travel papers." (Diary entry of November 8, 1944.)

"I stopped by the municipal Finance Section and the official in charge of travel papers in the same detached office of the Peace Preservation Section, and then returned." (Diary entry of November 14, 1944.)

"I went to the Aide-de-Camp's Office of army headquarters to see Warrant Officer Yamazoe. He had not yet been given a report on the accident in Arakan so I briefed him." (Diary entry of May 20, 1943.)

"There was a meeting of comfort station managers at army headquarters." (Diary entry of June 15, 1943.)

"I presented my clubhouse's monthly report for the month of August to the office of the association." (Diary entry of September 6, 1944.)

"I submitted a daily business report to the logistics headquarters and received condoms." (Diary entry of August 12 and 26, 1943.)

These passages are crucial documentary evidence of how the comfort stations operated under the military administration of the time.

To conclude

After I had read the diary the first time, I concluded definitively that the comfort stations were not military institutions, but rather were more similar to wartime brothels. I wrote about this in the magazine *Shincho 45*, in the issue published in September 2014.

Despite this, the translator of the book Professor An Byeong-jik received the exact opposite impression. Professor An argues that Mr. Bak's diary proves that the Japanese Army gave the comfort station managers and the comfort women a status akin to civilian military employees, integrated them into a subordinate branch of the army hierarchy, and unilaterally ordered them onto the frontlines. These claims were given a great deal of sensationalistic coverage by the South Korean media, and that was the way everyone in Korea accepted the diary. In other words, the diary was "definitive evidence" for the forcible mobilization of comfort women by the Japanese Army, quite contrary to what I had taken from it.

My areas of interest are certainly not limited to the current status of Japan-Korea relations or specifically to politics and the national interests of one country or another. Even so, I do feel that my readers and I have arrived at a good opportunity to confront these issues, so it is natural that my interest would be directed here. However, what I desire is not to analyze such problems on a superficial level, but rather to seek out the truth that lies below the surface. This is my primary concern and is the message that I want to have heard. I suppose that I have taken advantage of this opportunity so that my message will be understood sympathetically.

Undoubtedly, the military and the comfort stations enjoyed close relations, but that alone does not allow us to conclude that the military controlled them. Though the published diary was called *Diary of a Japanese Military Brothel Manager*, after reading it, I somehow felt the urge to remove the words "Japanese Military" from the title.