

A GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING THE COMFORT-WOMEN CONTROVERSY

**Moteki Hiromichi, Secretary
Society for the Dissemination of Historical Fact**

Anyone who wishes to arrive at an accurate understanding of the comfort-women controversy needs to be aware of five basic facts. I am referring not to opinions or perceptions, but to irrefutable, objective, social facts. Furthermore, they convey important information, ignorance of which is certain to render debates about the comfort-women problem speculative, or worse, fraudulent. I will address the question of whether this controversy involves the violation of human rights in my supplementary argument.

1. *Until the latter half of the 20th century, prostitution was legal in Japan and houses of prostitution could be found in every entertainment district. Military brothels were established in overseas war zones.*

Therefore, no objections were raised against military brothels (or comfort stations, as they were popularly known). Due to the lack of safe, supervised houses of prostitution overseas, those brothels were established when conflicts became prolonged.

2. *The majority of comfort women were Japanese; Korean comfort women received the same remuneration and treatment, and had the same responsibilities*

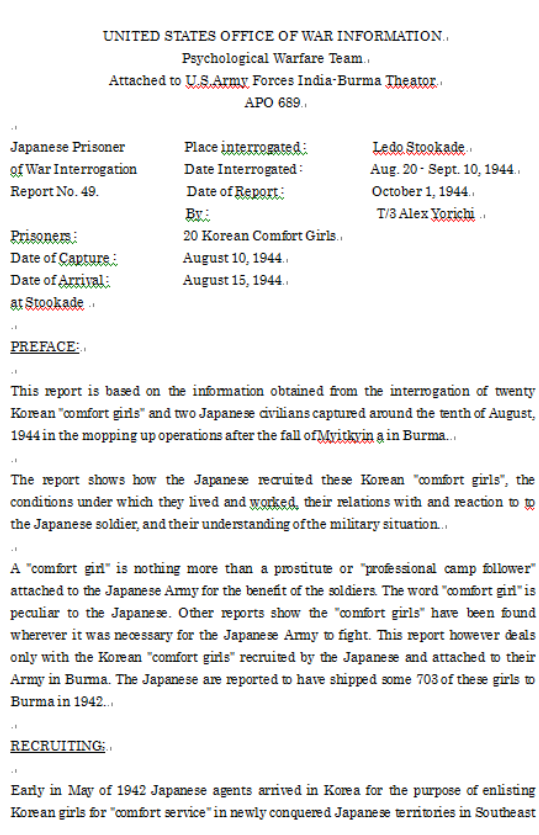
Therefore, I find it extremely strange that the current controversy about the comfort women focuses mainly on Korean comfort women.

In *Comfort Women and Sex in War Zones*, Professor Hata Ikuhiko writes that the ratio of comfort women by place of origin was approximately Japanese 4: local residents 3: Koreans 2: Taiwan and other nations 1. The rather large number of local residents can be explained by the fact that there were prostitutes everywhere in the world, and many women residing in war zones were eager to be hired. When there was a scarcity of women from Japan, Korea, or Taiwan, brothel managers hired local women, whom they screened rigorously (Japanese military authorities were scrupulous about hygiene). Even today a great many prostitutes are active in China; the news media has been reporting recent attempts to crack down on them.

3. *“A ‘comfort girl’ is nothing more than a prostitute or ‘professional camp follower;” this description of the comfort women in Report No. 49, issued by the US Office of War Information, is remarkably accurate.*

American soldiers could not possibly have had any empathy for the Japanese military, the enemy, and would not have painted a rosy picture of the situation. Therefore, we can assume that Report No. 49, based on interviews with Korean comfort women who had become prisoners of war in Myitkyina, Burma, has a high degree of objectivity. Nowhere

in the report do we find the slightest suggestion that the women were forced to become "sex slaves."



4. The comfort women were extremely well paid; receiving 30 to 100 times more than the salary of a private first class (10 yen per month)

Corroboration can be found in the following sources:

- Newspaper advertisements in *Keijo Nippo* (7/26/1944), *Mainichi Shinpo* (10/27/1944), etc.: 300 yen per month
- US Office of War Information: 750 yen per month
- Postal savings account passbook belonging to former comfort woman Mun Ok-ju: 1,000 yen per month

Advertisement in *Keijo Nippo* (or Seoul Daily, A Japanese-language newspaper published in Keijyo, the colonial capital of Korea), 26 July 1944 edition

Advertisement in *Mainichi Shinpo* (Japanese and Korean-language newspaper published in Korea), 27 October 1944 edition



慰安婦急募
 年齢 一七歳以上廿三歳迄
 勤先 後方〇〇隊慰安部
 月收 三〇〇圓以上(前借三〇〇〇圓迄可)
 午前八時より午後十時迄本人來談
 本隊事務所二〇
 今井紹介所
 電話東①一六二三

軍慰安婦急募
 行先 〇〇部隊慰安所
 募集資格 年齢十八歳以上三十歳以内身體
 強健者
 募集期日 十月二十七日早可十一月八日外
 出發日 十一月十日頃
 契約及待遇 本人面談後即時決定可
 募集人員數 十名
 左記場所に至る間旅費
 京城府新橋區新町一四五
 朝鮮旅
 光①一六四五
 (許氏)

URGENT RECRUITMENT DRIVE FOR COMFORT WOMEN

Age requirements: Must be between the ages of 17 and 23

Place of employment: Behind-the-lines comfort station attached to military unit YY.

Monthly pay: ¥300 (may authorize advance pay of up to ¥3,000)

Working hours: 8:00 a.m. - 10:00 p.m., subject to consultation

Apply to: Imai Agency
 4-20 Shin-machi, Keijo City
 Telephone: East (3) 1613

URGENTLY SEEKING MILITARY COMFORT WOMEN

1. Place of employment: Comfort station attached to military unit XX.
2. Qualifications: Must be between the ages of 18 and 30, and in good health
3. Application dates: October 27 - November 8
4. Estimated departure date: November 10
5. Contract and working conditions: To be determined at interview
6. Number of persons to be hired: 40-50
7. Interested parties are to inquire immediately at location listed below:

Apply to: Chosen Inn
 195 Paradise Street, Shoro
 Keijo City
 Telephone: Hikari (3) 2645
 (Ask for Mr. Ho.)

5. *Involvement of Japanese military authorities was obligatory*

In Japan, local government (for instance, the Public Health and Hygiene Bureau in Tokyo Prefecture) was responsible for the oversight of brothels. The police apprehended deceitful recruiters and kept watch to ensure that prostitutes were not mistreated. In war zones the military authorities fulfilled these functions, and also exercised their obligation to keep the comfort women safe. Japanese military administrators were simply doing their duty.

Supplementary argument: Does the comfort-women problem involve the infringement of women's rights?

We know for a fact that comfort women were engaged in the business of prostitution, and that they were very well paid, earning approximately 50 times the salary of an ordinary

soldier. We do not know whether they did so simply because they had no other options, or because they wanted to: every woman's circumstances were different. But they were not forced to work as comfort women; they were probably drawn to the large amount of money they could earn. Some of them must have suffered while serving as comfort women, but they were in war zones, and unfortunately, suffering goes hand in hand with war. Were their rights violated? No, they were not. It is absurd to demand that the Japanese government compensate everyone who suffered during the war.

Those who maintain that prostitution, the profession, violates women's rights are doing a disservice to Korea's prostitutes. Not the prostitutes of long ago, but the prostitutes of the 21st century. On May 17, 2011, Korean prostitutes held a rally at which they insisted, "We have a right to be prostitutes! If you take away our rights, I will pour fuel on my body and die gloriously." Some of them did pour flammable liquid over themselves (see NBC News photo below).

Some people are in favor of prostitution; others are not. It is as simple as that. But that is no reason for self-righteously insisting that prostitution is an infringement of women's rights.

