

# **The Truth about the Question of “Comfort Women”**

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## 1. The True Image of the “Comfort Women”

### (1) “Comfort Women” as licensed prostitutes

On Sept. 13, 2006, based upon the forceful actions of Korean lobbyists and others, the United States House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Relations proposed H.R. 759 for House consideration, which condemns Japan on the issue of the so-called comfort women.

The Resolution assertions, claiming “[T]he Government of Japan ... from the 1930s through the duration of World War II, organized the subjugation and kidnapping, for the sole purpose of sexual servitude, of young women, who became known to the world as ‘comfort women,’” are completely at odds with the historical truth. The Resolution is nothing more than political propaganda.

The truth of the “comfort women” system is that it was simply legalized prostitution; the “comfort women” were “professionals.” Their status, in fact, was that of commercial prostitutes who were engaged in business, and the women were thus called “comfort women.” This point is made clear in official records of the United States Army.

### (2) The Life of The “Comfort Women” as Seen in U.S. Army Records

In official documents of the U.S. Army’s Psychological Warfare Team from 1944, one can find recorded interviews of 20 Korean “comfort women,” occupants of a brothel in Myitkyina, in northern Burma. According to their accounts, these “comfort women,” for economic reasons, had been sold by their own parents to brokers to become prostitutes. Their compensation was between 300 and 1,000 yen – at a time when the monthly pay of a non-commissioned officer in the Japanese Army was approximately 30 yen.

According to the document, the women were keeping between 50 to 60 percent of their fees, and their monthly income was dozens of times higher than that of servicemen. When they had free time, they would enjoy themselves by playing sports or going on picnics with the soldiers. They also participated in other recreation and went to dinner parties. They had gramophones, and they were allowed to go into town to shop.

They also had the right to refuse customers. If a soldier was extremely drunk and unruly, for example, the women could turn him away – and they frequently did so. The investigation showed that these women were in good physical condition.

The details are in UNITED STATES OFFICE OF WAR INFORMATION, Psychological Warfare Team, Attached to the U.S. Army Forces India-Burma Theater APO 689.

In the report, “comfort women” are explicitly declared to be “prostitutes.” There are records detailing that some of the brokers committed illegal acts in recruiting comfort women, but there were absolutely no identified instances of “kidnapping” or “rounding up women” by the Japanese authorities or army.

Additionally, in 1945, in depositions of three Korean civilians in the employment of the Japanese Army, they stated “In the battle zones of the Pacific War, the Korean comfort women we met were all either volunteers, or women who had been sold by their parents. If any of the women had been victims of coercion, all Koreans, young and old, would have risen up in rage, regardless of whatever retaliation, and killed the Japanese.” This is taken from “Composite Report Three Korean Civilians List No. 78,” dated 28 March, 1945, “Special Questions on Koreans” (U.S. National Archives).

### (3) Wages of “Comfort Women”

According to the official reports of the U.S. Army noted above, the monthly take of the women was approximately 1,500 yen, and they kept between 40 to 50 percent of this. In other words, their “take home” income was an extremely high wage of 750 yen per month.

Here is one illustration to support this. A Korean comfort woman named Moon Ok-ju, who worked in Burma during the period between June of 1943 and September of 1945, recorded total savings of 26,145 yen in deposit at the military post office. (Note: the Japanese Post Office conducts banking functions.) In evidence of this, she went to the Shimonoseki Post Office to withdraw the funds in 1992, and her original ledger was discovered and confirmed. As she had lost her account book, she was unable to withdraw the money. At any rate, over a period of two years and three months, she had accumulated an incredible savings of 26,000 yen -- her monthly take-home would have been nearly 1,000 yen.

Incidentally, the monthly pay of a Japanese Army private at the time was 7 yen 50 sen; a sergeant made 30 yen. These women were making per month between 100 to 250 times what soldiers were.

### (4) The Korean Government Also Saw No Problem

As made clear by the previously indicated facts, the “comfort woman” system was purely an institution of legalized prostitution. It was nothing more than a part of the commercial prostitution industry that existed in the Japanese mainland as well as the Korean peninsula and in various other places. Therefore, for a long time after the independence of Korea, the existence of “comfort women” never arose as a political problem. This was because the people who knew the truth recognized that there could not have been an issue with “comfort women.” At the time, it was made common sense that there would be military brothels in army garrisons operating as commercial prostitution establishments, and that there were prostitutes who had been sold into such service by their own parents was a fact known to everyone. Also, at that time, there were no such myths that the army took women by force and made them into prostitutes.

In actuality, with the rehabilitation of diplomatic relations between Japan and Korea that took place over 14 years, beginning in 1952, the Korean government didn’t even once bring up the issue of “comfort women”. Even since then, however, the Korean government has continued adopting an anti-Japanese national policy. The Koreans incessantly found fault with the “Great Japanese Empire’s” rule of Korea even during on-going diplomatic negotiations to improve relations. Despite their unyielding demands for reparations, for 14 years the Korean government never once made a reference to “comfort women.”

## 2. The Background of the Myths of Coercion and Kidnapping

As previously presented, the “comfort women” system was simply legal, commercial prostitution. Moreover, it had long been understood to have been so. It was in 1980 that terms such as “kidnapping,” “coercion,” and “sexual servitude” first came to be associated with comfort women, and, thus, became a political problem.

The background in which this hollow myth arose, some 40 years after the end of the war, began with an event that will be introduced shortly. First, though, if one is to accurately comprehend what is meant by “comfort woman,” one must know what gave rise to this myth.

### (1) The “Confessions” of a Certain Storyteller

In 1983, a Japanese man living in Shimonoseki city in Yamaguchi prefecture, by the name of Yoshida Seiji, published a book called *My War Crimes: Coerced Taking of Koreans*. In this book, he confessed that in 1943, under military orders, on Cheju Island (in Korea) he went with 10 military men in two trucks on a “slave hunt,” to find and take away young girls and mothers with babies.

The truth is that Yoshida is a master storyteller. There is not a kernel of truth in his confession. In the several years before his lie was exposed, he deceived many people with this clever charade and made a great deal of money on royalties and speaking fees. Afterward, it was the Koreans, ironically, who exposed Yoshida’s lies.

In 1989, Yoshida’s book was translated and published in Korea. A female Korean reporter named Heo Young-seon with the *Cheju Newspaper* read his book. When she went to the actual place on Cheju Island to investigate his account, there was nothing that corresponded with reality. Local residents unanimously replied with comments such as, “We have lived here since that time, and we know nothing of this,” and “There aren’t more than 250 households in this village, so if even only 15 people had been taken it would have been a big thing, but nothing of the sort happened.” In addition, a local Cheju historian by the name of Kim Bong-ok conducted his own long-term follow-up survey, and as result he declared that there was no validity to Yoshida’s testimony. He dismissed Yoshida’s book, declaring, “Writing such drivel and thereby trying to profit, this shows the fruit of the immoral commercial spirit of the Japanese.” The investigation and evidence were all presented in an article refuting Yoshida’s claims in the August 14, 1989 edition of the *Cheju Newspaper*.

The *Cheju Newspaper*, however, is a small, local newspaper with a very limited circulation, so this article did not receive very much notice. However, on the Korean mainland, with the publication of Yoshida’s translated testimony, the image that “a comfort woman” equaled “a woman taken and coerced into sexual servitude” spread widely. Thus disseminated, this mythic image has been of great use for the Korean leadership to play as a convenient political card. The atrocious image of the Japanese military whipping Korean women and taking them away has been popularly used in movies, television dramas, magazines, and newspapers. The result is that this image has found its way into textbooks. It is taken as historical fact, although it is totally baseless.

### (2) Anti-Japanese Groups Making it a Political Problem

The people who have been pressing forward, based on Yoshida's confession and so forth, making a political issue of the "comfort woman question" for Korea within Japan, are anti-Japanese civil-libertarian activist groups. They have gone so far as to go "plaintiff hunting" in Korea, looking for Koreans who will sue the Japanese government for apologies and compensation.

Those seeking an erstwhile comfort-woman and hunting for potential plaintiffs began cooperating with groups like the Korean Association of Victims and Families of War Dead during the Pacific War in November of 1989. In December of 1991, they found three former comfort women and brought suit against the Japanese government in Tokyo District Court, seeking apologies and reparations. Their chief counsel was the anti-Japanese human rights activist and lawyer Takagi Ken'ichi, who had enthusiastically handled the organizing of the plaintiffs.

### (3) The Made-up Victims

In August 11, 1991, the *Asahi Newspaper*, one of Japan's leading dailies, introduced readers to a woman named Kim Hak-sun. It was reported that she was a former Korean army comfort woman who had been taken by force to the battle field in the name of the Women's Volunteer Corps and then forced into prostitution to service the Japanese military. This former comfort woman would have to have only been 17 years old when she was taken away by the Japanese Army.

Only three days later, however, on August 14, she gave an interview to a newspaper in Seoul, where she confessed the truth, "I was sold by my mother to a barrel maker, and after that I was sent by my 'foster father' to a military brothel." Moreover, in December of the same year, when she sued the Japanese government for the right to demand damages, she honestly admitted in her suit that she had been a *gi-saeng* at the age of 14. "*Gi-saeng*" is a term that has been used since ancient times in Korea to indicate a woman involved in the providing of sexual services, but the lawyers who put together her case overlooked that meaning at first.

The *Asahi* article made no mention that she had been sold by her mother – only that she had been taken to the battlefield under the designation as a Woman Volunteer. The journalist who wrote the article, Uemura Takashi, is fluent in Korean, so he had to have known what being sold to a *gi-saeng* house meant. What's more, he later joined with Kim Hak-sun, and became the adoptive son-in-law of the managing director of the board Yang Sun-im, man who had a leadership position in the Korean Association of Victims and Families of War Dead during the Pacific War. Thus, a member of the plaintiff's family wrote an article that was at odds with the truth.

Upon realizing their mistake after the commencement of the trial, the defense counsel abetted Kim, modifying their assertion to "she was forcibly taken away by the military." This shows a straightforward example of just how baseless and aberrant it is to claim that at that time there was a Japanese domestic campaign to round up and take away comfort women.

### (4) The Secret Maneuvering of the *Asahi Newspaper*

In December of 1991, the former comfort women, with the instigation of groups with political aims, presented their suit to the Tokyo District Court demanding from the

Japanese government apologies and reparations. Thereupon, Japan, too, was suddenly taken up by the problem of the “army comfort women.”

The timing was perfect for Japanese Prime Minister Miyazawa Kiichi’s anticipated visit to Korea in January, 1992. There were concerns over plans for even more anti-Japanese leverage just before Miyazawa’s Korean visit.

The *Asahi Newspaper*, known for its leftist leanings, published an article with the headlines “Documents Indicating Military Involvement in Brothels” and “Government’s Opinion Sways,” above the fold on the front page of the January 11, 1992 morning edition. At first glance, the article reads as if to say there was definitive evidence that the Japanese Army took women away by force.

However, the article is entirely misleading. The materials reported as “documents indicating military involvement” were in fact documents that concerned the army’s orders to crack down on corrupt brokers. If one reads the originals, the applicable document was an official order stating, “One element of the brokers, acting as middlemen for comfort women, is recruiting with techniques resembling kidnapping as this would affect the dignity of the military, you are ordered to rigidly supervise the dealers you select [to work with].” That is, the documents are totally useless as evidence that indicate that the Japanese Army was “taking women away by force.” Today, that article, which was politically loaded with the intention of ensnaring Miyazawa (who on the eve of his trip held back from going to Korea), has been characterized as being nothing but smoke and mirrors.

Verification such as shown here took place however shortly after all of this transpired. Miyazawa, who had no time to prepare, had to go to Korea without being informed of the truth. During his trip in Korea, Miyazawa was severely bashed, receiving abuse not just from Koreans, but also from Communist forces, anti-nationalist and left-wing forces back in Japan. He was not given the time or materials to refute the charges.

Lacking nerve, Miyazawa betrayed the Japanese people and failed to protect his own cabinet. As a political compromise, he issued an apology -- without verifying any of the facts. By the time he returned to Japan and investigated the article’s veracity and learned the truth, it was already too late.

### 3. The So-called Kono Statement

People blaming Japan for the comfort woman issue will from time to time cite the so-called *Kono Statement* and claim that it asserts that the Japanese government officially recognized the forcible taking away of women to be made into comfort women – but this is a mistake.

If one truly understands the contents and particulars of the *Kono Statement*, one realizes that it simply embodies diplomatic niceties; it is nothing more than simple lip service.

#### (1) The Strong Demands of the Korean Government

The so-called *Kono Statement* was the commentary released by then-Chief Cabinet Secretary Kono Yohei, based on strong demands by the Korean government.

In 1993, Japan and Korea were embroiled in difficult diplomatic negotiations. Korean president Kim Young-sam, due to consideration of domestic opinion, persisted on the issue of the comfort women, strongly insisting that the Japanese government

acknowledge that the recruitment of “comfort women” had been nothing short of compulsion. Korean public opinion, hardened by long years of anti-Japanese propaganda, was not about to accept that, in fact, the comfort women were actually legal, commercialized prostitutes.

On the Koreans’ part, as evidence to the “forcible taking away of women” they pointed to 16 former comfort women. If one undertakes to comprehend the actual situation, one finds that most cases are of women who have sold *themselves* into service, without a shred of evidence of “compulsion.” Nevertheless, from the Koreans there has been a persistent demand that Japan acknowledge that these women were coerced, thus there has been no progress in negotiations.

### (2) The *Kono Statement* as the Fruit of Compromise

When negotiations were on the verge of breaking down due to Korean obstinacy, a compromise plan was suggested by the Koreans. If Japan would admit that there had been some form of “compulsion,” the Korean government would never again bring up the question of comfort women as a diplomatic issue, and they would not make a case for monetary compensation. For the politicians and foreign ministry officials who wanted to bring the negotiations to a conclusion, it was a tempting offer. In the end, they came to an easy-going compromise and brought the negotiations to a conclusion, acknowledging “compulsion” in a subdued tone and round-about manner.

### (3) An Expression that Invites Misunderstanding

In the so-called *Kono Statement*, there was no concession that the Japanese government or military had direct involvement in the coercion or forced taking of comfort women. This is because, as it has been pointed out, not a shred of actual truth has been found that any one was forcibly taken. Expressions adopted to bring about an understanding of the Korean position were as follows:

- (a) The recruitment of comfort women by brokers was at times unlawfully performed, and some women were forced to go along by them,
- (b) There are examples of the authorities being involved in the recruitment activities of some of these brokers, and
- (c) The living conditions of comfort women were not always satisfactory; there were also some sad cases.

To be certain, if one reads these circumlocutions literally, it is the responsibility of the country that controls the merchants as well as the entire system to manage affairs, and the system of licensed prostitution was generally tragic, but if the Koreans keep their promise never to bring up the issue of comfort women again, this should not become a problem.

From the start, however, the Korean government reneged on that promise. They took the *Kono Statement* and held it up as evidence that the Japanese government admitted to the coerced taking of women, and that they are using it as a diplomatic card to their heart’s content.

#### 4. The Credibility of the “Collected Testimonies”

Among items often taken as evidence for the forced taking of women is the “Collected Testimonies” of former comfort women, which has been compiled by the South Korean government. This is the record of authentic enquiries and interviews produced by the “Volunteer Corps Research Society” project, in which famed Seoul University historian Professor An Pyongjik played a central role.

First, researchers determined if the substance of the testimonies was clearly fact. Next, self-contradicting cases were excluded. According to the “Collected Testimonies,” of the 40-plus cases investigated, what remained were 19 cases. In other words, even though this is an investigation by those who would charge the Japanese government with crimes, the testimony of over half of the more than 40 people investigated was deemed to have been obviously improper.

At any rate, there were only four of the 19 former comfort women cases appearing in the “Collected Testimonies” who made claims that they were forcibly taken away. Two of the four asserted that they “worked as a comfort woman” in areas where there could not have been comfort woman facilities, so their credibility cannot be considered as anything but highly unreliable. Of the other two, one was the aforementioned Kim Hak-sun, and the other was Moon Ok-ju (introduced previously as the woman who earned 26,000 yen in two years and three months). Given all this, the fictitious nature of the testimonies becomes apparent.

Two women claiming that they were forcibly taken away in these “Collected Testimonies” were the afore-mentioned pair who brought suit against the Japanese government, and who in their legal petition admitted that they had sold themselves into prostitution to become comfort women. Even though the “Collected Testimonies” is a document bearing the imprimatur of the South Korean government, there is simply not enough reliability in it.

#### 5. The Main Source of the Myth that Comfort Women were Forcibly Taken

(1) The origin of the myth that “comfort women” = “women forcibly taken off to sexual enslavement” is due to the previously mentioned confession of Yoshida Seiji, the *Asahi Newspaper*, and information manipulated by other left-leaning forces — and the posture of the Japanese government, which seems to lack any procedure in responding to the accusations.

As previously mentioned, there is at present no disputing that Yoshida’s “confession” is a total fabrication, but to this day the *Asahi Newspaper*, which has claimed it was factual, has yet to publish an article correcting the account. For that reason, foreign researchers and politicians in countries where these matters are not germane should refrain from citing Yoshida’s confession as evidence for the coerced taking of women.

Furthermore, the *Asahi Newspaper* deliberately concealed the fact that comfort women were simple cases of women selling themselves, rather reporting that they were taken away and forced into service with the Volunteer Corps. The *Asahi* has yet to issue

either a correction or apology. On the contrary — to gloss over their falsehood, they developed a novel theory. This is a concept they call “a *broader application* of the nature of forced taking.” This “broader application” can include *anything* that went against the voluntary intentions of the people in question, and would, therefore, encompass even reasons unrelated to the forced taking away of women.

Thus, according to their reasoning, it was entirely the fault of the Japanese Army “forcibly taking them away” into sexual servitude — regardless of whether it was the case in which daughters were sold by their parents for money in order to survive, or the case where women were deceived by vile brokers and sold to brothels. Most of the people who used the *Asahi Newspaper* report that comfort women were forcibly taken away as the basis for their beliefs simply do not know these facts.

(2) Given this situation, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs totally lacks any policies to deal with the problem. Quite the opposite — they are continuing with their foundationless political compromises with the South Korean government, virtually acknowledging “the kidnapping of women” (as in the *Kôno Statement*) thereby only serving to further spur the chaos. Japanese diplomacy has to be condemned for its incompetence on this point. To begin with, though, the *Kôno Statement* was founded on the forceful demands of the South Korean government; and this comment, which was issued by the Japanese with concern for the honor of surviving former comfort women, was nothing more than a political show intended to let the Korean delegation take credit for a success.

Kôno, intending this to be merely a diplomatic issue for later disposition, believed the Korean government’s promise that this would not be used as a “political card,” and so he complied with their demand. The Koreans quickly broke the promise, and though having said they wouldn’t bring it up again, raised the issue throughout the world, beginning with America and the United Nations. They played the top-level *Kôno Statement* as a political card to blame Japan. It seems one should blame the Korean government for their display of dishonesty.

## 6. The United Nations’ Resolution Critical of Japan

In February of 1996, the “Coomaraswamy Report,” a recommendation to the Japan government by U.N. special rapporteur Radhika Coomaraswamy concerning the comfort women issue, was submitted to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. The parts touching on all the facts of the case within this report were all pulled from the popular work *The Comfort Women*, published in 1995 by Australian journalist George Hicks. Hicks, who speaks no Korean, asked Prof. Takahashi of Tokyo University to introduce him to a Korean woman living in Japan named “Yumi Lee.” Lee collected data from Japanese left-wing activists, and Hicks wrote the book from this material which she had translated into English. Hicks himself admitted that he relied on 80 percent of the material in the book from Lee, so it is clear that most of his sources of information were Japanese left-wing activists. As a result, Hicks’ book is not one based on historical fact but is merely a run-down of political propaganda. As the Coomaraswamy Report uncritically culled information from Hicks’ book, it is full of fundamental errors of fact and distortions and its content is thus beyond redemption. As a typical item, there is an



episode where the prefectural governor of Nagasaki rounded up Korean women to be transported “under orders of the Japanese military authorities,” but it is clear that this story would require an impossible violation of proper chains of command. (This story is a total fabrication: there is no one who can assert the veracity of such a claim.)

Moreover, the book says, “The Japanese military followed measures to hunt down women with violence, overt coercion, and even the slaughter of family members who were trying to protect their daughters from being kidnapped.” The basis for this assertion, however, was Yoshida Seiji’s book, *My War Crimes: Coerced Taking of Koreans*. As previously mentioned, the result of Koreans’ own investigations in 1989 into Yoshida’s book was a total repudiation of it. This fact hints that the book was written without any proper investigation being conducted — that the conclusion came first, and then the data.

Incidentally, it is surprisingly not well known that this book is listed with the lowest level of valuation in the Coomaraswamy Report (i.e. “take note”).

## 7. “Military Brothels” and “Military Prostitutes (‘Comfort Women’)” Existed in Other Countries

During World War II, brothels for the use by military personnel were not particularly unusual. Every country in the world had them. The reason is that the issue of “sex on the battlefield” is at both important and difficult to solve for militaries of countries everywhere.

### (1) The Soviet Union

According to Prof. Gerhard Reichling, the German section chief of an international organization concerned with refugee issues, 1,900,000 women were raped by the Soviet Red Army on the march to Berlin. Of that number, 1,400,000 were from the old eastern territory of Germany and 500,000 rapes occurred in the occupation zone. Prof. Reichling said that it was impossible to grasp the actual number of children born as a result of these rapes, but he estimated that there were some 292,000. Even if one disbelieves these numbers, the reality is that the battlefield demands the existence of military brothels.

### (2) The United States

As of May 8, 1945, the United States had 1,600,000 soldiers stationed in Germany. Between March and April, 1945, 487 cases of rape were reported to the court at the US base in Heidleburg. Upon the capture of Sicily in 1943, the American army inherited the military brothel system, complete with personnel, formerly operated by the German and Italian armies: it was regulated by the U.S. military physicians and MPs. When the United States occupied Japan, in the first year of occupation there were 2,900 rapes reported in Kanagawa prefecture alone. In the seven years of the occupation, the General Headquarters (GHQ) of the Supreme Allied Command was concerned about the 2,536 murders and 30,000 rapes (see: Takayama Masayuki, “A Manual: ‘How to Make Japanese–Korean News’,” *Shokun! Magazine*, March, 2005), and so the GHQ demanded the Tokyo metropolitan government prepare a brothel for U.S. servicemen’s use in Tokyo. This is neither rumor nor exaggeration: it is the recorded truth.

### (3) France

On April 21, 1945, the French army occupied Stuttgart. Professor Gaube, a Frenchman accompanying the army, was responsible for welfare and insurance concerns, had this to report: “The German women residents were not satisfactorily prepared for this misfortune; many places are reporting almost a hundred rapes have occurred. Even women over 60 and younger than 16 years of age were unable to escape this fate.”

### (4) Germany

The Germany army, which attacked the Soviet Union, subjected “comfort women” to enforced recruitment; as Stalin had forbidden prostitution, the Germans had no alternative but to establish military brothels. Young women who refused to go into the German homeland as forced labor were taken instead to work in the brothels. Jewish women likewise were sent to the brothels.

It is claimed that about 200,000 children were born of German soldiers in Norway, Denmark, Belgium, Holland, and France.

### (5) Korea

The Korean military, which participated in the Vietnam War, used local military brothels as did the American army. There were many children of mixed blood born in Vietnam.

Finally, in Korea, after World War II and for a long time since there have been brothels for sole use by American military men which are managed by the Korean government.

Thus the problem of “sex on the battlefield” is a globally ubiquitous phenomenon. It is true that the Japanese army took a proactive stance in establishing military brothels at the front and made use of them. This was a measure done entirely to curb the potential for occurrences of rape.

Within the Japanese system of licensed military prostitutes, the management of the military brothels was undertaken by civilian merchants; the military participation was limited to providing goods for living, provisions, hygiene management, etc. The existence of such an army-licensed prostitution system was common all over the world in those days. There is absolutely no reason why Japan alone should be subject to censure for it.

Incidentally, according to the latest research of Professor Hata Ikuhiko of Nihon University, there were 20,000 or a few thousand more total comfort women for the Japanese army, and their composition was 40 percent Japanese, 30 percent locals of the area of the brothel, 20 percent Koreans, and 10 percent other nationalities (see: *War and Sex*, Hata Ikuhiko, Shinchô Co., 1999, pp 406, 410). In other words, the fact of the matter is that there were in total only about 4,000 or 5,000 Korean comfort women; there is absolutely no way it was an unreasonably number like “20,000.”

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