

COMFORT WOMEN IN KOREA

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Repercussions from remarks made by Osaka City Mayor Hashimoto Toru about the so-called “comfort women” have been felt throughout the world.

And as always, anti-Japanese public sentiment has risen to the surface in South Korea.

The Koreans seize upon every possible opportunity to heap abuse on Japan. I find it impossible to comprehend their perversity.

However, matters are only made worse by the American response to any mention of the comfort-women issue. The fact is that a great many Americans have succumbed to the persistent, interminable campaigns waged by the Chinese and Koreans to convince the world that the Japanese abducted innocent Asian women and forced them to become sex slaves for Japanese military personnel during World War II.

In 1993 Chief Cabinet Secretary Kono Yohei issued a statement about the comfort women (the Kono Statement), which acknowledged that government or military authorities were involved with recruitment of comfort women. In 1995 Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi made a statement about Japanese aggression during World War II. Since disavowal of those statements would encounter vehement objection from American public opinion, the Obama administration is opposed to attempts within Japan to refute the lies they contain.

Japanese authorities never abducted women. Nor did they force them to become comfort women against their will.

Accusations involving the comfort women, Japanese aggression during World War II, and the Nanjing “massacre” are complete fabrications, with absolutely no basis in fact. And incredible though it may seem, the government of a democratic nation has officially admitted to — and apologized for — acts that never took place! It is no wonder that the entire world accepts the accusations as valid.

For that very reason, Kono’s and Murayama’s transgressions are grave indeed. We must take immediate steps to remove the stains on our nation’s honor, for the sake of Japan’s national security. Restoring Japan’s good name will increase respect for our nation and strengthen our diplomatic effectiveness.

Every nation has been involved in and in charge of facilities enabling soldiers to satisfy their sexual needs without the risk of contracting venereal disease when those soldiers are engaged in combat on foreign soil. The Japanese military was no exception. During World War II, Japanese military authorities established brothels and contracted with local civilian Japanese and Korean brothel operators to recruit prostitutes.

Is it possible that prostitutes have never been hired to service military personnel in South Korea?

The year before diplomatic relations were established between Japan and South Korea, I traveled to Korea many times in my capacity as a journalist. While there I often noticed advertisements recruiting prostitutes to service US soldiers, in *Dong-a Ilbo* and other leading Korean newspapers. They used the term *wianbu*, the Korean pronunciation of the same term the Japanese had used when Korea was part of Japan.

The results of research on comfort women in South Korea, done by a group of Korean scholars, were published in book form two years ago under the title *The Military and Sexual Violence*.ⁱ

The book provides verification that United Nations Forces (US troops) and the South Korean government were both involved in and in charge of military prostitutes from the moment the Korean War erupted.

In South Korea prostitutes servicing US troops were referred to as *yanggongju* (western princess), *yanggalbo* (prostitute for westerners), *UN madam*, and *Mrs. UN*. The district in which they worked was called *Kijichon* (Camp Town).

The Military and Sexual Violence also reveals that military prostitutes were hired for three reasons: (1) to protect Korean women who were not prostitutes, (2) to demonstrate the Korean government's appreciation to US troops, and (3) to raise the soldiers' morale.

Korean soldiers also had access to prostitutes. Very few of the women who became prostitutes to service them did so of their own free will. According to their testimonies, most of them were abducted by Korean intelligence agents and forced into prostitution within 24 hours.

The authors of the book maintain that the women were licensed prostitutes from the viewpoint of the Korean government, but that they perceived themselves as sex slaves — victims of the Korean military.

Immediately after the aforementioned research work was published in 2002, a ban was placed on the examination of all resources relating to military prostitutes servicing Korean troops housed in the Reference Library of the Korean Ministry of National Defense. When asked why, the relevant authorities muddied the waters further by saying, "This has nothing to do with the Japanese comfort women problem."

I wonder if we can expect to see demonstrators erect statues of comfort women — this time in front of the Korean Parliament and the US Embassy.

ⁱ Song Ok-yeon and Kim Yeong, eds., *Guntai to sei boryoku: Chosen hanto no 20 seiki* (The military and sexual violence: the Korean peninsula in the 20th century) (Tokyo: Gendai Shiryō Shuppan, 2010).