

The Origins of the US Army's Korean Comfort Women

**By Choi Kilsung,
Professor at University of East Asia, Professor Emeritus at Hiroshima University**

Introduction

This book is about Koreans and sex.

I have already written a number of articles on this subject and have discussed it in lectures. This book is an original work that I wrote based upon those articles and lectures.

Naturally sex is something that everyone is interested in from the moment that they hit puberty, but the root of my way of thinking about sex dates back even further than that.

It all goes back to my experiences in the Korean War which started over sixty years ago in 1950 when I was only ten years old. My memories of that time are unforgettable and have run through my mind countless times since then. As a witness of what happened, I have recounted what I saw for posterity. The things that I need to say range from amusing to tragic, but I have cautioned myself to never stray from the truth.

During the Korean War, the soldiers of the United Nations were a "peacekeeping force", and we thought of them as guardian angels protecting our democracy from communist rule. And yet, in my own home village, some truly dreadful acts of sexual violence against women were perpetrated by the US-led UN Army that we Koreans believed was our ally. Could it be that human beings are reduced to the level of beasts in times of war? By this point in time it is no longer possible to verify just how widespread such sexual assaults were. In my village, where Confucian ethical traditions were strong, brothels had been forbidden, but under the strain of war and the fear of rapes, the residents had little choice but to accept prostitution.

This is the story of the US Army's comfort women, a story which neither Japan, Korea nor international society can ignore when discussing the comfort women problem. However, mention of this topic has long been considered taboo within South Korea. The book "Troublesome Korea," published in Japanese by *Sankosha*, included a dialogue between myself and Oh Seon-hwa which took place in 1997. I mentioned that the UN Army had engaged in mass rape in my home village, which resorted to prostitution in order to defend itself from further acts of rape. The attention we brought to the issue was not at all well received in South Korea. Indeed, the Korean media, including the TV network *MBC*, subjected us to relentless criticism.

Today the problem of the so-called "comfort women" is a major source of discord in Japan and Korea. As Korea-Japan relations have hit a low point, there has been an explosion of anti-Japanese and anti-Korean literature, including many books on the comfort women. It is an undeniable truth that sex is an unavoidable part of war, but in the context of the old Japanese Army, the "comfort women" are seen internationally as an issue of "sexual slavery" due to misinformation printed in the *Asahi Shimbun* newspaper.

Given these circumstances, I have avoided thinking in black-and-white terms, of anti-Japanese versus anti-Korean, attack versus defense, and legitimate arguments versus illegitimate arguments. Nor should this be a case that is prosecuted through the lens of modern-day human rights. The comfort women problem arose amidst the bloodshed of war, and I would like people to consider it as a matter of sex by soldiers in war, in which neither human rights nor basic humanity exist at all.

Nevertheless, this book's treatment of the comfort women problem does not simply adopt a pacifist-based anti-war stance. Instead, I have examined the matter by looking at war and sex crimes from the perspective of sex being the most basic human instinct. The questions I want to pose concern not only a mere problem of individuals, but also a problem of society.

For example, in the case of Korea, which has for ages adhered to Confucian ethical traditions, I ask if these traditions were maintained in a time of war and national emergency. I ask what sex and sexual morals are in a Confucian society which values chastity as much as life itself. However, I will not comment on the economic side of sexual norms and the prostitution industry.

Concerning the relationship between Japan and Korea, I have always been interested in an unbiased cultural comparison of the two nations. Though there have been times that I felt it was dangerous to talk about the comfort women problem, to be honest, that has actually increased my interest in the subject. Objective scholarship is safe, but politics is dangerous, which means that this subject is on the threshold between what is considered safe and dangerous.

In this book, I will also touch on the unsavory aspects of the Korean Confucian stance towards sex and chastity. From there, I will delve into a variety of related issues, including marriage and divorce, the mistress system, the crime of adultery, and teahouse prostitution.

Sex is something which is linked to the survival of the species, and because it also feels good, one might even say that sexual love is a gift from heaven. Still, pleasure is something that can also corrupt humans and bring us down to the level of animals. It is well known that religious leaders and sages have warned about the dangers of sex, and sexual repression is clearly a major cause of sex crimes.

In this book I have contemplated the relationship between sexual violence and prostitution by observing humans at war. As a quintessential case study of this relationship, I put

forward the example of my own village which was steeped in the tradition of Confucian sexual morality but which was transformed almost overnight into a "prostitution village" during the war. However, I do not intend to convey that my point of view is the definitive truth—this is a matter that I, along with the readers of this book, want to continue to think about.

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