

# **KOREAN “COMFORT WOMEN”**

## ***The Intersection of Colonial Power, Gender, and Class***

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*During the Asian and Pacific War (1937-45), the Japanese government mobilized approximately 200,000 Asian women to military brothels to sexually serve Japanese soldiers. The majority of these victims were unmarried young women from Korea, Japan's colony at that time. In the early 1990s, Korean feminist leaders helped more than 200 Korean survivors of Japanese military sexual slavery to come forward to tell the truth, which has further accelerated the redress movement for the women. One major issue in the redress movement and research relating to the so-called “comfort women” issue is whether Japan's colonization of Korea or gender hierarchy was a more fundamental cause of the Korean women's suffering. Using an intersectional perspective, this article analyzes how colonial power, gender hierarchy, and class were inseparably tied together to make the victims' lives miserable. By doing so, it shows that a one-sided emphasis on colonization or gender hierarchy will misrepresent the feminist political issue and misinterpret the “comfort women's” experiences.*

**Keywords:** *sexual violence against women; colonial power; gender; class*

**A**bout 200,000 Korean and other Asian young women were mobilized to serve Japanese soldiers in military brothels established in China and other Asian and Pacific countries during the Asian and Pacific War (1932-45). Helped by feminist movements in South Korea and other Asian countries, several hundred of these

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women came forward in the early 1990s to testify about their horrible experiences, breaking a half-century of silence. Feminist and democratic movements in Asian countries, along with the victims' testimonies, have led to an active redress movement. Although this movement has pervaded several Asian countries, it has been most active in South Korea, which has the majority of the victims, and Japan, the country that perpetrated the crime.

One major issue in the redress movement and research on the so-called "comfort women" problem in Korea and Japan is whether Japan's colonization of Korea or the gender hierarchy in Japan and Korea was a more fundamental cause of the Korean women's suffering. Both Korean women activists and researchers concerned with the issue have emphasized Japan's colonization and national prejudice against Koreans as a more fundamental cause of the victimization of many Korean women as sexual slaves (Chung 1997; Kang 1993; Yun 1988, 1997). Naturally, the leaders of the movement have focused on the Japanese government's acknowledgment of the crime and apology and compensation to the victims as the basic solution to the problem.

Some Korean and Japanese feminist scholars are critical of this nationalistic discourse by Korean activists and researchers. Ueno Shizuko and Yamashita Yeongae, in particular, argue that since other Asian women, including Japanese women, also were victimized by Japanese military sexual slavery, gender hierarchy should be considered the key variable in understanding the "comfort women" issue (Kang and Yamashita 1993; Ueno 1998; Yamashita 1996, 1999). Korean activists and researchers consider it important to make a distinction between Korean comfort women as forced sexual slaves and Japanese comfort women as voluntary participants for commercial purposes. Yet Ueno and Yamashita argue that Japanese comfort women basically do not differ from Korean comfort women in that, like the Korean women, they were victimized by the military "comfort" system created for sexual slavery. In their view, the Japanese comfort women also were involuntarily drafted, in the sense that poverty pushed them to military brothels. They claim that an overly nationalistic interpretation has led the leaders of the redress movement in Korea to focus on the Japanese government's apology and compensation and to neglect treatment of the surviving comfort women as sexual victims.

The victimization of Korean comfort women has three major components: (1) their being forced into military sexual slavery, (2) their suffering inside military brothels, and (3) their half-century of agonizing experiences after their return home. More Korean women were mobilized for Japanese military sexual slavery than were women from other Asian countries, and Korean comfort women were treated more cruelly than were Japanese comfort women, mainly because of Japan's colonization of Korea. Thus, the colonization perspective used by Korean feminists is relevant to understanding the Korean experiences of sexual slavery. However, the state-supported patriarchal system in Japan was central to the establishment of Japanese military brothels while patriarchal customs in Korea have been mainly responsible for the Korean victims' lifelong suffering after their return home. Accordingly, the feminist perspective used by some Japanese feminist

scholars is equally relevant to the Korean victims' experiences. In addition, as is the case with some other types of sexual assault, the Korean victims' lower-class background played a less significant but still important role in their forced mobilization for the military sexual service.

Using an intersectional analysis, this article intends to show that colonization, gender, and class were inseparably tied together to make the lives of Korean comfort women extremely miserable, although each factor has greater effects on one component of their victimization than on the others. By emphasizing the intersection of colonial power, gender hierarchy, and class, I argue that a one-sided emphasis on colonization or gender hierarchy as the fundamental cause cannot fully explain the suffering of the Korean victims of sexual slavery.

The race-gender-class intersectional perspective has been popular in the social science disciplines in the United States (Anderson and Hill Collins 2001; Chow, Wilkinson, and Baca Zinn 1996; Hill Collins 1991; Jayawardena 1986; King 1988; Mohanty, Russo, and Torres 1991), but it has largely been applied to Black and other women of color, especially in connection with their marginalized socioeconomic status. Few studies have applied the intersectional perspective to gender issues cutting across two or more countries, such as those related to international migration or colonization (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Mohanty, Russo, and Torres 1991). This article contributes to the literature on the race (nation)-gender-class intersection by applying it to women's political movements in South Korea and Japan and to sexual violence against women during war.

### HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY BACKGROUND

Between 1932 and 1945, Japan was involved in an imperial war with many Asian countries and the United States, commonly referred to as the Asian and Pacific War. During that time, the Japanese government mobilized a large number of Asian women to military brothels to "comfort" Japanese soldiers stationed in Asian and Pacific countries (Hicks 1995; Korean Council 1997; Shin and Cho 1997; Yoshimi 1993a). Japanese troops in Shanghai established the first military "comfort stations" in early 1932 to prevent Japanese soldiers from raping local women (Chung 1997, 102; Yoshimi 1993a, 54-55). The military sexual slavery system was formalized after the 1937-38 period when Japan opened an all-out war with China and occupied Nanking (Chung 1997, 103; C. I. Kang 1997). In the early 1940s, the Japanese military established comfort stations in other parts of the Asian occupied territories, such as Indonesia, Indochina, Thailand, and the Philippines. They also established them in many parts of the Pacific Islands, as well as in Japan, Okinawa, Korea, and Taiwan.

The exact number of women mobilized to Japanese military brothels is currently unknown because the Japanese government burned key historical documents. But based on a few documents indicating the ratio of Japanese soldiers to the comfort women, historians roughly estimate that the number ranges from 80,000 to 280,000

(Korean Research Institute for Jungshindae 2000, 30).<sup>1</sup> The women were mobilized from many Asian countries, including Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and the Philippines, and even some Dutch women in Indonesia were victimized (Hicks 1995, 58-59). But Japanese government documents suggest the majority of the young women were from Korea, Japan's colony at that time (Chung 1997; Yoshimi 1993a, 69-72).

Interviews with 76 Korean victims by members of the Research Association (Korean Council 2001a, 2001b; Korean Council and the Research Association 1993, 1995, 1997, 1999) and my own interviews with 19 victims reveal their horrible experiences at the hands of the Japanese military. Confined to filthy shanties, the sexual slaves were forced to have intercourse with Japanese soldiers, from 10 to 30 times per day. They were regularly subjected to torture, beating, burning, and sometimes stabbing. Some women died of venereal disease in military brothels, while other women committed suicide. Testimonies by both the victims and Japanese witnesses reveal that Japanese soldiers abandoned the comfort women, in some cases killing them, when Japan was defeated in World War II (Yun 1997, 291).

Although many victims returned to Korea after the war, because of shame they could not live with their parents. Physically and mentally sick, most of them could not live normal marital lives. Although most eventually got married, many were later divorced early because of their infertility or their husbands' knowledge of their secret past, or they became young widows because of their husbands' much older age. Although they worked hard day and night, mostly as maids, waitresses, or peddlers, they could hardly support themselves (Yi 1997). All victims suffered from a number of health problems and psychological traumas caused by their sexual slavery experiences. Many victims continued to suffer from venereal disease, and some had hysterectomies. They regularly had nightmares in which Japanese soldiers were chasing them, but they had to hide their horrible experiences for more than 50 years.

Women's fight against sex tourism by Japanese businessmen, the prostitution near U.S. military bases, and sexual violence against activist women college students by the police in South Korea in the 1980s led Korean feminist leaders to pay attention to the comfort women issue (Lee 1992). To take concerted action against the Japanese government, 36 Korean women's organizations established the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Sexual Slavery by Japan (hereafter referred to as the Korean Council) in November 1990. The Korean Council has helped more than 200 Korean surviving victims in South Korea and other Asian countries to come forward to tell the truth, which has further accelerated the redress movement for the victims (H. C. Lee 1997).<sup>2</sup> Korean feminist organizations have made broad coalitions with Japanese and other Asian women's and human rights organizations to make the Japanese government acknowledge the crime committed by its predecessors and compensate the victims (H. C. Lee 1997). The redress movement has in turn accelerated research on the comfort women issue, leading to

the publication of several dozen books and numerous articles focusing on the issue in Japan and Korea.

### DATA SOURCES

This research is part of a larger study that focuses on Korean comfort women and the redress movement in South Korea. It is based on my personal interviews, my participant observation, and many Korean- and Japanese-language secondary materials. I conducted tape-recorded interviews with 19 surviving Korean former comfort women, several of them two or three times, in the five summers of 1995, 1996, 1997, 1999, and 2001. I completed about half of the interviews at *Nanumeui jip* (Sharing House) where 8 or 9 former comfort women lived together under the guidance of a Buddhist monk. I conducted the other interviews at the victims' apartments in Seoul and its adjacent cities. These interviews lasted from 35 minutes to 1 hour and 50 minutes.

Interview questions focused on the following contents: (1) the survivor's early family background, (2) when and how she was drafted to a Japanese military brothel, (3) how she was treated in the brothel, (4) how she managed to come back to Korea after the end of the war, (5) how she has lived since coming back to Korea, (6) her testimonies and other activities for the redress movement, and (7) her opinions about how the comfort women issue has been handled by Japanese and Korean governments and people and how it should be handled.

In the same period, I also interviewed 14 key members of the Korean Council, most of them two or three times. Although my interviews with these staff members focused on the redress movement, they also shed light on the victims' contemporary life experiences, including their participation in the movement. Each interview lasted an average of one hour.

During my research trips to Seoul, I also participated in about 15 weekly demonstrations staged in front of the Japanese Embassy, which the Korean Council has organized since February 1992 and in which several victims have participated. After each demonstration, the participants went to a restaurant to eat lunch together and to talk with the survivors. At the lunch meetings, I was able to talk informally with some former comfort women. Moreover, I attended several forums focusing on the comfort women issue held in Seoul and organized by the Korean Council. In addition, in the summer of 2001, I lived at *Nanumeui jip* (Sharing House) for 10 days, eating and talking with 8 victims every day. My participant observations during my stay there also comprise a data source.

Members of the Research Association on the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan (hereafter referred to as the Research Association) compiled life histories of 76 Korean victims of military sexual slavery, based on several rounds of interviews with each woman. Their life histories were published in six volumes (Korean Council 2001a, 2001b; Korean Council and the Research Association 1993, 1995, 1997, 1999). I use some information from the six-volume life

histories of the Korean victims of Japanese military sexual slavery for this article. In addition, a number of books and journal articles focusing on the comfort women issue have been published in Japanese and Korean since the early 1990s. This article is partly based on some of these secondary materials.

In the following sections, I examine Japan's colonial power, gender, and class as the three major contributing factors to the victimization of Korean sexual slaves. In each section, I first develop the analysis using secondary sources and then examine the fit of such an analysis to the personal experiences of the Korean victims using primary sources. To protect the informants' privacy, I use pseudonyms. Following Korean custom, I use their last names first.

### COLONIAL POWER

Japan made Korea its protectorate in 1905, ending its diplomatic contacts with other countries, and annexed it in 1910. Japan's colonization of Korea lasted until August 15, 1945, when the Pacific War ended with Japan's defeat. During the colonial period, Japan appropriated a vast amount of land from the Chosun Dynasty and individual Koreans and distributed it to Japanese citizens (C. S. Kang 1997).

In the last stage of colonization (between 1937 and 1945), the Japanese government mainly used Korea as a place to supply food and other war materials for Manchuria. Koreans were forced to provide rice, other agricultural products, and even minerals for the Japanese military. More than 100,000 displaced Korean farmers were forced to move to Manchuria. Moreover, Japan enforced its monolithic assimilationist policy by replacing the Korean language, names, religion, and history with Japanese versions (C. S. Kang 1997).

The Japanese government also took Korean laborers and military draftees to Japan to fill the manpower vacuum created by the expansion of the military forces and the war industry. Beginning in 1939, Korean laborers were collectively sent to Japan and other Asian and Pacific countries more or less involuntarily through interventions by local officials (Kang and Suh 1997). Between 1939 and 1945, 668,000 Korean laborers were drafted to Japan (Yo 1993, 47). They included about 200,000 unmarried young women between the ages of 12 and 40, the majority of whom were sent to Japan in the name of a "women's voluntary service corps" in 1944 and 1945 and worked at aircraft parts or warship manufacturing factories in Japan (Yo 1993). Korean conscripted workers were paid less than the equivalent Japanese laborers, and about half of their wages were retained as compulsory savings to be paid on discharge. Moreover, they were subjected to cruel treatment by Japanese supervisors (Yun 1997, 302-3), resulting in high casualties due to malnutrition, overwork, accidents, or exposure to the bombing by the allied forces (Dakagi 1995).

In the early years of the Asian and Pacific War, Japan drafted Korean young men for military service through a voluntary system, but it forcibly drafted many young

Koreans. In August 1945, at the end of the war, there were more than 200,000 Korean soldiers in the Japanese military (C. I. Kang 1997, 299). Korean soldiers were put in the front lines in Asian and Pacific jungles, leading to high casualties. In addition, Japan forcibly took more than 150,000 Korean civilians to work as paramilitary servicemen in war zones in Japan and Asian countries (C. I. Kang 1997, 300). Some of them (more than 3,200) were assigned to supervise the allied prisoners of war captured in Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, and Java. After Japan was defeated in the war, 148 of the Korean paramilitary servicemen were put on trial for abusing prisoners of war, with 28 executed (Dakagi 1995, 120-21).<sup>3</sup>

Korean victims of sexual slavery are similar to other Korean groups of Pacific War victims in that they all were forcibly drafted for one or another type of service to the Japanese military and inhumanly treated mainly because they were subjects of Japan's colony. For this reason, not only Korean but also many Japanese scholars agree that the victimization of many Korean women under Japanese military sexual slavery was partly a by-product of Japan's colonization of Korea (M. K. Kang 1997; Suzuki 1991; Yoshimi 1993b; Yun 1988, 1997). The vast majority of the sexual slaves were drawn from Korea because it was a colonial country. The Japanese government also mobilized women from Taiwan, another of Japan's colonies at that time, but the number of Taiwanese victims is believed to be much smaller than that of Korean victims,<sup>4</sup> partly because of the much smaller population in Taiwan.<sup>5</sup>

The Japanese military did not use Japanese virgins in military brothels since it would have resulted in the Japanese public's distrust of the military (Yoshimi 1993a). Japanese comfort women mainly were prostitutes and others engaged in entertainment jobs. As a result, they were older than Korean sexual slaves and were more prepared for their services before they were shipped to military brothels (M. K. Kang 1997, 25; Kurahashi 1994; Yun 1988, 1997). By contrast, almost all Korean women were young, unmarried virgins in their teens and early 20s, all of them drafted forcibly for sexual slavery. Japanese comfort women usually served officers and were paid for their services, while Korean sexual slaves usually served a large number of enlisted men and were treated more brutally than were Japanese comfort women (Kurahashi 1994; Yun 1988).

Colonial power interplayed with gender in the mobilization of many Korean women to Japanese military brothels in that the Japanese military authorities preferred to mobilize Korean women for sexual slavery because of their prejudice against their colonial subjects. The Japanese government considered the Korean people—whether men or women—mainly as instruments to be expended for its war purpose (Yun 1997). They believed that Korean young women could be used effectively for their war efforts by meeting the sexual desires of their soldiers. The Japanese soldiers who used military brothels committed extreme forms of abuse and humiliation against Korean comfort women, but the Japanese military authorities did not try to discourage their soldiers from treating Korean sexual slaves inhumanly. This was probably because the Japanese authorities who established military sexual slavery had a high level of prejudice against Koreans.<sup>6</sup>

The Japanese government may have preferred to use Korean women for sexual slavery because of the convenience of drafting and transporting them to military brothels established in other countries. Korean women were obtained using abduction and other forms of coercion or by making false promises of employment (M. K. Kang 1997).<sup>7</sup> Coercive means were more effective against Korean women than against other Asian women because Koreans were colonial subjects, almost completely governed by Japanese officials and military police. Employment promises also worked effectively because the Japanese colonial economic policy had devastated Korean agriculture so that many young Korean women from farming families were ready to leave home for meaningful jobs in a foreign country (Kang 1993). Thus, colonial power intersected with gender and class in the lives of Korean women from poor farming families.

Yoshimi Yoshiaki (1993b; 1995, 160-63), a Japanese historian, has suggested that another reason the Japanese government chose Korean and Taiwanese women for sexual slavery was its assumption that it could be construed as not violating the international laws banning the sale of women and children for prostitution. Japan had ratified the International Convention for the Suppression of White Slave Traffic (1910) and the International Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women and Children (1921). However, it exercised its prerogative, under article 11 of the 1921 convention, to declare that neither of the colonies (Korea and Taiwan) would be included in the scope of the convention (Yoshimi 1993b). Thus, the Japanese governmental authorities assumed that the mobilization of young women from Korea and Taiwan for sexual slavery would not violate international laws (Yoshimi 1993b; 1995, 160-63).<sup>8</sup>

My interviews with Korean victims suggest that they consider their powerlessness as girls in a colonized society to be mainly responsible for their forced mobilization to military brothels and inhuman treatment by Japanese soldiers. For example, Park Ok-Sun expressed her anger at the Korean government's failure to press the Japanese government to take actions to compensate the victims. She said,

We were taken to the military brothel by the Japanese military mainly because our country, colonized by Japan, was not strong enough to protect us. Therefore, this is not our individual problem, but our nation's problem. Until the Japanese government resolves the *Jungshindae* issue, it cannot have normal relations with Korea. The Korean government should put pressure on the Japanese government to acknowledge the crime and compensate the victims.

In her trip to Japan for testimony in the early 1990s, Lee Ji-Sook, a woman who had suffered Japanese sexual slavery for two years in Taiwan, had a chance to meet with Japanese prime minister Murayama in 1994. She told me she screamed the following words when Murayama offered a handshake:

Your government destroyed my life. If you had not mobilized me to the *Jungshindae*, I could have become even *daetongryung*'s [the president's] wife. You should give me

back my lost youth. After losing everything important in my life, now I have nothing to be afraid of.

In July 1995, the Japanese government helped to establish the Asian Women's Fund to compensate the victims using privately donated monies (Asian Women's Fund 1998a). The Asian Women's Fund tried to pay each victim in Korea, Taiwan, and the Philippines two million yen (about \$20,000) in cash and three million yen (about \$30,000) more to be paid from the Japanese government for the victim's medical and welfare support. The Korean Council and other Asian women's organizations involved in the redress movement adamantly opposed the private fund as "sympathy money" or "charity money." They demanded victims' compensation by the Japanese government and a sincere apology by the emperor. The Asian Women's Fund sent officials to Korean victims' homes to persuade them to accept the compensation through the private fund. But staff members of the Korean Council informed me that only 7 of the about 200 Korean surviving victims had accepted the compensation money by January 1997. The Korean Council asked the Korean government to pay each victim a certain amount of money so that she did not have to accept "charity money" from the Asian Women's Fund. In April 1998, the Kim Dae Joong administration responded favorably to the request by paying each Korean victim 31.5 million won (\$21,000) in government subsidy and 6.5 million won (\$4,344) from a civilian-raised fund.<sup>9</sup>

Between 1995 and 1997, I asked my interviewees to give their opinions about receiving money from the Asian Women's Fund. They generally agreed that getting money as soon as possible was important because they did not think they would live long. Yet all but a few expressed the strong feeling that they should not receive it from the Asian Women's Fund. As Kim Soo-Ja, a 70-year-old survivor, said in an interview conducted in 1995,

It is more important to get a sincere apology than simply to get a monetary compensation. I am not merchandise that can be traded for money. Even if they give me Japan as a whole, they cannot compensate for my lifelong suffering. I will never accept money from the Asian Women's Fund. The Japanese government should make a sincere apology and directly compensate me.

The above excerpt indicates that the Korean sexual slavery victims hold the Japanese military government primarily responsible for their lifelong suffering and, therefore, only the Japanese government can take measures to atone for brutalities committed against them by its predecessor. The strong feeling of most of the interviewees not to accept the "atonement money" from the private fund also shows the inadequacy of the suggestion by the Asian Women's Fund that staff members of the Korean Council tried to block the victims from accepting the money against their will (Asian Women's Fund 1998b).

## GENDER HIERARCHY

Although the victimization of many Korean women as sexual slaves is closely related to Japan's colonial power over Korea, Korean comfort women basically differed from other groups of Korean Pacific War victims because they suffered far more brutality and humiliation. Furthermore, as victims of sexual violence, they have had to live with shame and humiliation throughout their lives. The subordination of women to the state and the emperor under the state patriarchal system in imperial Japan became the ideological foundation for the establishment of military brothels to "comfort" Japanese soldiers. Moreover, sexual double standards and related practices associated with the patriarchal ideology in Korea played a key role in preventing the former Korean sexual slaves from maintaining normal family lives and in keeping them silent for half a century. Thus, gender hierarchy and patriarchal customs in Japan intersected with the imperial war in the establishment of the military "comfort" system, while the experiences of Korean victims with sexual slavery interplayed with patriarchal customs in Korea to keep them silent for half a century.

There have been many examples of sexual violence against women in military contexts (Grossman 1997; Hicks 1995; Human Rights Watch 1995, xiv). But in the 20th century, only the Japanese government practiced large-scale military sexual slavery. The establishment of sexual slavery by the Japanese imperial government during the war reflects the inferior position of Japanese women before and during the war. The *ie* system, established during the early Edo period (1603-1867) based on Confucian principles of patriarchy and primogeniture, gave the patriarchal head of the family an unquestioned authority over his wife and children. Furthermore, the Civil Code, established in 1898 by the Meiji government, formally restricted women's rights in marriage, property inheritance, divorce, child custody, and voting (Kumagai 1996, 94). The adoption of the imperial system and emerging Japanese nationalism during the Meiji period further stressed the devotion of each woman to the state and the emperor.

Japan has a long history of public prostitution. It maintained a government-licensed prostitution system for almost the entire Edo period (1603-1867), which survived well into the 20th century (until 1956) (Seigle 1993). Although the Meiji government modernized Japan, modeling on the Western powers, it did not change its earlier policy of legalized prostitution. In fact, as capitalism and industrialization developed, the trade and traffic in women for public and private prostitution increased in Japan in the 20th century.

In Meiji imperial Japan, each family was ultimately subordinate to the state with the emperor as its head. In the "family state" or "patriarchal state," women were considered important mainly because of their childbearing potential to produce future soldiers (Chung 1997). The subordination of each family and woman to the state and the emperor was a unique aspect of the Japanese patriarchal system in the Meiji period. The establishment of military sexual slavery by the Japanese

government had much to do with the notion, prevalent in Meiji imperial Japan, that women could be used in any way to serve the purpose of the Japanese state and the emperor.

As Japanese soldiers and civilians moved into Korea and other Asian countries for colonization and military expansion in the first half of the 20th century, the Japanese government transplanted its practice of legalized prostitution to other Asian countries to meet the sexual needs of the Japanese people. Korean, Chinese, and other local women as well as Japanese women (the *karayuki-san*) were used for prostitution. Privately run comfort stations were already established near Japanese military units during the Sino-Japanese war (1895) (Kurahashi 1994, 52-54, cited in Chung 1997, 105), and military-run comfort stations existed during the Russo-Japanese war (1904-5) (Chung 1997, 104-5). Thus, the Japanese military sexual slavery during the Pacific War had a historical precedent in the public prostitution system that had been in existence in Japan for hundreds of years (Kang and Yamashita 1993; Yamashita 1999). After its defeat in World War II, the Japanese government continued its military prostitution, using Japanese women for the U.S. military forces in Japan (Dower 1999, 123-32; Lie 1997).

Gender hierarchy in Korea also played a key role in the suffering of Korean comfort women after their return home. Most Korean victims of Japanese military sexual slavery spent less than five years in military brothels. Yet they had to hide their humiliating stories for more than 50 years and avoid marriage mainly because of strong patriarchal traditions and strong sexual double standards in Korea. In examining the problems of the victims' postwar adjustments in Korea, I want to make a distinction between sexual slavery as the primary cause and gender oppression and Korea's patriarchal ideology as the secondary cause. The surviving women have suffered a variety of physical damage, as well as psychological and psychosomatic symptoms, such as bodily pain, venereal disease, infertility, nervous breakdown, excessive drinking, and fear of men, directly or mainly caused by the sexual slavery experience. In addition, they have suffered from shame, social isolation, marital problems, and poverty, for which the patriarchal ideology and sexual double standards in Korea are as much responsible as is sexual slavery. Thus, the victims' experiences with sexual slavery are inextricably tied to their gender experiences in Korea that prolonged their suffering after their return home.

Researchers in Korea, including most members of the Korean Council, have stressed the role of the gender hierarchy and patriarchal ideology in imperial Japan in the establishment and operation of military sexual slavery (Chung 1997; Kim 1997; Yun 1997). Yet they have neglected to examine the devastating effects of patriarchal traditions and sexual double standards in Korea on the social and psychological adjustment of the victims after they returned to Korea (the exceptions are Kang and Yamashita 1993; Yi 1997). As already indicated, some Japanese feminist scholars are very critical of this nationalist interpretation of the comfort women issue by Korean researchers and movement leaders (Ueno 1998; Yamashita 1996, 1999).

As noted above, the victims' narratives of their experiences in the brothels are full of nationalist discourse, with little room for a feminist discourse. By contrast, gender figures prominently in their narratives of experiences after they returned home. Given the predominance of patriarchal customs emphasizing women's chastity, marriage, and childbearing/child rearing in Korea at that time, it is not difficult to figure out what kind of hardship they experienced. The majority of my interviewees initially returned to their parental homes but could not tell their parents what had happened to them. They could not stay there long because their parents insisted they get married quickly. Most of my informants either remained single, were divorced (partly because of their infertility or venereal disease), or were widowed young after marrying much older men. Since the traditional gender orientation in Korea at that time left women entirely dependent on their husbands for financial support, these women had severe difficulty in economic survival. The following report by Kang Soon-Shim, a 68-year-old woman who was taken to a military brothel at the age of 15, reflects the economic survival difficulties the Korean victims encountered:

Because my mother annoyed me every day by talking about marrying me out, I left home. Although I took odd jobs in different factories, I could not survive. I went to my brother's home, but he kicked me out saying, "Why won't you marry a man?" I tried to commit suicide by jumping into the Han River. But a man who happened to be sexually disabled saved my life. I lived with him for 10 years.

Even in the early 1980s, sexual abuse victims in South Korea, whether married or not, rarely reported attacks to the police because of stigma attached to sexual victims (Lee 1992, 289). The same stigma forced the victims of Japanese military sexual slavery to keep silent for half a century. Beginning in 1990, the staff members of the Korean Council were anxiously looking for a surviving comfort woman to challenge the Japanese government's denial of responsibility for military sexual slavery. But Kim Haeng-Ja, the former director of the Korean Council, reported that in the summer of 1991, "I was shocked by Kim Hak-Sun's willingness to testify her experiences as a former 'comfort woman.'" She described her initial concern:

If Kim *halmeoni* (grandmother) reveals her story of sexually serving dozens of soldiers every day in front of TV cameras, it would bury her in the Korean patriarchal cultural milieu. I did not want to kill her twice. Therefore, I was initially hesitating to arrange a press conference for her testimony.

After Kim's testimony on August 14, 1991, more than 200 surviving victims followed her in revealing their stories hidden for half a century. It was a little easier for Kim than for other victims to come forward to testify because she had neither immediate family members nor relatives. But it was extremely difficult for other victims with family members. For example, Lee Ok-Soon, a surviving comfort woman with three children, reported that after she watched Kim's testimony on TV, she could not sleep for three weeks, trying to decide whether or not to report her

case. It was difficult for her to report her past, especially because she wanted to keep it secret from her three children. Another victim, Lee Ji-Sook, said that she visited a local branch of a major daily 15 times to report her past but that each time she came back home without doing so. She continued to hesitate because "I worried negative reactions of my brothers and their wives." On her 16th visit to the daily, she gave her name as a surviving comfort woman, but she told them she was reporting her friend's story. After she appeared on television, as expected one of her sister-in-laws reacted negatively:

After one of my sister-in-laws saw me appear on TV as a surviving "comfort woman," she called me and asked me not to let it be known to her children. She said the news would not be helpful to her children's education. . . . I experienced a lot of stress after I reported it.

As the above quotation indicates, those victims who have revealed their identity to the public through testimonies still have to deal with the prejudice and stigma attached to sexual victims. This is the main reason why most victims, including some who participated in the redress movement, have tried not to reveal their identity to their children, spouse, and/or neighbors. Kang Mi-Kyung, an executive staff member of the Korean Council, said, "Some victims believed they had succeeded in hiding their past to their children, but at their funerals their children confessed to me that they had already known their mothers' identity."

Understandably, Korean victims of sexual slavery are angry about Korean patriarchal customs that forced them to keep silent for half a century and still force some of them to hide their identity to their children, spouse, and/or their neighbors. When asked why she kept silent about her suffering for such a long period of time, Lee Young-Ok, a 73-year-old survivor of sexual slavery, responded,

At that time, a woman's chastity was considered more important than her life. How could I tell people I was daily raped by many soldiers. It would have been a great humiliation to my parents. Many times I regretted I came back home alive. It would have been better for me to die there. . . . Yet, looking back I am angry at the fact that because of traditional Korean customs I had to hide my past without myself doing anything wrong.

The redress movement in the 1990s in South Korea has helped to change the perceptions of *Jungshindae halmeoni* (as the surviving comfort women were commonly referred to in Korea) by both the media and the general public. Although people in Korea generally accept the surviving comfort women as victims, many people still believe it is a humiliation at the personal and national levels to discuss what happened to them in the hands of Japanese soldiers. My informants were angry that many Koreans still laughingly looked at them when they were picketing in front of the Japanese Embassy.<sup>10</sup> For example, Lee Ok-Soon said,

If someone comes to me and asks me why I take issue with the humiliating past, I will slap him on the face and tell him "what if your daughter had suffered the atrocities I suffered without doing anything wrong?"

### SOCIAL CLASS

The Korean victims of sexual slavery suffered partly because they happened to be born as women in a colonized society. However, not all Korean young girls were drafted for sexual slavery during the war. The Korean victims of sexual slavery were drawn largely from poor families that belonged to the landless tenant or semitenant class in rural areas or to the jobless migrant groups in cities. The appropriation of vast amounts of land from Korea by the Japanese colonial government in the 1910s resulted in an increase in the number of landless tenants and jobless urban migrants in Korea (M. Y. Lee 1997). As previously noted, Japan's colonial economic policy made many young girls from landless or jobless families vulnerable to mobilization into military brothels through false promises of meaningful jobs. The majority of the Korean victims of sexual slavery (59 percent) were drafted through false promises of well-paying jobs in Japan. This suggests that Japan's colonization and the class system in Korea during the colonial period interacted with each other to make many young girls vulnerable to forced or enticed mobilization to the military comfort system.

Many Korean victims had been working in other families as maids or adopted children before their mobilization because their own families could not feed them. For example, Young-Im Kim, a former comfort woman I interviewed three times, left home at 12 to be adopted by a man for a little money to buy drugs for her father's illness. Her foster parents had two daughters of their own, the younger girl attending a high school and the older one preparing for a college in Japan. One night she overheard her foster parents talking about the difficulty of deciding which of the three daughters (including herself) to send to a military goods factory in Japan to meet the *chunyeo geonchool* order, the obligation of each Korean family to send at least one unmarried daughter to a labor service for the war industry in Japan. She thought that she, who needed money, rather than one of her foster sisters, should respond to the order. The next morning, she told her foster parents she would volunteer for the labor service. This is how she was sent to a military brothel in Manchuria. This story reveals how the daughters of impoverished families were selectively mobilized to Japanese military sexual slavery.

The other popular technique through which Korean comfort women were obtained was coercive means, including abduction. No doubt, the Japanese military and police targeted Korean young women from poor farming families, who were powerless and helpless, "to minimize public criticism and any potential condemnation of their forceful and deceptive ways" (Keith 1995, 18).

Korean girls from well-to-do families that belonged to the rural landlord, urban professional, or business classes were generally able to escape from mobilization to the comfort system. For example, Yun Chong-Ok, who initiated research on the comfort women in Korea and who has played a leading role in the redress movement, was able to escape from mobilization by stopping attending school. As she recalled,

In my high school year in 1943, I was forced to sign in the school basement that I would respond to labor mobilization, but my parents made me stop going to school and stay inside the home to avoid mobilization.

She expressed a “guilty feeling” for her ability to escape from the atrocities that many other Korean women her age suffered simply because she was born in a well-to-do family.

The class-based powerlessness of the Korean comfort women is also partly responsible for the burial of the issue in South Korea. In postwar Korea, there were many newspaper reports and magazine stories about the victimization of Korean women in Japanese military brothels. However, most parents of the victims did not have their daughters come back home after the war. If many of the victims’ parents had held influential positions in postwar Korea, they would have paid special attention to the report of the Korean comfort women and pushed the government to investigate the issue. Moreover, because almost all the victims’ parents had no resources in terms of power, money, or information, they could do nothing to find their daughters. The victims have complained that Korean politicians, including the president, do not pay attention to their demand for compensation especially because they are from a powerless, humble class background. Lee Young-Ok, who worked as a maid before she was mobilized into a military brothel, said, “If his [President Kim Young Sam’s] daughter or sister had been victimized as a Japanese military ‘comfort woman,’ he would have taken some action long ago to make the Japanese government acknowledge the crime and compensate to us.”

As previously pointed out, the Japanese comfort women were drafted on a more or less voluntary basis. However, as several feminist scholars argued (Kang and Yamashita, 1993; Ueno 1998; Yamashita 1996, 1999), they, too, were involuntarily drafted in that the poverty of their families forced them into sexual servitude in military brothels. The prewar Japanese society drew a sharp line between the sexual norms of lower- and middle-/upper-middle-class women (Ueno 1998, 142-43). Both the government and the general public emphasized the chastity of middle-/upper-middle-class women, but they believed lower-class women could be mobilized to public prostitution and at the same time protect the chastity of their daughters and wives. In many cases, poor parents in rural area sold their daughters into prostitution. In other cases, young girls in rural areas volunteered to serve as prostitutes in large cities to help their poor or sick parents (Kim 1997, 45).

We can see the lower-class background of women engaged in the sex industry in contemporary military prostitution and sex tourism in Asian countries. A large number of Japanese, Korean, Filipino, and Vietnamese women have sexually served American servicemen in U.S. military bases in Asian countries since World War II (Sturdevant and Stolfus 1992). Also, since the early 1970s, many Asian women have engaged in the sex tourism industry by serving Japanese and Western businessmen (Bishop and Robinson 1998; Korea Church Women United 1988). Poverty and women's lower status intersect in making the lives of these Asian young women miserable. The imperial war and colonial power added to these two variables in making the suffering of Korean victims of Japanese military sexual slavery far more severe.

### CONCLUSION

To summarize my argument, first, Japan's colonization of Korea is the main contributing factor both to the forced mobilization of a large number of young Korean women to Japanese military brothels and the more brutal treatment of Korean sexual slaves than their Japanese counterparts. Second, the gender hierarchy in imperial Japan facilitated the establishment of a military sexual slavery system, while sexual double standards associated with the patriarchal ideology in Korea contributed to the suffering of Korean victims for more than 50 years. Third, the women's impoverished family background partly made them more vulnerable to mobilization to military brothels and to their suffering after their return home.

The experiences of the Korean victims of Japanese military sexual slavery reflect the intersection of colonial power, gender, and class. In this article, I have examined colonization, gender hierarchy, and class separately for analytic purposes. Colonization had greater effects on the forced mobilization of the Korean women to the military brothels and their brutal treatment there, while gender hierarchy and patriarchal customs in Korea had greater effects on their suffering after returning home. Nevertheless, I cannot separate the three variables in understanding the victims' suffering and overall experiences. Therefore, a one-sided emphasis on colonization or gender hierarchy as central to the pain and suffering of the Korean victims will misrepresent feminist political issues and misinterpret the victims' experiences.

This article contributes to feminist studies in at least three different ways. First, using the intersectional perspective, it helps us understand one of the important contemporary international gendered issues and thereby contributes to the advancement of feminist theory. Second, it also improves our understanding of feminist movements by showing how their national context results in two different analyses of the same political issue. Finally, by examining the suffering of the victims of military sexual slavery, this article contributes to the literature on abuse of women's sexuality in militarized or war situations.

## NOTES

1. A Japanese general reported that one comfort woman was to be mobilized for 40 Japanese soldiers, while a Japanese medical officer indicated the ratio of comfort women to Japanese soldiers was 100:1. Assuming approximately 8 million Japanese soldiers, paramilitary workers, and governmental officials were mobilized to the Asian and Pacific War between 1937 and 1945, the number of comfort women mobilized ranges from 80,000 to 200,000. See the Korean Research Institute for Jungshindae (2000, 31-32).

2. Testimonies by surviving comfort women in South Korea in the early 1990s and the spread of the redress movement to other countries have led many victims of Japanese military sexual slavery in other Asian countries to come forward to tell their experiences.

3. The Japanese military forced the allied prisoners of war captured in Asian countries to work in mining and railroad construction under miserable working conditions, which was a violation of regulations of the Geneva Treaty regarding treatment of prisoners of war. It forced Korean young men to guide many allied prisoners of war to the work sites and to oversee them working.

4. While more than 450 surviving Korean comfort women have been identified in South Korea, North Korea, China, and other Asian countries, about 60 such victims have been located in Taiwan (Korean Research Institute for Jungshindae 2000, 31-32).

5. The Korean population in 1944 was about 25 million compared to 4 million in Taiwan.

6. Some Korean researchers (Chung 1997; Yun 1988, 1997) have even argued that the Japanese government's mobilization of many unmarried young Korean women for sexual slavery was a part of its policy to annihilate the Korean nation (*minjokmalsal jungchaek*). To obliterate the Korean nation, the Japanese government took measures to push Koreans into Manchuria and to bring Japanese to Korea and take over lands. As a part of the same policy, it also encouraged Korean-Japanese intermarriages, which significantly increased after 1937. In the view of Korean researchers, the forced draft of many young Korean women for sexual slavery was a by-product of the Japanese government's policy to annihilate the Korean nation.

7. An analysis of interviews with 76 Korean sexual slaves reveals that 59 percent were mobilized to military brothels by false promises of jobs or going to school, 33 percent by one or another form of coercive means, and the remaining 8 percent through sales by their own or adopted parents or husband (Korean Council 2001a, 2001b; Korean Council and the Research Association 1993, 1995, 1997, 1999).

8. This assumption was wrong. Although the Japanese military drafted women in its colonies, it moved them to the occupied territories in Asia and the Pacific Islands and used them as sexual slaves there (Park 1997, 442). Thus, the mobilization of Korean and Taiwanese women as sexual slaves in military brothels established in Japan, China, and other Asian and Pacific countries involved a violation of the International Convention banning trade and trafficking in women and children for prostitution.

9. If the victims get compensation from the Japanese government, they are supposed to return the money to the Korean government.

10. Beginning January 8, 1992, on every Wednesday between 12 and 1 P.M., the Korean Council has organized a demonstration in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul, in which its staff members, some victims of sexual slavery, and other citizens have participated.

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