

# What is “Comfort Women” ?

## BASIC FACTS



*Japanese Women for Justice and Peace*



## 1. I have come across newspaper articles about “Comfort Women.” Who were they?



The term “comfort women” refers to women who worked as prostitutes at brothels for the Japanese military, called “comfort stations”, during WW2.

There is no formal record on the number of “Comfort Women”, and estimates range widely, with the total number as low as 20,000 and as high as 40,000.

There were prostitutes for the US occupation forces in Japan after WW2 (1945~1952) and those for the US military during the Korean War (1950~1953). They were also called comfort women, however, in these cases, the critics never raised an issue.

“Comfort Women” is a direct translation of a Japanese word “ian-fu”. “ian” means comfort, and “fu” means women.

慰安婦  
*i an fu*  
*comfort woman*



*A Korean comfort woman enjoyed “Hanami” (admiration of blossoms) with a Japanese soldier in April 1941, China.*

*Right:  
Korean comfort woman  
Left:  
Japanese woman*



*A Korean comfort woman came to the corps to read newspapers when she had free time.*

*1939-1942, China*

- Photographs offered by Toshio Hasui (Army civilian employee required for pacification work in North China from 1938 to 1942)
- Page 74 of "Special Edition of Bulletin of Showa Kenkyujo" ( A collection of testimonies of returned military persons and civilians compiled and published by "Showashi Kenkyujo" in 2006, and now in the custody of "The Institution of Research of Policy of Media and Broadcasting")

## **2. If the comfort women were prostitutes, they must have been remunerated. Then, what makes this practice an issue?**

Yes, they were well compensated. However, the Chinese and Korean governments, civil groups and activists from both countries claim:

- The Japanese military abducted women and girls in the Korean peninsula and the occupied territories, and forced them to become comfort women;
- Comfort women were sex slaves;
- The Japanese military committed atrocities against comfort women including murder;
- There were 200,000 or hundreds of thousands of comfort women.

The number of comfort women activists present is not backed up by reliable records. Based on these false claims, they demand Japan apologize and pay compensation to the former comfort women.

### 3. Is it true that the Japanese military abducted Korean women and forced them to be comfort women?

Not at all. The police at that time cracked down on cases of abductions and coercions. If a soldier had abducted a civilian, he would have been punished as a criminal.

There are no records that the Japanese military had organized abduction.

There were many news articles in newspapers in Korea that private brokers obtained girls through deceptions. But there were no reports of abductions committed by the Japanese military.



August 31, 1939 edition of the Korean newspaper Toa Nippo (East Asian Newspaper)

*The Korean police, then under Japanese control, arrested procurers who coerced women into serving as comfort women.*

# 地方에潜伏中인

## 誘引殘黨을掃蕩

### 婁家一族이頭目으로活動

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Chosen (Korea) Newspaper April 1, 1939

### Private brokers arrested

For 4 years, they lured and abducted more than 130 girls in rural area, and sold them as prostitutes to brothels in north and Manchuria.

#### **4. What about the claims of “Japanese military’s atrocities toward sex slaves”? Are they true?**

Groundless lies. The claims of “Japanese military’s atrocities” are based solely on the oral testimonies of some self-proclaimed ex-comfort women who decided to appear in public almost 50 years after the end of WW2. Their oral testimonies lack the specific details as to the time, locations, individuals involved, and the evidence has never been verified.

Moreover, there are no verifiable historical records to back up their stories.

The term “sex slaves” was first introduced by a Japanese human rights lawyer Etsuro Totsuka at the UN in 1992. He now admits that the term “sex slaves” was his invention.

Later, in 1996, the UN Coomaraswamy Report\*1 used the definition of “comfort women as sex slaves”. However, the report merely borrowed the term from the oral testimonies of former comfort women.



## 5. Why did it take 50 years for these stories about "atrocities and sex enslavement by Japanese military" to surface?

Only when most older people with direct knowledge about the wartime period passed away did these stories started to come out, and human rights lawyers and activists began to bring up the wartime reparations.

In reality, all war reparation issues were completely resolved between Japan and Korea in the Japan-Korea Basic Treaty\*2 in 1965, including compensations to individuals.

More recently, some people think Koreans use "comfort women" to cover up their own war crimes committed during the Vietnam War. They also believe it is political maneuvering by North Korea and China to weaken the security treaty between the US, Japan, and South Korea.



**6. Some people claim the number of comfort women was 200,000 or hundreds of thousands. What is the basis for these numbers?**

There is no basis for those exaggerated numbers. If that many women were kidnapped, that would have been noticed by the press and the authorities at the time.

In reality:

- There are no eye witnesses of the “incidents”;
- There is not a single record of police report by families for missing persons;
- The issue was never mentioned at the Tokyo Trial (1946-1948), or in the Japan-Korea Basic Treaty \*<sub>2</sub>(1965);
- IWG report\*<sub>3</sub> (2007): The three Armed Forces, CIA, FBI, Departments of State and Treasury, National Archives, etc. of the United States Government undertook this nationwide project to find out war crimes of Japan committed during the wartime, spending 7 years and 30 million dollars. Contrary to their intentions, the report ended up certifying that no crime against the comfort women including their abduction, were found in the records.

## 7. But I've seen news articles saying that "Japan forcibly recruited Comfort Women".

The origin of the phrase "forcible recruitment" was a book titled "My War Crimes" by Seiji Yoshida, published in 1983. However, the author admitted before his death that it was fiction rather than his own experience.



Asahi Shinbun, Japan's major newspaper that spread Yoshida's story, also admitted their lies in 2014.

Japanese citizens' groups are suing the newspaper company over this false report.

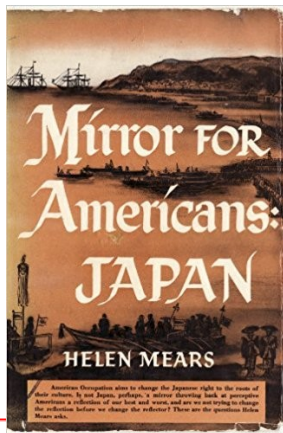
## 8. Korea and Taiwan were both Japan's colonies during WW2, weren't they?

After annexation, Korea and Taiwan became technically part of Japan. They were not colonies.



Helen Mears, an American historian, wrote in her book “Mirror for Americans: Japan” (1945) the following:

*“... every step in the process was ‘correct’ diplomatically and the final annexation was consummated by ...treaty, not proclamation.” As a matter of record, Japan’s annexation of Korea had considerably more “legal” documentation than most of the empire-building of the Western Powers. (page196)*

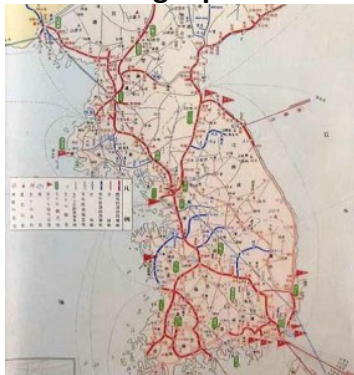


China and Russia for the most acceptable motive — Korean “independence” and if, after the second war, they forgot what it was they had fought for, they were encouraged by international practice which they followed to the letter. It was by treaty with the Korean Government that the Japanese Foreign Office was given “control and direction” of Korea’s “external relations and affairs”; and that a Japanese Resident-General was given authority in the Korean capital. In 1907, when the Korean Emperor tried to protest to the Second Hague Conference (the Association of Peace-Loving People of that period), his representatives were not given a hearing, and the Emperor was forced to abdicate. When, in 1910, the Japanese annexed Korea, it was because the new Emperor “petitioned” them to do so. In commenting on Japan’s relations with Korea, many pre-Pearl Harbor Western historians have noted how punctilious the Japanese were in following the legal niceties of international relations as taught them by the Western Powers. As Professor Treat comments, “. . . every step in the process was ‘correct’ diplomatically, and the final annexation was consummated by . . . treaty, not proclamation.” As a matter of record, Japan’s annexation of Korea had considerably more “legal” documentation than most of the empire-building of the Western Powers.

Referring to this Japanese empire-building, the *Fortune* editors



# Infrastructure built in the Korean Peninsula during Japanese Annexation (1905-1945)



Korea Rail Network



Seoul Station



High School



Hydro Dam



Steel Mill



Railroad Bridge over Han River



Rice Fields Developed

## 9. But shouldn't providing sexual service to the military be considered akin to human trafficking and being subjected to a slave-like treatment?

No, it is neither human trafficking nor slavery. We must first establish clearly the definition of both human trafficking and slavery. We must not make judgement by today's values.

Keep in mind that:

- Prostitution was legal at that time;
- Women who worked as comfort women came from very poor families and many of them worked hard for their families and sent money home;
- Once they saved enough money, they could quit being comfort women and go home;
- A regular Japanese soldier at that time was paid about 15 yen (approx. US\$1,300 in current value) a month. Comfort women in comparison were paid 700 yen (approx. US\$60,000);

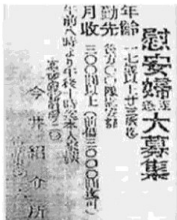
**Definition of Slave** by Slavery Convention

signed at Geneva on 25 Sept, 1926

*"Slavery is defined as the status or condition of a person over which the powers of ownership are applied."*



# Newspaper advertisements recruiting comfort women during WW II



1944年 7월 26일자 『경성일보』 위안부 모집광고



Advertisement in Mainichi Shinpo October 27, 1944

1944年 10월 27일자 『매일신보』 위안부 모집광고

Comfort women were recruited by **private** sex brokers, **NOT** coerced by Japanese government/military.

Note:  
The monthly pay of a Japanese military at the time  
Private: ¥ 6~9  
Corporal: ¥ 20  
Sergeant: ¥ 23~30

Urgent Help Wanted for Comfort Women

Age 17 years or older (it was legal to do prostitution from 17 at that time)

A Private company's name

Advances of up to ¥3000 may be granted

Advertisement in Keijyo Nippo (Seoul Daily, Japanese language newspaper published in Keijyo, the colonial of Korea), 26th July 1944 edition

- They could take sick days when they were ill. They also received periodical medical checkup, and the work conditions were a subject to set standards. On their days off, they could go shopping or enjoy recreational activities. The US National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) has many such records.



SC-262579

HOLDER CAP

UNIT \_\_\_\_\_ CLASS 13 \_\_\_\_\_

COMMENTS: \_\_\_\_\_

AGENCY & SUBJECT: \_\_\_\_\_

REMARKS: \_\_\_\_\_

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Do Not Write Here

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in served as a  
M. Dixon, India.  
13 Aug 1944

SC-262579 (Shouna)  
13 Aug 1942

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A. R. Active Division

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A Japanese interpreter of US Army questions Korean Kim, a Japanese “comfort girl” in Myitkyina, Burma. (3 August 1944 / NARA)



Korean comfort women captured by US Army in Myitkyina, Burma (14 August 1944 / NARA)

# US Army Report No.49 of 1 October 1944 (NARA)

UNITED STATES OFFICE OF WAR INFORMATION  
Psychological Warfare Team  
Attached to U.S. Army Forces India-Burma Theater.  
APO 689

Japanese Prisoner of War Interrogation Report No. 49.	Place interrogated; Date interrogated; Date of Report; By:	Lode Stockade Aug. 20 - Sept. 10, 1944 October 1, 1944 T/S Alex Yorichi
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Prisoners; Date of Capture; Date of Arrival at Stockade;	20 Korean Comfort Girls . August 10, 1944 August 15, 1944
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**SECRET**

## PREFACE:

This report is based on the information obtained from the interrogation of twenty Korean "comfort girls" and two Japanese civilians captured around the tenth of August, 1944 in the mopping up operations after the fall of Myitkyina in Burma.

The report shows how the Japanese recruited these Korean "comfort girls", the conditions under which they lived and worked, their relations with and reaction to the Japanese soldier, and their understanding of the military situation.

A "comfort girl" is nothing more than a prostitute or "professional camp follower" attached to the Japanese Army for the benefit of the soldiers. The word "comfort girl" is peculiar to the Japanese. Other reports show the "comfort girls" have been found wherever it was necessary for the Japanese Army to fight. This report however deals only with the Korean "comfort girls" recruited by the Japanese and attached to their Army in Burma. The Japanese are reported to have shipped some 703 of these girls to Burma in 1942.

## RECRUITING:

Early in May of 1942 Japanese agents arrived in Korea for the purpose of enlisting Korean girls for "comfort service" in newly conquered Japanese territories in Southeast Asia. The nature of this "service" was not specified but it was assumed to be work connected with visiting the wounded in hospitals, rolling bandages, and generally making the soldiers happy. The inducement used by these agents was plenty of money, an opportunity to pay off the family debts, easy work, and the prospect of a new life in a new land - Singapore. On the basis of these false representations many girls enlisted for overseas duty and were rewarded with an advance of a few hundred yen.

**UNITED STATE OFFICE OF WAR INFORMATION**  
**Psychological Warfare Team**  
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**APO689**

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**1<sup>st</sup> . Page (PREFACE)** A “comfort girl” is nothing more than a prostitute or “professional camp follower.”

**1<sup>st</sup> . Page (RECRUITING)** The inducement used by these agents was **plenty of money**, an opportunity to **pay off the family debts**, easy work, and the prospect of a new life in a new land-Singapore. On the basis of these false representations many girls **enlisted for overseas duty and were rewarded with an advance of a few hundred yen.**

**2<sup>nd</sup> . Page (PERSONALITY)** The interrogations show the average Korean "comfort girl" to be about **twenty-five years old**, uneducated, childish, and selfish.

**2<sup>nd</sup> . Page (LIVING AND WORKING CONDITIONS)**

They **lived well** because their food and material was not heavily rationed and they **had plenty of money** with which to **purchase desired articles.**

They were able to buy cloth, shoes, cigarettes, and cosmetics to supplement the many gifts given to them by soldiers who had received "comfort bags" from home.

While in Burma they **amused themselves by participating in sports** events with both officers and men, and attended **picnics, entertainments, and social dinners.** They had a phonograph and in the towns they were **allowed to go shopping.**

**10. Come to think of it, I've also heard about German and American militaries having comfort stations.**

That's right. In order to prevent rape, sexually transmitted diseases resulting in loss of fighting forces or to protect against espionage, armies of other countries also had comfort facilities.



RAA with beer hall  
in Ginza, Tokyo

RAA "Yasuura House"  
in Yokosuka, Kanagawa



The Recreation and Amusement Association (RAA)  
The brothels arranged for occupying U.S. armed forces by  
the Japanese Government after World War II

## **11. What then, was the difference between the Japanese comfort women and German or American comfort women? Why is only Japan a target of condemnation?**

The reason why only Japan is being criticized has to do with the propaganda campaign based on the false claim that the Japanese Army forced more than 200,000 women into sex slavery and most of them died.

Japanese historians have denied the allegation of forcible recruitment or atrocities, but nobody made these facts they uncovered widely available in English outside of Japan. The Japanese government neglected to refute the false claims publicly.

The military was involved in the operation of comfort stations in all cases. The Japanese military ensured the health and safety of comfort women and maintained appropriate work conditions. Women could go home upon fulfilling their contracts. Some even chose to extend their contracts in order to earn more. They were well remunerated.





A bank book record was kept of a woman who saved 26,000 yen for 2 years. This amount was enough to purchase several houses in Tokyo. A top army general at the time was paid about 6,600 yen a year.

On the other hand, the Korean troops involved in the Vietnam War committed tens of thousands of rapes of Vietnamese women. These atrocities are not the target of condemnation, and ignored by the Korean government and the Korean “grassroots” activists. This shows an extreme bias and distortion of history.



The Independent

@Independent

The Vietnamese women whose mothers were raped in wartime seek justice for a lifetime of pain and prejudice



**The Vietnamese women whose mothers were raped in wartime seek justice f...**

Tran Dai Nhat still remembers the moment his childhood disappeared forever. The shy, five-year-old boy survived the bloody curtain call of the Vietnam War and was...

[independent.co.uk](https://www.independent.co.uk)

<https://goo.gl/4gBN5Q>

## **12. The "comfort women" has been a big issue between Japan and Korea, hasn't it?**

Yes. Since the 2010s, Korean and Chinese civil groups have been active abroad - especially in the US - in building comfort women statues. They claim they are promoting women's rights.

However, their inscription mentions, "sex slaves, forcible recruitment of 200,000, Japanese Army cruelty" etc., resulting in disinformation and prejudice against Japan. The relations between Japan and Korea have worsened due to these anti-Japan campaigns.

On the other hand, due to North Korea's nuclear threat and Chinese military expansions, the Japan-US-Korea alliance is all the more critical.

This is why the US arbitrated the December 2015 agreement between the two countries as "final and irreversible" solution on the "comfort women" issue.

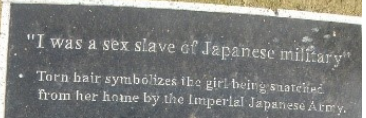
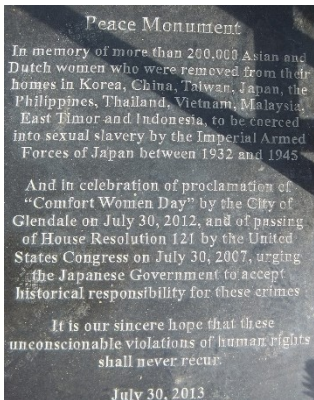
The "comfort women" problem has now evolved into a foreign policy issue with serious security implications.

### 13. I've heard there is a "comfort woman" statue in Glendale, US.

The statue is located in the Glendale Central Park in California. It was built in 2013 by Korean citizens' group.

The inscription begins with "I was a sex slave of the Japanese military" and ends with "urging the Japanese Government to accept historical responsibility for these crimes."

Japanese grass-roots group sued them, demanding the removal of the statue. The matter went all the way to the US Supreme Court.



The "comfort women" issue hinges upon whether the Government of Japan planned and executed the forcible recruitment of many young women into sexual slavery and sent them to comfort stations in the battlefields. \*5

This is the real issue.

Women referred to as "comfort women" did indeed exist, but they were not forcibly recruited or treated like slaves.

It is foolish to involve third countries that have nothing to do with the issue. Nor does it do any good to Japan or Korea.

It is especially problematic when immigrants bring their old grievances to their host countries, thereby creating problems in their new adopted homes.





The world today is faced with real problems of human sex trafficking, sex slavery by ISIS, and serious human rights violations in places like North Korea, China and Tibet. We should be dealing these actual problems more seriously.

Women's rights are important, but we should not allow the "comfort women" issue to be used as a political weapon.

Let's learn the facts and move forward.

*Korean comfort women at the comfort station  
in Wutai(五台), Shanxi (山西省), China  
1944-1945*



Photographs offered by Shigeo Tomita (First Lieutenant)

“Special Edition of Bulletin of Showa Kenkyujo” Page 103

## < RECOMMENDED BOOKS for futrher reading and study >

C. Sarah Soh. The Comfort Women: Sexual Violence and Postcolonial Memory in Korea and Japan. (University of Chicago Press, 2008)

Park, Yuha. 『帝国の慰安婦』(Comfort Women of the Empire) (Asahi Newspaper, 2014)

Koichi Mera, Comfort Women Not "Sex Slaves", (Xlibris, 2015)

Archie Miyamoto. Wartime Military Records on Comfort Women. (Amazon Digital Services LLC, 2017/ ASIN: B01NCOKEB4)

Comfort Women Issue From misunderstandings to SOLUTION  
<https://goo.gl/fKadiB>

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## < FOOTNOTES >

\*1 Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, in accordance with Commission on Human Rights resolution 1994/45 E/CN.4/1996/53/Add.1

[http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=E/CN.4/1996/53/Add.1](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=E/CN.4/1996/53/Add.1)

\*2 Treaty on Basic Relations Between Japan and the Republic of Korea (1965)

Agreement on the Settlement of Problem Concerning Property and Claims and on Economic Cooperation Between Japan and the Republic of Korea (1965)

<https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%20583/volume-583-I-8473-English.pdf>

\*3 Nazi War Crimes & Japanese Imperial Government Records Interagency Working Group Final Report to the United States Congress April 2007

<http://www.archives.gov/iwg/reports/final-report-2007.pdf>

\*4,\*5 Kamijima, Yoshiro「韓国には言うべきことをキッチリ言おう!」(Let's tell Korea what we should say!)(wani books, 2016)

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