Accounts of Comfort Women

"Chinese and Malaysian women forcibly relocated from Penang in Malaysia by the Japanese to work as "comfort women" are liberated by the British on South Andaman Island. Port Blair, South Andaman Island, Andaman Islands, India. October 1945." (johdpicsarchive.com)

*A map of the comfort station in Zaoying, as drawn by Kimiko Kasuda* (Kawela)
“Kimiko Kaneda was born in Tokyo on October 22, 1921... When she was 16 years old, she went to Seoul for better employment on the recommendation of her friend who worked as a housemaid for a Japanese family. Led by a Japanese man, she was put on a train to go from Seoul to Tianjin, China, then from Tianjin via Peitao to Zaoqiang. There she was forced to be a comfort woman for the Japanese military... Her life during childhood was difficult and solitary. Out of the wish to forget her pains, she became an opium addict and in 1945 was allowed to return to Korea. After the war, she had to go through an operation in which she lost her womb. In January 1997, Harmoni Kimiko Kaneda became one of the first recipients of the atonement project of the AWF in South Korea. She passed away on January 27, 2005,” (AWF).

“Maria Rosa Henson was born in Passy City on December 5, 1927... In February 1942... while she went to fetch firewood with her uncles and neighbors for her family, she was caught and raped by three Japanese, one of whom seemed to be an officer... After two weeks she was again raped by the same Japanese officer while fetching firewood. In April 1943 she was arrested by Japanese at a checkpoint in the suburbs of Angeles and taken to the garrison. There she was forced to be a comfort woman... Maria Rosa Henson passed away on August 18, 1997,” (AWF).
“An 18-second video clip released by the South Korean government claims to show one of the darkest moments in Asia’s 20th century history – the so-called ‘comfort women’ forced to work as sex slaves by Japanese troops during World War II. The footage... is believed to have been filmed by American soldiers in China’s Yunnan Province during 1944. It was discovered by a government-funded research team from Seoul National University who spent years looking through the United States National Archives. The footage may be the only known moving images of ‘comfort women’ in existence.” (Adam)

Living in Slavery

“it’s easy to kill you all, easier than killing dogs. Since those Korean girls are crying because they have not eaten, boil the human flesh and make them eat it.”

– Japanese Company Commander Yamamoto

Chong Ok-Sun remarks her wartime experiences:

“One day in June, at a restaurant, a Japanese garrison soldier surprised me and took me away. I was taken to the police station in a truck, where I was raped by several policemen. When I objected, they put sticks in my mouth and continued to rape me. The head of the police station hit me in the left eye because I was crying. The day I lost my weight in the left eye. I was taken to the Japanese garrison barracks in Hayashi City. There were around 400 other young Korean girls with me and we had to serve over 3,000 Japanese soldiers as sex slaves every day. Up to six or seven times a day. Each time I protested, they hit me or stuffed sticks in my mouth. One day I resisted, and they hit me so hard that my mouth was not with blood. One Korean girl who was serving as a comfort woman perished and My hair was burned with a stick until I was unable to live. She told me that she was a comfort woman... To punish her for her...
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One Korean girl caught a serious disease from being raped so often. In order to stop the disease from spreading and to "sterilize" the Korean girls, they stuck a hose filled with water and soap into her vagina. Once they took 30 of us on a truck far away to a pool filled with water, snapped their necks in the pool and buried them alive. I think over half the girls at the garrison barracks were killed."

An estimated 20,000 to 410,000 comfort girls were forced into sexual slavery by Japan. The Asian Women's Fund (AWF) contributes this gap in statistics to the lack of a survey that has been done to determine accurately how many women were taken to the comfort stations of the former Japanese military... or how many did not return from the battlefields."
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Comfort girls were raped thirty to forty times a day. This was described as “sexual slavery at a rape center,” (Contemporary Forms of Slavery, 11-23).
"We have a culture where raping women and girls is not taken seriously... We need to understand their place in history. We need to make sure it never happens again."
— Writer M. Evelina Galang

**Women are NOT War Supplies**

Before and during World War II, the Japanese military enslaved thousands of Korean girls in “comfort stations” around Asia. These women were forced into prostitution to service Japanese troops. While a compromise between Korea and Japan attempted to remediate Japan’s iniquity, the two governments have failed to resolve the conflict and provide adequate compensation for former comfort women.

**Japanese Sovereignty**

Japan expanded its empire extensively during the Second World War. Korean citizens, under Japanese influence since 1910, were subject to Japanese military orders. Seeking a solution for repeated rapes in China, Japanese Kempeitai captured and tricked young girls into prostitution.

"Comfort women were needed to boost the spirit of the troops, keep law and order, and prevent rape and venereal disease."
— Japanese Department of War directive, 1938

"In 1942, when she was 13 years old, Park Yoon-Nyeo was drafted by a friend who said he could make a lot of money working as a Newcastle woman. Instead, she was forced to go to a comfort station and tricked young girls into prostitution."
— Park Yoon-Nyeo, Newcastle woman
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In 1941, when she was 19 years old, Park Yoo-Nyun was deceived by a friend who said she could make a lot of money working as a nurse for Japanese soldiers. Instead, she was handed over to a prison gang supplying "comfort women" for soldiers in the Kanto region of Japan along with six other Korean women. Park was forced into sexual slavery in Singapore until Japan’s surrender in 1945 and returned to Korea when it became liberated. She lived first in Baek, Gyeongsang Province, selling wild ginseng to make ends meet. (Kongly TV)

On December 13, 1937, Japanese troops began a six-week-long massacre that essentially destroyed the Chinese city of Nanking. Along the way, Japanese troops raped between 20,000 and 80,000 Chinese women. The mass rapes horrified the world, and Emperor Hirohito was concerned with its impact on Japan’s image,” (Blakemore). Seeking prevention of another massacre, Japan increased its number of comfort stations.
Not all surviving comfort girls found freedom upon the war’s conclusion. Thousands of women were forced to service American men when the United States occupied Japan. It was not until January of 2017 that the Seoul Central District Court acknowledged these claims by former comfort women, demanding the US and South Korean government apologize and pay survivors a considerable sum for their suffering.

“The compensation may be minimal, but more meaningful is the message that victory would send, potentially amounting to an admission of government responsibility for coerced prostitution that served the US military,” (Cain).

“...the Japanese government denied that women had been forced to work at comfort stations and maintained that it was never involved in operating comfort stations,” (Horn).
“This Is The Business Of The Asian Women’s Fund”
(AWF Press Release)

“Along with other support groups, the Asian Women’s Fund has focused on receiving adequate compensation for the surviving comfort women, who now total less than twenty-four,” (BBC).

Compromise Between Nations

Japan denied all claims of running comfort stations until 1993.

The Prime Minister later apologized to surviving comfort women by written letter (MOFA: Letter From Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi To The Former Comfort Women).
Letter from the Prime Minister of Japan

(Provisional) Translation

Dear Madam,

On this occasion, I wish to extend our most sincere apologies to all the women who suffered immense physical and psychological wounds as comfort women. We must not tread the weight of the past, nor should we evade our responsibilities for the future.

I believe that our country, patently aware of its moral responsibility, should face up squarely to its past history and accurately convey it to future generations.

Furthermore, Japan should take an active part in dealing with violence and other forms of injustice to the honor and dignity of women.

Respectfully yours,

Junichiro Koizumi
Prime Minister of Japan
“Letter from the prime minister of Japan to comfort women, translated to English” (MOFA, 1996)

"Undeniably, this was an act, with the involvement of the military authorities of the day, that severely injured the honor and dignity of many women. The Government of Japan would like to take this opportunity to extend its sincere apologies and remorse to all those, irrespective of place of origin, who suffered immeasurable pain and incurable physical and psychological wounds as comfort women."

— Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohsei Kono, 1995

In 2015, Japan and Korea came to a compromise that Japan would pay $8.3 million towards the whipping of comfort women. Korea agreed to drop all agreements with Japan over the subject, strengthening the ties between the two nations.
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"Lolas protest near the Malacanang Palace in Manila, where visiting Japanese Emperor Akihito met President of the Philippines Benigno S. Aquino III on Jan. 27, 2016," (Mosbergen).

"Their demand of Japan is that it includes in its historical accounts, such as school textbooks, the history surrounding the women who were forced to work in military brothels in order to educate present and future generations," (Japan Times).

"Filipina 'comfort women,' a sex slave for the Japanese Imperial Army during World War II, holds an origami paper peace crane as she participates in a protest near the Malacanang Palace in Manila, 2016," (Shay).
“Filipina ‘comfort woman,’ a sex slave for the Japanese Imperial army during World War II, holds an origami paper peace crane as she participates in a protest near the Malacanang Palace in Manila, 2016.” (Hua.)

“An old woman holds origami cranes at a rally in Manila, the Philippines, January 27, 2016. A group of Filipino comfort women during World War II hold a protest rally outside Malacanang, the presidential palace, as Philippine President Benigno S. Aquino III met with visiting Japanese Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko.” (Hua.)
“An old woman holds origami cranes during a rally in Manila, the Philippines, January 27, 2016. A group of Philippine comfort women during World War II held a protest rally outside Malacanang, the presidential palace, as Philippine President Benigno S. Aquino III met with visiting Japanese Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko,” (Hua).

“A group of women, who survived being forced into brothels set up by the Japanese military during World War II, protesting in front of the Japanese Embassy in 2000, demanding an apology for their enslavement,” (Blakemore).

“Rosa Maria Henson (second from left), from the Philippines, joins Korean “comfort women” Kim Soon Duk (left) and Yoong Sue Ree (second from right) during a protest rally staged in front of the Japanese embassy in Manila in 1999. Henson died a year later,” (Mosbergen).

“Tokyo criticized Seoul on Tuesday after South Korea’s foreign minister raised at a U.N. committee concerns about a 2015 bilateral deal on “comfort women” who were forced to work in Japan’s wartime military brothels,” (Japan Times).

In February of this year, Korea mentioned comfort women at a United Nations meeting. Japan responded by verbally attacking Korea, which had broken the compromise made three years earlier (Donnelly).
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"Richelda Extremadura (right), executive director of Lila Filipina, or the League of Filipino Women, an organization of former comfort women and their supporters, assists Filipino victims at a forum Friday in suburban Quezon City, northeast of Manila. The event was held ahead of this week’s five-day state visit to the Philippines by Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko."

(Filipino 'Comfort Women' Want Right Raised With Empéor).
“South Korea activists pose with comfort woman statue during a 72nd Liberation Day rally in front of Japanese embassy on August 15, 2017, in Seoul, South Korea,” (Donnelly).

Protesters argue that proper retribution has yet to be achieved, and in association with the Me Too movement, comfort women may finally receive the proper apology and reassurance they deserve.
“A statue in a San Francisco park depicting Japanese World War II-era sex slaves called ‘Comfort Women’ has angered Japanese officials who want to sever the decades-old sister city relationship with San Francisco unless the statue is taken down,” (Donnelly).

“The statue was originally erected in 2011 in front of Seoul and regarded as the symbol of the sex slaves forced by the Imperial Army during the WWII,” (Donnelly).

Protests continue to be held in defense of living former women, who now total less than 24.

“A statue of a teenage girl symbolizing the former ‘comfort women’ who served as sex slaves for wartime Japanese soldiers is seen last year in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul,” (Japan Times).

“We have yet to receive real justice. We were so young, but a lot was already taken from us. We lost our dignity. We weren’t able to go to school. We suffered under the Japanese soldiers,” – Narcisa Claveria.
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— Narcisa Clavera

“We are in for a very steep fight, and only a few of us remain to continue. We can only solve this through dialogue and harmony. We want to hear directly from the government leaders. Many have died without the taste of justice. We are now very old, time is running out. Until there is a compromise, we are fighting two battles; our own and the enemy,”
— Richelda Extremadura
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