Title:
The Scar in the History—the Comfort Women

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I. Introduction

After suffering losing and separating with their love ones during the World War II, people was starting to rebuild their homes and get over the trauma. However, a group of teenage girls, who were in the bloom of youth during the war, were still suffering from the physical torture and the mental trauma. These girls have been bearing scars that are not easily to be erased. They are driven to the dark corners of the world by public opinions and people’s judgments, and even abandoned by their family members.

The beginning of the war is a start of nightmare to them. Though the war has ended, their pain still remains. What they have experienced is not only a scar in the history of women’s rights but also a stigma in human history. They are—the comfort women.

II. Body

A. The comfort women

1. Definition of the comfort women

The comfort women are the poor girls from different places who were tricked into providing “sexual services” for Japanese army during the World War II. They were either deceived, abducted, or forced by the officials, the military, the military police, the police, or the businessmen mobilized by the Japanese government, which systematically organized the nation as a machine aiming at winning “the Jihad” to
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dominate the Eastern Asia.  

2. Historical background of the comfort women

In January 1932, the Shanghai Incident in China led to continuous cases of the Japanese soldiers’ raping Chinese women. Also, in December 1937, the cases of slaughter and rape kept happening after the Japanese army took over Nanjing. Japanese soldiers’ cruel behavior not only caused strong anti-Japan awareness among Chinese people, but triggered bitter international denunciation against Japan.

Thus, considering the inevitability of sexual desire and the prevention of more raping cases, Japanese government had to provide a comfort facility of sex for soldiers to vent their sexual desire. At the other hand, the Japanese military headquarters was also afraid that the sexually transmitted disease would influence the combat capability of the Japanese soldiers.

3. Sources of the comfort women

Starting from late spring in 1938, comfort stations were established in China one after another at every place that Japanese troops were stationed. The earliest one managed by the Japanese government was established in a Shanghai suburb. Except the Japanese prostitutes, the majority of the first comfort women were the Korean ones, most of whom were virgins and young girls.

For the ratios, Korean women ranked first at the percentage of eighty, the group that ranked second was the Japanese prostitutes by profession and a minority of
Japanese decent women. Chinese women taken forcibly ranked third, and the women drafted or abducted from other counties in Southeast Asia ranked fourth. (2)

B. The comfort stations

1. The military direct management

A. Most were located within barracks; still others were located near barracks. The access was controlled strictly and there was little freedom.

B. There was a condition that some were exclusive for a certain troop, so others couldn’t use them. For instance, the navy and the army had their own comfort stations respectively. They couldn’t be mixed.

C. With the migration of troops, there were no steady locations for these stations.

D. Comfort stations were mostly low houses or shabby rooms built with boards. The interior was separated into two rooms with respective numbers.

E. The naming of the comfort stations depended on where they were located. Some were even hung with a sign tagged with the comfort station and were in sheer comfort operation.

F. The owner and owner’s wife—who were not soldiers—were managers, but they were still under the supervision of the military. (2)

2. The private management

There were still a minority of cases of the private management. It has not been confirmed yet whether they were monitored by Japanese army; however, the people who were allowed to go to these stations were only the Japanese officers, soldiers, or
military servants. The comfort women still had to obey the regulations of regular physical checkups. (2)

3. Private management on the surface but in fact controlled and managed by the military

The military arranged and set up this kind of comfort stations. It was all interfered in by the military from selecting operators, issuing voyage permits, assisting the job of recruiting and shipping comfort women if necessary, distributing them to the comfort stations, to providing the houses, and so on. The military stations also regulated the operating hours, the standard of fees, physical checkups, the activity scope of comfort women, etc. The operators of the comfort stations had to report the number of customers to the military regularly. (2)

C. Influences

1. Physical influence

Due to the physical harm, most of the comfort women were not able to be fertile. Many of them even didn’t dare to ask a marriage. Owing to the experience of “comfort,” most of them had to endure the extremely awful physical condition. According to a research from Taipei Women’s Rescue Foundation (TWRF), some of them were suffering from stomach diseases because of poor diet in the comfort stations, others were suffering from hearing loss in a single ear resulting from getting a slap in the face by Japanese soldiers, and still others were suffering from spinal pain. There were much more comfort women suffering from ovarian problems, about sixty
percent of whom were not able to become pregnant. (3)

2. Psychological influence

As the victims of the war, most of the comfort women cannot accept themselves. Throughout the dark days that last over half a century, they even daren’t expect others’ understanding, not to mention their family members’ and friends’. They thought they were not chaste and were cursed. The loss of their virginity was absolutely a disgrace, and thus it couldn’t be mentioned to anyone even if he or she is one of their children and grandchildren. Compelled to go overseas or inveigled to barracks near from their workplaces to be engaged in sexual work, they were not able to fight back. Even though they were reluctant to be manipulated, there was nowhere to escape. When returning to their homelands, they usually ended up being forced to leave their homelands to make a living as the result of the overwhelmed psychological stress and gossips from their neighbors. Before becoming the comfort women, they originally were the disadvantaged ones in the society. However, after returning to their homelands, they were far less able to get rid of poverty. In their old age, they were still caught in difficulties by the heavy livelihood. (4)

D. Recent development of Taiwanese comfort women

1. The assistance of TWRF

No one would believe such news would appear one day after the comfort women went through countless days of crying at night: TWRF would open a line to receive complaints from Taiwanese comfort women. In February 1992, Hideko Itoh, a
member of the Japanese Congress, found three telegrams at the congress library and confirmed that there were also Taiwanese comfort women who had fallen victims of the war, so the TWRF opened the complaint line at once on February 20th. After receiving complaints, the TWRF confirmed every case by interviewing them in person. Besides, it helped them seek for psychotherapy and ask for indemnification along with Japanese and Korean comfort women. It was over half a century that Taiwanese comfort women finally came to the stage—they could look back into their past which they were unwilling to face at first, open the box of memory, and remove the scars in their hearts. Finally came the day that someone told them: the people who were guilty were not you, but those who started the war! (5)

2. The long-long road of demanding reparation

Since 1990s, it has continually been addressed as an issue among many countries that the Japanese army recruited females from occupied areas and colonies as sexual slaves from 1931 to 1945 during the World War II. One after another, the victims from South Korea, Philippines, Holland, etc., started to publicly accuse Japanese government of their vice. They filed a lawsuit to the Japanese courts, asking for a public apology and indemnification from the Japanese government. It was not until in mid-July 1999 that the Taiwanese comfort women formally filed a lawsuit against the Japanese government. However, without experiencing this long process in person, we would never know how hard it was. The vice of the war was so easily erased in the official statements of the Japanese government that even the Nanjing Massacre was ignored, not to mention the comfort women. It took Japanese government half a century to finally confront this issue, making the Taiwanese comfort women endure the agony for so long. (6)
III. Conclusion

Initially, fifty-eight Taiwanese comfort women survived; nowadays, there are only twenty left. With the average age of eighty-five, they won’t give up asking the Japanese government for apology and compensation. They are still waiting for the moment that the Japanese government gives back the dignity and reputation they deserve.

Now, there are still many organizations seeking for support in order to arouse the public and the international concern about the Taiwanese comfort women. They hope to combine everyone’s power to make people pay more attention to the issue, and they look forward to giving back the belated justice to the comfort women someday.

VI. References


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