

Comfort Women:

The Economics of the Contracts and the Politics of the Dispute

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Abstract: During the Second World War, fraudulent recruiters sometimes promised young Korean women factory jobs but sent them instead to war-zone brothels called "comfort stations." Western historians take it on faith that the Japanese military forced Korean women into brothels as well. Unfortunately, in doing this they do not just ignore the role that politics (Korean, Japanese, and Western academic) have played in the dispute. They also ignore the contracts that the rest of the -- not defrauded -- young women actually concluded.

In the article that follows, I examine the employee-level contracts in the market for sexual services within the Japanese empire. The contracts reflect the straightforward logic of "credible commitments" so basic to elementary game theory. Realizing that the brothel owners had an incentive to exaggerate their future earnings, the women demanded a large portion of their pay upfront. Realizing that they were headed to the war zone, they demanded a relatively short maximum term. And realizing that the women had an incentive to shirk, the brothels demanded provisions that gave women incentives to work hard. Ultimately, the women and brothels concluded indenture contracts that coupled a large advance with one or two year maximum terms, and an ability for the women to return early if they generated sufficient revenue.

Crucial to the current dispute, the Japanese military did not force -- or even recruit -- Korean women into prostitution. Instead, the brothels surrounding the bases began and remained as privately owned and operated enterprises. They employed contracts that reflected these game-theoretic principles of promissory credibility. The women were poor, they were young, and they were born into the bad circumstances. But basic principles of market economics apply to poor young people too -- and we would do well to recognize how resourcefully the women used those principles to respond to their plight.

[Errata, Feb 2021:

(1) The reference at the end of line 4 of page 18 should include: U.S. Office of War Information, Japanese Prisoner of War Interrogation Report, No. 49, Oct. 1, 1944, Josei no tameno Ajia heiwa kokumin kikin, ed., Seifu chosa: "Jugun ianfu' kankei shiryoshusei [Government Investigation: Documents Relating to the "Comfort Women Accompanying the Military] (Tokyo Ryukei shosha, 1977), vol. 5, page 203.

(2) My implication that Osaki knew what she was getting into on page 14 is incorrect. I am chagrined by this mistake.

(3) The reference on page 18, line 9, to an advance in the 600-700 yen range is incorrect.]

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Circulate through North American or European conferences, and one might reasonably suppose that the only comfort-women questions left are diplomatic. Conference participants reassure each other that the only unresolved problems concern the Japanese acknowledgement of guilt and the international fight against sexual violence. As Carol Gluck (2007, 49, 74) -- premier American intellectual historian of Japan -- articulated the apparent Western academic consensus, although Japan still refuses "to confront its unresolved imperial and wartime past" about the comfort women, the battle on their behalf has created a "newly transnational memory" that extends beyond Japan and "signifie[s] the end of the long invisibility of wartime sexual violence against women." But the historical facts themselves, conference participants insist, are not in question.

If the facts are not in question, they should be.

Much of what Western historians think they know about the comfort women follows from our usually unspoken priors about the industry involved. For a large fraction of the Western population (including the scholarly population), sex-for-money is a paradigmatic example of what in economics we call a "repugnant transaction." Unfortunately, in this case the repugnance has blocked economic analysis. It has blinded historians to the resourcefulness and sheer rationality with which so many young women approached the choices they faced. It has blocked them from asking where our comfort-women accounts come from. And it has stopped them from examining -- much less understanding -- the economic arrangements that the brothels and young peasant women actually concluded during the 1930s and 1940s.

Were one to explore the source of the historical "consensus," one would learn that it does not involve "war memory" at all. Instead, the consensus largely dates from a 1980s-era sensationalist book eventually shown to be a fraud. One would learn that before the book's eventual takedown, the preeminent Japanese newspaper flamboyantly exploited the story toward commercial and political ends. One would further learn that the few Korean comfort women who regularly talk to journalists and western scholars live in a nursing home run by an organization with close ties to North Korea. And one would find that the group relentlessly manipulates the dispute to disrupt ties between South Korea and Japan, and launches criminal prosecutions against anyone who contests its account. Understand: professors who question the comfort women story that Western historians assume is "not in question" can receive prison time in South Korea.

Were one to examine the contracts that the brothels and prostitutes actually concluded, one would come to appreciate both the universality of basic economic principles, and the agency of the women themselves: the way that impoverished but resourceful young women demanded and obtained economic arrangements that rationally maximized their personal welfare. They women had few alternatives, but they had some -- and they concluded terms and arrangements that rationally promoted the interests that mattered to them most.

I begin by reviewing the course of the dispute (Section I). I trace its growth from the disaster at the Asahi shimbun, to the caveats from activist historian Yoshiaki Yoshimi, and the contradictions within the comfort-women testimonies themselves -- discussions of which have destroyed academic careers in South Korea (Section II). I describe the role of the North-Korean

affiliated organization in Section III,¹ and turn to the economics of the labor contracts in Section IV.

I. The Dispute

It is hard to find a single account that captures the academic consensus in the West. One now-well-known textbook (Bentley & Ziegler 2011, 853) provides one variation:

The Japanese army forcibly recruited, conscripted, and dragooned as many as two hundred thousand women age fourteen to twenty to serve in military brothels, called "comfort houses" or "consolation centers." ...

The majority of the women came from Korea and China. Once forced into this imperial prostitution service, the "comfort women" catered to between twenty and thirty men each day. Stationed in war zones, the women often confronted the same risks as soldiers, and many became casualties of war.

When the Japanese government complained about this account, twenty Western historians of Japan rushed to defend the book on the newsletter of the American Historical Association (Dudden 2015). Several of the twenty taught in such high-prestige schools as Harvard, Princeton, Cornell, and Columbia. They wished, they collectively explained in 2015, to "express [their] dismay" at the Japanese government's complaint. In the process, they provided another version of the consensus:

Historians continue to debate whether the numbers of women exploited were in the tens of thousands or the hundreds of thousands and what precise role the military played in their procurement. Yet the careful research of historian Yoshimi Yoshiaki in Japanese government archives and the testimonials of survivors throughout Asia have rendered beyond dispute the essential features of a system that amounted to state-sponsored sexual slavery. ... Survivors have described being raped by officers and beaten for attempting to escape.

A classic pile-on ensued. After the twenty published their letter, some 180 scholars (primarily from the U.S. and Europe) signed another letter in support. By some accounts the number soon soared past 450.

Japanese scholar Naoko Kumagai (2015) soon contacted the newsletter. The "statement that as many as 200,000 women age 14 to 20 were forcibly recruited, conscripted, or dragooned by the Japanese army [is] unrealistic in view of the Japanese military's quite limited material capabilities and strategic purposes," she explained. "Not true," 14 of the 20 summarily replied. Apparently, she may as well have denied the holocaust. Hers was a "denialist thesis" (Dudden 2015b).

Table the academic dispute. The diplomatic dispute over the comfort women began in 1991. That year, Kim Hak-sun identified herself publicly as a comfort woman. She was the first, and the next year she and several other women (along with several men who claimed to have been forced into other jobs) sued the Japanese government for compensation. The case reached the Supreme Court in 2004, but the court dismissed the claims on the ground that the Korean government had waived all claims by its citizens against Japan in 1965 in exchange for massive financial aid.² As one source summarized the 1965 deal (S. Korea 2005):

¹ Mind you, for describing the organization in those terms, in 2018 a Seoul court sentenced retired Army officer and professor Ji Man-won to a six-month (deferred) prison term (Teitai-kyo 2018).

² [No names given] v. Koku, 1879 Hanrei jiho 58 (Sup. Ct. Nov. 29, 2004). At least two other cases were also filed, but these were dismissed by the Supreme Court as well. See Zaisan oyobi seikyu ken ni kansuru mondai no kaiketsu narabi ni keizai kyoryoku ni kansuru Nihon koku to Dai kan minkoku to no aida no kyotei [Agreement

South Korea agreed never to make further compensation demands, either at the government or individual level, after receiving \$800 million in grants and soft loans from Japan as compensation for its 1910-45 colonial rule.

Meanwhile, the Japanese government formally apologized to the comfort women in 1992. The Diet passed a resolution ordering the government to make things right, and the government solicited private donations on top of its own budgeted amount for a compensation fund that would eventually top 5 billion yen. To each comfort women, it proposed to pay a flat 2 million yen, and up to another 3 million yen toward medical care (Digital n.d.).

But the dispute did not end. In 1996, the U.N. Human Rights Commission (2016) published a scathing report on the comfort stations. Starting in 2000, comfort women filed several suits (all unsuccessful) against the Japanese government in courts in the U.S. (Columbia n.d.). And in 2007, the Foreign Affairs Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives issued its own blistering report (Protecting 2007).

In 2007 the Japanese Diet passed another apology, and in December 2015 Prime Minister Abe issued yet another (though with accusations that he walked back earlier apologies). As the Foreign Minister put it, he "expresses anew sincere apologies and remorse from the bottom of his heart to all those who suffered immeasurable pain and incurable physical and psychological wounds as 'comfort women.'" The government added another \$8 million in compensation, and the South Korean government agreed not to make further demands. The deal, they promised each other, was "final and irreversible" (Choe 2015).

It was not to be. Agreement or no agreement, a South-Korean government-appointed panel soon declared the 2015 agreement unsatisfactory (Choe 2017). In early 2018, the newly elected Korean President Moon Jae-in announced the 2015 agreement "defective as it not only goes against the principle of truth and justice, but did not reflect the view of the victims" and in any case was insufficiently "sincere" (Choe 2017, 2018; Choe & Gladstone 2018). Treaty or no 1965 treaty, the South Korean Supreme Court held that Koreans who claimed to have been drafted to work at Japanese factories in the 1940s could sue the companies (Choe 2018; Choe & Gladstone 2018). The Moon government effectively voided the 2015 agreement by liquidating the Japanese foundation set up to implement it (South 2018). And as if any of this were not confusing enough, in January 2019 South Korean police arrested the former Supreme Court Chief Justice on charges that he had stalled the labor cases against the Japanese firms for political reasons (Choe 2019).

II. The Source of the Controversy

A. The Asahi shimbun debacle:

The claim that the Japanese army coerced Korean women into working in comfort stations dates largely from the 1980s. In 1982, a Japanese writer named Seiji Yoshida began talking about "comfort women hunts" he had led. He gave lectures, and soon incorporated the stories into what he styled a memoir. "My War Crimes," he (1983) called it. He had worked from 1942 in a labor office in Yamaguchi. There, he had supervised the work of mobilizing Korean workers. In May of 1943, he wrote, his office received an order to recruit 2000 Korean workers. More pointedly, it received an order to acquire 200 Koreans to work as "comfort women."

With nine soldiers, Yoshida continued, he went to the island of Jeju. There, he led "comfort women hunts." In a typical account, he (1983: 108) recalled finding a compound where 20-30

between Japan and the Republic of Korea Concerning the Economic Cooperation and the Resolution of Problems Involving Property and Claims, Treaty No. 27, 1965.

women worked. He and his team went in with guns. When the women started screaming, nearby Korean men came running. He and his team grabbed the women by their arms, however, and dragged them off. The mob soon grew to over 100, but Yoshida's soldiers drew their bayonets and held them at bay. They loaded the women into the truck, drove 5 or 6 km, and then stopped for a half hour to rape them. The military transported the women to the harbor and loaded them onto its ships -- hands tied, and each woman bound to the next.

The Asahi Shimbun newspaper, as close to a "newspaper of record" as any paper in Japan, gave Yoshida's story flamboyant coverage ("Yoshida shogen" 2014; Hata 2018). With the articles, it catapulted Yoshida's story to the heart of the modern comfort women dispute. Yoshida is the man who started the story that the textbook above repeated -- that Japanese soldiers "dragooned" teenage Korean girls into working as "sex slaves." And Yoshida is the man on whom the U.N. Human Rights Commission based its savage 1996 attack -- an attack celebrated by scholars like Gluck (2007) -- on the Japanese government (U.N. 1996).

In fact, Yoshida had invented the story. He had written an immensely readable memoir, complete with long dialogues. Prominent historians questioned it from the start. Ikuhito Hata (1999, 2018) was among the first to doubt the account, and travelled to Jeju to investigate. He found the village where Yoshida claimed to have conducted one of the larger hunts, but no one remembered anything about a raid. This is a small place, one elderly man told him. If the Japanese military had abducted women to serve as prostitutes, no one would forget it.

Other historians and reporters -- both Japanese and Korean -- followed. Yoshida initially insisted that the events had occurred. He started avoiding reporters and scholars, however, and eventually admitted to having fabricated the book. By the mid-1990s, Japanese scholars had dismissed Yoshida's account as fiction. Even activist historian Yoshiaki Yoshimi -- so celebrated by Gluck (2007) and the twenty U.S. historians -- decided already in 1993: "I had no choice but to conclude that I could not use [Yoshida's] statements as testimony" (Zaishuto 2014).

In the years since 1982, the Asahi newspaper had covered Yoshida's sensational account in over a dozen articles. In 2014, it finally pronounced them "false" and retracted the entire portfolio ("Yoshida shogen" 2014; Jiyu 2014; Zaishuto 2014; Asahi shimbun moto 2014). "From April to May of this year," explained the Asahi, "we interviewed approximately 40 residents of Jeju Island in their mid-70s to 90's. We were not able to obtain any testimony corroborating the forced recruitment claims of Mr. Yoshida." Accordingly, it continued, "we have concluded that Mr. Yoshida's claims that he forcibly recruited comfort women from Jeju Island are fraudulent. We retract the articles" (Zaishuto 2014).

B. Yoshiaki Yoshimi

When Western scholars cite any Japanese scholar on the dispute, they most often cite Yoshiaki Yoshimi. But Yoshimi (2013; Yoshimi 2000: 29) himself no longer claims -- indeed, at the time of the attacks by the 20 Western historians had already renounced -- the claim that the Japanese government forced any Korean woman to work in a station. Instead, he details evidence of coercion only in enemy territory like China (claims no one contests).

Back in 1992, Yoshimi (see 2013: 58-59) did announce to great fanfare that he had located documentary proof of the government's involvement in recruiting comfort women. Gluck (2007, 68) declared that the documents made "it impossible for the Japanese government to maintain its blanket denial of state involvement." In fact, what Yoshimi found were documents along the lines of the following memorandum from early 1938 (Gun'ianjo 1938):

Several matters requiring close attention have arisen with respect to the recruitment of women from Japan for comfort stations located near operations relating to the China incident. Some recruiters claim to have received the approval of the military. They threaten to damage the good name of the military, and to create misunderstanding among the general public. Some recruiters risk creating social problems by recruiting unsystematically through the intervention of military journalists or sympathetic outsiders. Some people have dealt with carelessly chosen recruiters, and they in turn have transformed recruitment into something close to kidnapping, and found themselves the subject of arrests and police investigation. In the future, recruitment should be coordinated through the local military, and recruiters should be selected carefully. In carrying out their activities, recruiters should keep any ties to the local police and military police confidential -- in order to maintain the good name of the military and minimize social problems.

The document does not suggest that the military forcibly recruited comfort women. It does not suggest that it recruited comfort women at all. Instead, it shows that the government wanted women who would staff approved brothels near its military posts. It indicates that the government encouraged recruiters to hire women for the job. And it suggests that the government knew that some recruiters had been hiring women through false pretenses -- and wanted the fraud stopped.

At roughly the same time that the Army issued the memorandum above, the Home Ministry ordered (Shina 1938):

(a) For women traveling for the purpose of prostitution, approval shall be granted only to those women heading to North and Central China who are currently working as licensed or effective prostitutes, who are 21 years old or older, and who are free of venereal and other infectious diseases ...

(b) When receiving the identification documents detailed in the preceding section, the women should understand that they should immediately return to Japan upon the conclusion of their provisional contract or when that completion is no longer necessary.

(c) Women intending to travel for the purpose of prostitution must apply to the police office for their identification documents in person.

(d) In issuing identification documents regarding women traveling for the purpose of prostitution, special care should be taken in investigating the labor contract and other matters in order to insure that the transaction is not a sale of the woman or a case of kidnapping.

By the terms of Yoshimi's own documents, the government wanted for the comfort stations only women who understood exactly the job they were accepting. It realized that some of its recruiters were cheating, and was trying to stop them without dismantling the entire licensing apparatus.

C. The Testimonials:

Perhaps more than anything else about the comfort women dispute, we remember the testimonials: the touching, wrenching autobiographies told by the women themselves. Gluck (2007, 69) captures the tenor of the standard Western response when she writes of the way "former comfort women bared their painful personal pasts ... while Japanese officials issued their habitual denials."

Unfortunately -- and crucially -- the most prominent of the women are not telling consistent stories. Only a small subset of the comfort women recount the autobiographies on which the conventional Western account depends, and they have changed their stories. More than anyone else, Korean-American anthropologist C. Sarah Soh (2008) has tried to verify their accounts.

Several of the most prominent of the comfort women, she found, have changed their testimonies in crucial ways. Tellingly, when one Korean political scientist tried to discuss Soh's book in class, his university suspended him on charges that he "supported Japanese war crimes" (Yi 2018; see Section III.B.).

Yi Yong-su originally told historians that she left home with a friend in the middle of the night. The interview had taken place in the early 1990s, when Korean scholars were collecting the biographies of surviving comfort women. Her friend had urged her to "[c]ome out quickly," she told them, so she had "tiptoed out" and followed her friend. There she found a Japanese man who gave her a "a red dress and a pair of leather shoes in a packet." So excited was she that she followed him "readily," and "without any further thought" (Soh 2008: 12-13, 98-100; Howard 1995: 88; Yi 2018).

By the next decade, Yi had joined the campaign to demand money from Japan, and told a radically different story. In 2002, she visited the Japanese Diet and declared that "she had been taken away at age 14 at bayonet-point." (Moto 2002). In 2007, she told the U.S. House of Representatives "that she had been kidnapped by Japanese soldiers." Shortly after that visit to the U.S., she added at a Tokyo news conference that "Japanese soldiers had dragged her from her home, covering her mouth so that she could not call to her mother" (Fackler 2007).

Kim Hak-sun had originally blamed her stepfather for her career in prostitution. She did not like the man her mother had married. According to one of her accounts, her mother had responded by selling her (KIH 2016a). According to another (perhaps simply adding detail), her mother had sent her to "foster parents" who trained her to become the Korean equivalent of a geisha (*kisaeng*). This foster father had run a comfort station. One day he disappeared, and she became a comfort woman (Soh 2008: 127; Yi 2018). As the comfort-women movement ramped up its pressure on Japan, however, Kim adopted a very different story: Japanese soldiers had arrested her foster father during a trip to Beijing, and sent her to a comfort station (Howard 1995: 33).

Kim Sun-ok originally told those who asked that she had "had no childhood. I was sold four times from the age of seven" (Soh 2008: 11). Recruiters would come "showing up at my home, coaxing my parents," she recalled. "I declared to my parents that I was not going anywhere I begged them not to sell me again." Indeed, "I contemplated a variety of methods of killing myself." But her parents sold her anyway, and she eventually landed in a Manchurian comfort station. Nevertheless, when the U.N. Commission on Human Rights held hearings on the comfort women in 1996, she testified to "U.N. interrogator Radhika Coomaraswamy ... that she was abducted by the Japanese military" (Devine 2016, quoting Soh).

Like Kim Hak-sun, Kim Kun-ja started her career in comfort-women politics by blaming her foster father. He had "sold" her, she recalled. She "hated the father more than the Japanese military" (Soh 2008: 11; KIH 2016a). Nevertheless, in 2007 she told the U.S. House of Representatives (Protecting 2007: 30) that the Japanese army had abducted her. She had lived in a house "in front of a train station," she now explained. At age 17, the family with whom she lived had "sent [her] outside for an errand." There, she "was captured and taken away" on a train. "[T]here were lots of soldiers" on the train, "and there were lots of women who were forcibly taken away."

III. The CDH

A. The Institution:

One organization lies at the heart of the current dispute with Japan; unfortunately, it is an organization that manipulates the dispute in relentless opposition to reconciliation with Japan. The organization is the Chong Dae Hyup (CDH), the "Korean Council for Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery" (KIH 2016d). The CDH organizes the weekly protests in front of the Japanese embassy in Seoul. It began the installation of the comfort women statutes around the world. It pressured the former comfort women to reject the compensation offered by Japan (KIH 2016d). And it brutally attacks scholars who would question the "sex-slave" narrative we so loyally follow in the West (Ji 2005; Gunji 2013).

CDH controls most of the public testimony by the comfort women. It maintains its ability to do this by collaborating in the operation of a nursing home -- the House of Nanumu -- for the women who recount the stories it wants told (Soh 2008: 96). As political scientist Joseph Yi (2018) put it, the "prevailing narrative of abductions is based on the oral testimonies of a small number of women (16 of 238 registered survivors in 1990s), associated with activist organizations (e.g., House of Sharing [i.e., the nursing home]; Korean Council [i.e., CDH])" (Yi 2018). By helping to control Nanumu, the CDH controls who scholars and reporters will see and what the women will say.

Many of the comfort women deeply resent the CDH. Back in 2004, several comfort women sued CDH to try to retake control over their movement (Moto 2018). The CDH retained control, however, and has successfully intimidated most of the women who remain. Harsh critic of the CDH, Korean historian Park Yu-Ha confesses herself puzzled that the group ever let her interview the women (KIH 2016d):

I regained my interest in [the comfort women] issue in the early 2000s when I heard that Chong Dae Hyup was confining surviving women in a nursing home called House of Nanumu. The only time these women were allowed to talk to outsiders was when Chong Dae Hyup needed them to testify for the UN Special Rapporteur or the U.S. politicians. But for some reason I was allowed to talk to them one day in 2003.

Park found the Nanumu women deeply unhappy with the CDH. Park continues (KIH 2016d):

I could sense that women were not happy being confined in this place. One of the women (Bae Chun-hee) told me she reminisced the romance she had with a Japanese soldier. She said she hated her father who sold her. She also told me that women there didn't appreciate being coached by Chong Dae Hyup to give false testimonies but had to obey Chong Dae Hyup's order.

CDH made its threats against the women credible when Japan first offered compensation in 1995. Determined to sabotage the coming rapprochement, it ordered the women to refuse the payments. Some took the money anyway. According to Park (KIH 2016d):

When Japan offered compensation through Asian Women's Fund in 1995, 61 former Korean comfort women defied Chong Dae Hyup's order and accepted compensation. Those 61 women were vilified as traitors. Their names and addresses were published in newspapers as prostitutes, and they had to live the rest of their lives in disgrace. Sarah Soh (2008: 101) confirms the women's fears. Although some comfort women

invented dramatic new stories to keep themselves in the news, "other South Korean survivors have firmly refused to be further interviewed after the initial investigation for the government certification process." They have, Soh explains, "kept their silence out of fear of making 'speech errors' that might lead to the cancellation of their registration and hence the cessation of their welfare support money."

By sabotaging any reconciliation between South Korea and Japan, the CDH directly promotes a key North Korean political goal -- and that seems to be the point. As Park (KIH 2016d) explains it, CDH "has used the comfort women issue for its political purpose, which is to drive a wedge into U.S.-Japan-South Korea security partnership." Initially organized by Korean communists, the group was at one time designated by the South Korean government as a North Korean affiliate (KIH 2016d). Its long-time senior representative -- Yun Mee-Hyang -- was herself investigated for North Korean ties in 2013. Other members of her family have for years been embroiled in controversy and litigation over whether they did or did not spy for the north (with a court eventually concluding in 2018 that they did not). This is the group, however, that controls the public statements by the comfort women.

B. Academic Dissent:

Together with its allies within South Korea, the CDH maintains brutal pressure on any who would dissent from its favored narrative. Historian Park Yu-Ha (2014: 28) stresses that private recruiters hired the women for privately owned comfort stations, not the Japanese military.³ Albeit less directly, anthropologist Sarah Soh (2008: 240) suggests much the same. Yet the two women are hardly the only Korean scholars to write that the Japanese military did not forcibly draft Korean women to its comfort stations.

Professor Jun Bong-Gwan of the Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology reviewed Park's monograph (KIH 2016e):

After reading the book, I was a little bit disappointed because there was nothing in the book that I didn't know. We all knew that Korean comfort women were not coercively taken away by the Japanese military. Korean comfort station owners recruited women in the Korean Peninsula and operated comfort stations in the battlefields.

The point seemed common sense: "The Japanese military was busy fighting all over Asia, and it certainly didn't have time to be in Korea recruiting women."

Seoul National University emeritus historian Ahn Byung-jik thought it common sense too. He estimates, notes Soh (2008: 193), that "Koreans made up more than half the people who recruited comfort women and ran the brothel business." Echoing Jun, Ahn explained, "Korean people in the industry did the recruitment. Fundamentally, there was no need for the military to draft women forcibly" (Ianfu 2013).

But common sense is not at stake. Sarah Soh (2008: 102) observes that within Korea "few reputable historians or nationally known scholars in the field of social science have involved themselves in the task of sorting out the truth in the comfort women controversy." She attributes their absence to "politics," and so it is. But it is politics as blood sport.

Seoul National University (SNU) emeritus economist Lee Young-hoon described the comfort stations as "regulated houses of prostitution for the army." More specifically (Nishioka 2017; Seoul 2016):

The comfort woman system was a licensed prostitution system under the control of the military.... The comfort women were not sex slaves.... Korean comfort women were recruited by pimps by means of advance payments and outright fraud.... There is no evidence that there were 200,000 Korean comfort women. The number is somewhere around 5,000.

³ The English-language wikipedia entry on the book bears virtually no relation to the book itself.

In 2004, Lee explained the history on television. No Korean scholar -- not one -- thinks the Japanese government "forcibly mobilized comfort women," implied Lee.

Almost immediately, the CDH attacked. He should resign, it announced. If he refused, the SNU should fire him. In time, Lee relented, and visited the women in Nanumu House. When he briefly tried to explain himself, the women went livid. For forty minutes, according to reporters, they berated him. "It's inconceivable that he would compare us to the women who are selling their bodies at Tondochoon," one declared. "I'd like to slug him if I could," said Kim Kun-Ja. "We were forcibly taken away." Lee went down on his hands and knees (literally) and apologized (Lee 2004; Ianfu 2004).

As noted earlier, one Korean political scientist discussed Sarah Soh's book in class. His university suspended him and investigated him on charges that he "supported Japanese war crimes." To reclaim his job, "he wrote a letter of apology" (Yi 2018).

Management professor Ji Man-won suggested that many of the self-identified former comfort women had not in fact worked as comfort women at all. Of those who had indeed been comfort women, he said, most "were people [who] wanted to enter the sex trade because of the terrible economic situation." CDH declared this to be criminal defamation, and petitioned the local prosecutors' office to initiate criminal prosecution (Ji 2005; Gunji (2013).

What happened to Ji over that statement is not clear, but what happened to Park Yu-ha herself is. For writing the book that she did, Seoul prosecutors filed criminal defamation charges, and asked for a three-year prison sentence. The district court acquitted her, but the high court reversed and fined her \$8,848. The case now stands on appeal to the Supreme Court (Togo 2017; South 2017).

Economics professor Yon So-yon remarked in class that the comfort women had been "voluntary prostitutes. The notion that they were forced into the position is manufactured history without any basis in fact." The university promptly fired him, prosecutors filed charges for criminal defamation, and in 2018 the district court sentenced him to six months in prison (Hannichi 2014; Ianfu 2018; Jitsuwa 2018; Kankoku 2018).

IV. Prostitution in Prewar Japan and Korea

A. Introduction:

The comfort stations operated as the overseas military analogue to the private brothels in Japan and Korea. To understand the way that the women structured their relationships with these comfort stations, begin with the historical context: with (a) how private brothels and prostitutes structured their relationships in Japan, (b) how they structured their relations in Korea, and (c) how overseas non-comfort-station brothels structured their relations with Japanese and Korean prostitutes.

Let me belabor one point in advance -- because so many readers seem uncomfortable coming to terms with the fact that these arrangements occurred in a thriving market among independent, resourceful actors. Brothels hired, and women looked for work. The work involved sexual services, but the economic logic to the arrangements that the two parties -- brothel and prostitute -- negotiated reflected (as I describe below) the resources and alternative opportunities that both sides understood each other to hold. Recruiters and brothels could lie, but prostitutes could shirk or take the money and run. The women understood that the recruiters and brothels could lie, and understood too that they could shirk or disappear. The brothels could replace them with other women, but the women could find other work too, however low-paying. Yes indeed, parents did sometimes sell their daughters and brothels did sometimes trap women or keep them

virtually imprisoned. But the economic logic (detailed below) to the contractual arrangements that the brothels and women negotiated reflects the fact that brothels could not -- and did not -- trap or imprison all or even most of the women.

We do the young women no favor by exaggerating their mistreatment -- because in doing so we deny them their intelligence and resourcefulness. The women who took these jobs were poor. They had few attractive alternative economic opportunities. But they had some, and they knew they had some. They chose prostitution over those alternative opportunities only if they believed prostitution offered them a better outcome. Yes, recruiters could lie. Brothels owners could be violent. Parents could abuse their children. But to exaggerate recruiter duplicity, brothel violence, or parental cruelty -- to make those elements anything close to the principal story -- is profoundly to deny the ways that these young women did the best with what they had.

Consider first the Japanese brothels and prostitutes. Compare those to the Korean brothels and prostitutes, and to the overseas brothels and prostitutes outside of the comfort station network. Finally, compare all of these alternatives to the contracts that the brothels and prostitutes (because prostitutes are what they were) used in the comfort stations

B. Japan

1. Licensed prostitutes. -- Prostitution had been a licensed industry in pre-war Japan (see generally Ramseyer 1991). In 1924, 50,100 licensed prostitutes (shogi) worked out of 11,500 licensed brothels in Japan (Fukumi 1928: 50-56, 178; Kusama 1930: 14-26). Most commonly, the licensed prostitutes worked under multi-year indenture contracts. The brothel paid the woman (or her parents) a given amount upfront, and in exchange she agreed to work for the shorter of (i) the time it took her to pay off the loan or (ii) the stated contractual term (Fukumi 1928: 97-99, 115-16, 220; Kusama 1930: 283; Okubo 1906; Ito 1931: 229). The mean upfront amount in the mid-1920s ranged from about 1000 to 1200 yen; the most common (70 to 80 percent of the contracts) term was six years. The brothel did not charge interest. Under the typical contract, the brothel took the first 2/3 to 3/4 of the revenue a prostitute generated. It applied 60 percent of the remainder toward the loan repayment, and let the prostitute keep the rest (Chuo 1926: 412-15; Kusama 1930: 206, 211; Fukumi 1928: 70).

In practice, the prostitutes repaid their loans in about three years and quit. Surely, historians sometimes insist, the brothels must have manipulated the charges for food and clothing to keep prostitutes mired in perpetual debt. At least on a large scale, however, they did not do this. Probably, the brothels -- established institutions with a large capital investment -- realized that cheating on their initial contract would raise their future recruitment costs. Not only did the brothels specifically promise a woman she could quit debt-free at the end of six years regardless of the revenue she generated, they generally kept their promise.

If brothels manipulated charges or otherwise cheated on their terms to keep prostitutes locked in debt, the number of licensed prostitutes should have stayed reasonably constant at least up to age 30. The minimum age for licensed prostitutes was 18. In 1925, there were 737 licensed Tokyo prostitutes aged 21, and 632 aged 22. There were only 515 aged 24, however, 423 age 25, and 254 age 27 (Fukumi 1928: 58-59). Similarly, if brothels were keeping prostitutes locked in "debt slavery," the number of years in the industry should have stayed constant beyond six. Yet of 42,400 licensed prostitutes surveyed, 38 percent were in their second or third year, 25 percent were in their fourth or 5th, and only 7 percent were in their 6th or 7th (Ito 1931: 208-11; Kusama 1930: 281). On a workforce of about 50,000 licensed prostitutes, 18,800 women registered as new licensed prostitutes in 1922 and 18,300 de-registered (Yamamoto 1983: 388; Ito 1931: 211-13).

Consistent with a general tenure of about three years, one third of the work force replaced itself every year (Keishi 1933: 96-98; Kusama 1930: 227-28).

Consider some simple calculations (Keishi 1933: 96-98; Kusama 1930: 227-28). In 1925, customers made 3.74 million visits to the 4,159 licensed prostitutes in Tokyo. Aside from payments for food and drink, they spent 11.1 million yen. Of this amount, prostitutes kept 31 percent, or 3.4 million yen -- 655 yen per prostitute. Under the standard arrangement, the prostitute would have applied 60 percent of this amount (393 yen) toward the repayment of her loan, and kept the rest (262 yen). She would have repaid her initial loan of 1200 yen in about 3 years. The average adult factory wage (both sexes; room and board not provided) in 1925 was 1.75 yen per day, and in 1935 was 1.88 yen per day (Shakai 1936: 53; Ohsato 1966: 68). To earn their income, the prostitutes in 1924 served a mean 2.54 customers per night (Keishi 1933: 96; Kusama 1930: 220-21; Uemura 1929: 492-501). They worked about 28 nights per month (Keishi 1933: 96-98).

2. The contractual logic. -- This indenture contract in the licensed sector reflected the straightforward game theoretic logic of "credible commitments" (Ramseyer 1991). Young women understood that prostitution was dangerous and harsh, and imposed a large upfront hit to their reputations. What is more, they understood that they incurred that reputational hit even if they quit after a very short period. Recruiters promised them very high wages, but they understood that recruiters had every incentive to exaggerate.

As a result, before a young woman agreed to work at a brothel she needed credible assurance that she would earn wages high enough to compensate her for the negative characteristics associated with the job. Were there no reputational hit to entering the industry, she could try the job for a few months to see how much she could earn. Given that she incurred the reputational cost even from a short stint, however, she could not readily verify the recruiters' claims.

The women forced recruiters to overcome this problem of promissory credibility by paying each prostitute a large fraction of her earnings upfront, and capping the number of years she would have to work. If the brothel paid her 1,000 yen in advance and set the maximum term to six years, she knew the minimum she would earn. She also knew that if she repaid it earlier (as most prostitutes did), she would earn even higher effective monthly wages.

In turn, the brothel needed a way to create an incentive for its prostitutes to please their customers. The women performed harsh work in impossible-to-monitor environments. If brothels paid them a fixed wage (like an initial 1,000-yen payment on a fixed six-year term), they had little incentive to try to please their customers. If a prostitute were sufficiently unpleasant that guests seldom requested her by name, so much the better.

By coupling a maximum six-year term with the ability to quit early, the brothel gave a prostitute an incentive to please her customers. The more customers requested her, the more revenue she generated. The more she generated, the sooner she could quit.

3. Unlicensed prostitutes. -- Below the licensed prostitutes in this sexual services market worked the independent, unlicensed prostitutes (Ramseyer 1991). Given the choice between the two sectors, most prostitutes preferred the licensed. From 1920 to 1927, of all the women who applied for work as licensed prostitutes in Tokyo, only 62 percent obtained jobs (Chuo 1926: 381-82; Kusama 1930: 27-30, 36). Many of the unlicensed prostitutes were those women whom the licensed brothels had refused to hire (Kusama 1930: 37). Historical records contain no reliable censuses of the unlicensed workers, but otherwise trustworthy observers put their number at about 50,000 in the mid-1920s (Fukumi 1928: 26-28, 32, 50-56, 178).

Because the unlicensed prostitutes nominally violated the law, they lacked the option of working for an established brothel. Brothels developed reputations. Given that illegal unlicensed prostitutes could not work for a brothel with a reputation for high quality service, the unlicensed prostitutes earned less money. Among female workers from the northern Akita prefecture in 1934, licensed prostitutes earned room & board plus 884 yen per year. Bar maids (shakufu; the general euphemism in this literature for unlicensed prostitutes) made 518 yen, waitresses made 210 yen, and other women workers made 130 yen (Shakai 1935: 160-61).

The unlicensed sector also presented clients with higher risks. By law, licensed prostitutes underwent weekly medical examinations for venereal disease, and infected women could not return to work until they recovered. In 1932, 3.2 percent of licensed prostitutes in Tokyo had venereal or other infectious disease. The same study found a 9.7 percent rate among unlicensed prostitutes. Other studies confirm a 1-3 percent infection rate among licensed prostitutes, but find rates much higher than 10 percent among the unlicensed (Keishi 1933: 143-44; Uemura 1918; Kusama 1930: 288, 291; Fukumi 1928: 93, 168-69; Chuo 1926: 433-35).

4. Karayuki. -- As Japanese businessmen moved abroad for work, young women followed. There in the foreign countries, the women worked as prostitutes for the Japanese clientele. "Karayuki-san," Japanese called them: "women heading abroad" (Nihon 1920). Given the usual preference among expatriate Japanese men for Japanese women, they earned substantially higher wages than their local competitors. Given the cost of relocating abroad, they earned generally higher wages than they could earn within Japan (Park 2014: 451).

The expatriate prostitutes tended to come from two discrete communities on or near the southern island of Kyushu: Shimabara and Amakusa. That most of them came from a few small communities makes implausible any notion that they had been tricked by duplicitous recruiters. Trickery works when the target audience does not know what is at stake. When young women (or girls) from small, closed communities leave for several years and then return, they report what happened. Word travels, and others in the community learn what the trip entails.

Author Tomoko Yamazaki (1972) traveled to Amakusa to explore this history. There, she befriended an elderly emigrant prostitute named Osaki. Osaki had indeed worked many years abroad, but hers was not a story either of paternal oppression or of sexual slavery. Osaki had been born in a small village to a family who already had a boy and a girl. A few years after her birth, her father died. Her mother then found a new lover. As he had no interest in her very small children, she abandoned them and married him anyway. The three children survived together in a tiny shack, and scapped together what they could to eat. Other women in the community had worked as prostitutes abroad, and had returned with substantial sums of money. In time, her older sister left to work abroad as a prostitute herself.

When Osaki turned ten, a recruiter stopped by and offered her 300 yen upfront if she would agree to go abroad. She discussed it with her brother, and decided to take the work to help him establish himself in farming. She travelled to Malaysia, and worked as a maid for three years. She was happy. Her family fed her white rice and fish every day, which was more than the three children had been able to scavenge in Amakusa.

At age 13, she began working for the family as a prostitute. Because of the cost of passage and three years of room and board, she now owed 2000 yen. Under the new terms, customers paid 2 yen for a short stay and 10 yen for an overnight visit. The brothel owner kept half the amount, and provided room and board. Out of the remaining half, she paid down her outstanding balance

and bought cosmetics and clothing. If she worked hard, she found that she could repay about 100 yen a month.

Before Osaki had finished repaying her loan, her owner died and she found herself transferred to a brothel in Singapore. She disliked her new owner, so one day she and some of the others went down to the harbor and bought a ticket back to Malaysia. She found a new brothel. She liked the couple who owned it (and they negotiated her release from the earlier brothel), and in time took to calling the wife "mother." There she stayed until an expatriate Britisher made her his mistress. Later in life, she returned to her home in Amakusa.

B. Prostitution in Korea

1. The phenomenon. -- As Japanese emigrants began to move to Korea, they established in their communities structures akin to the licensed brothels at home. Japan formally annexed Korea in 1910, and the new government imposed uniform licensing rules across all Korea in 1916. It set the minimum age for prostitution at 17 (not 18 as on the Japanese islands), and required regular medical examinations (Fujinaga 1998a, 2004; Kim & Kim 2018: 18, 21).

Although both Koreans and Japanese could use the new licensing system, the Japanese did so more readily. By 1929, for example, 1,789 Japanese licensed prostitutes worked in Korea but only 1,262 Koreans. The Japanese prostitutes entertained 450,300 guests, where the Koreans entertained 110,700 (252 guests per year for the Japanese prostitute, 88 for the Korean). By 1935 the number of Japanese licensed prostitutes had fallen to 1,778 but the number of Koreans still had risen only to 1,330 (Kim & Kim 2018: 18, 21; Fujinaga 2004).

Plenty of Korean women worked as prostitutes, but they simply did not work within the licensing structure. In 1935 Korea, 414 Japanese women worked as bar maids and 4,320 as cabaret workers (both euphemisms for unlicensed prostitutes). Of Korean women, 1,290 worked as barmaids and 6,553 as cabaret workers (Nihon 1994: 58, 65, 76; Chosen 1906-42; Nihongun 779).

To recruit their licensed prostitutes, Korean brothels used indenture contracts much like those in Japan. Note, however, that Koreans (both potential prostitutes and potential customers) were poorer than Japanese. Over the economy as a whole, from 1910 to 1940 the ratio of Japanese to Korean wages varied from about 2.5 to 1.5. Korean men in the 1930s earned about 1 to 2 yen per day (Odaka 1975: 150, 153).

Prostitutes charged high prices, but Japanese women charged more than Korean. By one account, in 1926 Korean prostitutes charged 3 yen for an assignation; Japanese prostitutes in Korea charged 6 to 7 yen. Customers spent an average 3.9 yen on visit to a Korean licensed prostitute; they spent an average of 8 yen on a visit to a Japanese licensed prostitute in Korea (Kim & Kim 2018: 26, 89, 96; Nihon yuran 1932: 461). In one (apparently poorer) Korean community in 1929, Japanese licensed prostitutes generated annual revenues of 1,052 yen; Korean licensed prostitutes generated 361 yen (Nihon 1994).

The lower Korean revenues resulted in higher upfront cash payments to the Japanese prostitutes working in Korea than to the Korean prostitutes. One source (see Kim & Kim 2018: 96) described Korean licensed prostitutes receiving advances of 250-300 yen (and occasionally 400-500 yen) on three year contracts; Japanese licensed prostitutes received 1,000-3,000 yen (note the higher amounts than in Japan). Another source calculated the average upfront payment to Korean licensed prostitutes at 420 yen, while the Japanese licensed prostitute received 1,730 yen (Nihon 1994: 63).

Consistent with the experience of prostitutes in Japan quitting within five years, Korean licensed prostitutes left the industry by their mid-20s. In one study, 61 percent of Korean licensed

prostitutes were 20-25 years old; only 16 percent were over 25 (Kim & Kim 2018: 97; see Ito 1931: 172-94). In another, 680 of the 1,101 licensed prostitutes in the Seoul area were age 20-24, but only 273 were 25-29. Of that group of 1,101, 294 were in their fifth year of service; 65 were in their sixth, and 17 in their seventh. On the base population of 1,101, 317 entered in 1924, and 407 quit (Michiya 1928).

2. Korean prostitution abroad. -- Like the Japanese karayuki, young Korean women too travelled abroad. Crucially, Korean women went abroad to work as prostitutes long before several Shanghai brothels became the first licensed "comfort stations" in 1932. Already by the 1920s, Korean women were travelling to Manchuria to work as prostitutes (Fujinaga 1998a). In 1929, 196 Korean women worked in Taiwan as licensed or unlicensed prostitutes (Fujinaga 2001; Taiwan 1932), and in 1924 67 Korean women worked in Dailin (Fujinaga 2000: 219). Presumably, some served a Japanese clientele, some served a Korean clientele, and some served a Chinese clientele.

And long after those first comfort stations, Korean women continued to travel abroad to work as unlicensed prostitutes as well -- again, for a wide variety of customers. In 1937, for example, the Tianjin immigrants association reported 81 unlicensed prostitutes from Korea. During one month in 1938, 90 Korean women petitioned the (Japanese-controlled) Korean government for permission to travel to the Chinese city of Jinan to work as unlicensed prostitutes (Kitashina 1938). And while 12 Korean women worked in comfort stations in Shanghai in 1940, 527 worked as unlicensed prostitutes (Takei 2012: tab. 6; Zai Jokai 1938; Zai Jokai 1937).

C. Recruitment in Japan and Korea

1. Japan. -- Many reformers sought to ban prostitution in prewar Japan, but virtually none complained about recruiters abducting young women into brothels. Young women from poor communities routinely left town to work as prostitutes, but they rarely claimed that any recruiter or brothel forced them to take the job. Neither did many reformers complain that recruiters tricked young women into working for brothels (Senda 1973: 89). Instead, when Japanese reformers complained about how women had become prostitutes, they complained about the parents: that parents had effectively "sold" their daughters into prostitution. They had not wanted to go, some women reported. But their parents had induced them to agree in order to collect the indenture advance.

For the network of overseas comfort stations, the Japanese government drafted recruiting regulations designed to limit potential fraud. The resulting government regulations suggest that the government realized the political risks it was running. Reformers within Japan had been fighting for decades to ban prostitution. The last thing the government needed -- the regulations imply -- were accounts of naive young girls duped by mercenary and dishonest recruiters into a multi-year stint in a Shanghai brothel.

To avoid this morass, the Home Ministry issued the memorandum quoted earlier (Sec. II.B.). It told comfort station recruiters to hire only women who already worked as prostitutes. To insure that the women knew what they were agreeing to do, it told police not to issue travel documents unless each woman applied in person with her contract. And at the time of the interview, it demanded that the police tell each applicant to return immediately when her contract expired.

2. Korea. -- Korea had a problem distinct from any in Japan. It had a large corps of professional labor recruiters, and those recruiters had a history of deceptive tactics. In 1935, Korean police records counted 247 Japanese and 2,720 Korean recruiters. To be sure, these men

and women (and they included both men and women) recruited workers for factories as well as brothels (Nihon 1994: 51; Yamashita 2006: 675). But throughout the prewar decades, newspapers reported recruiter fraud related to the sex industry. Back in 1918, the Japanese language daily in Seoul (Keijo nippo 1918; Senda 1973: 89) complained of "a massive increase in the number of cases where a delinquent entices a woman to Seoul and, after playing all sorts of tricks on her, sells her off to one of the 'dubious restaurants.'" In the late 1930s, Korean newspapers reported a ring of 11 recruiters who attracted over 50 young women into prostitution (Toa 1937). They reported one astonishingly skillful couple who had deceived over 100. Apparently, the couple promised parents that they would find a job for their daughters in Seoul factories, paid the parents 10 or 20 yen, and then forwarded the daughters to overseas brothels for 100 to 1,300 yen each (Toa 1939; Yamashita 2006: 675).

D. Comfort Stations

1. Venereal disease. -- The reams of government documents about the comfort stations from the 1930s and early 1940s make clear that the government established the institution to fight venereal disease. To be sure, it had other reasons too. It wanted to reduce rapes. And one strange 1939 army document from North China suggested that comfort stations would help the army fight communism within its ranks (Kitashina 1939). Primarily, however, the military set up the stations to fight venereal disease: by definition, a "comfort station" was a brothel that had agreed to follow the military's stringent sanitation and contraceptive procedures.

The Japanese military did not need additional prostitutes; it had plenty. Prostitutes have followed armies everywhere, and they followed the Japanese army in Asia. Instead, the Japanese military needed healthy prostitutes. During the army's Siberian expedition in 1918, the commanders had found large portions of their command disabled by venereal disease (Senda 1973: 14; see estimates of days lost, Yamada & Hiramata 1923: 269). As the army expanded across China in the 1930s, it found that there too the local prostitutes were heavily infected. If its soldiers were going to patronize brothels, it wanted them patronizing brothels that kept the debilitating diseases in check.

To minimize that risk of disease, the army took several steps. It licensed those brothels that agreed to meet its standards -- and named them "comfort stations." It required prostitutes at the licensed brothels to undergo weekly medical examinations. If they became infected, it banned them from serving customers until fully recovered. It ordered all customers to use condoms (provided free either by the Army or by the brothel), and forbade prostitutes from serving anyone who refused to do so. It required all prostitutes and customers to wash with disinfectants immediately after sex. And it banned its soldiers from patronizing any brothels other than the licensed institutions.⁴

2. Contract terms. -- The comfort stations hired their prostitutes on contracts that closely resembled those used by the licensed brothels in Japan and Korea. For women leaving the countryside to work as prostitutes in Tokyo, the "credible commitment" problem was basic. For those considering leaving Japan to work on the front, the problem was severe in the extreme.

The contracts mirrored the following structure. First, they covered a multi-year term. Reflecting the natural hesitation anyone would have about working near the front lines, the

⁴ Gunsei (1942); Shina (1942); SCAP (1945); Minami Shina (1939); Morikawa (1939); Mandalay (1943); U.S. Interrogation (n.d.); Hito gun (1942).

contracts usually specified only two-year terms. Recall that the Japanese contracts typically provided six-year terms, and the Korean contracts three-year terms. Some Korean comfort women in Burma even worked on contracts as short as six months to a year (e.g., Josei 1997: 1-19).

Second, for these relatively short-term assignments, the brothels typically paid several hundred yen up-front. Sample contracts for Japanese women recruited to Shanghai comfort stations in 1937 provided advances of 500 to 1,000 yen (Naimusho 1938). Similarly, Home Ministry documents from 1938 report Japanese women travelling to the Shanghai comfort stations on 600-700 yen advances, with one woman receiving an advance in the 700-800-yen range, and two in the 300-500-yen range (Naimusho 1938).

Third, the other contractual terms typically followed standard Japanese and Korean brothel contract practice. Take the 1943 military regulations regarding the stations in Malaya. Of the gross revenue a prostitute generated, the brothel was to pay the woman a fraction that turned on the amount of her outstanding debt. With 1,500 yen or more outstanding, she was to receive 40 percent of the revenue; if she had less than 1,500 yen, she was to receive 50 percent; and if she had no outstanding debt she was to take 60 percent. Of this share, the brothel was to apply 2/3 toward the remaining debt, and directly pay the prostitute the rest. In addition, the brothel was to open a postal savings account in her name, and to deposit each month 3 percent of the gross revenue she generated (Maree 1943; see also U.S. Office 1944).

Upon completing the contractual term or (if earlier) repaying the loan, the women could go home. In the course of his research on comfort women, Kako Senda met a veteran who had helped to recruit women from Japan. Obviously, he had self-interested reasons to say what he said. But when Senda (1973: 26-27) asked him, "were there any women who actually paid back the 1,000 yen [advance] and went free?," "oh, there were," he replied. "There were lots. Among the ones who went with the first regiment, even those who were slowest paid it off in a few months and went free."

3. Prostitute income. -- The amount that a prostitute earned beyond her up-front advance varied. Even by the contractual terms themselves, that amount depended on the revenue a prostitute generated. Scholars routinely suggest that that brothel owners must have cheated their prostitutes -- and no doubt some did. People cheat each other in any industry.

Crucially, however, many brothel owners did indeed pay their prostitutes beyond that large up-front advance. One Korean publisher recently reprinted a diary kept by a receptionist for comfort stations in Burma and Singapore. Several times, the receptionist noted that the comfort women kept postal savings accounts, and that he deposited money on their behalf in them (KIH 2016b). Indeed, some comfort women earned and saved enough to establish comfort stations of their own (Park 2014: 111).

Of all the Korean comfort women who left accounts, Mun Ok-ju seems to have done well most flamboyantly. She writes in her memoir (KIH 2016c):

I saved a considerable amount of money from tips. ... I knew that all the soldiers put their earnings in the saving accounts in the field post office, so I decided to put my money in the saving account. I asked a soldier to make a personal seal and put 500 yen in the account. ... I became the owner of the savings passbook for the first time in my life. I worked in Daegu as a nanny and a street seller from the childhood but I remained poor no matter how hard I worked. I could not believe that I could have so much money in my saving account. A house in Daegu cost 1,000 yen at the time. I could let my mother have an easy life. I felt very happy and proud. The savings passbook became my treasure. ...

It was fun to go shopping by rickshaw. I can't forget the experience of shopping in a market in Rangoon. There were lots of jewelry shops because many jewels were produced in Burma, and ruby and jade were not expensive. One of my friends collected many jewels. I thought I should have a jewel myself, so I went and bought a diamond.

I became a popular woman in Rangoon. There were a lot more officers in Rangoon than near the frontlines, so I was invited to many parties. I sang songs at parties and received lots of tips.

E. The Closing Years of the War:

The Japanese government mobilized Korean workers most aggressively during the last two years of the war, and scholars have sometimes suggested that those were the years it most aggressively recruited comfort women. In fact, the opposite is true. The closing years were not ones where the government was trying to staff brothels. Those were years it was moving prostitutes out of brothels and into munitions factories.

As the war turned bad for Japan, the military began running out of men. In 1936, 240,000 men served in the army. Once the army invaded China, that number climbed to 950,000 (1937). It hit 3.58 million in 1943, 5.4 million in 1944, and 7.34 million in 1945. Increasingly, the army called up reservists approaching age 40. By the end of the war, 60.9 percent of the men aged 20-40 had served in the military, and 2 million had been killed (Watanabe 2014: 1, 8).

The military was also running out of supplies (see generally Miwa 2014). As the army called up its 30-something reservists and sent them to the front, it needed others to take their place in the mines and factories. It had not drafted its young Koreans (despite their being Japanese citizens) into the army. By 1944, however, it did begin sending large numbers of Korean men to those mines and factories (Hatarakeru 1943; Romu 1943; Chosen 1944). Simultaneously, it began sending young unmarried Japanese and Korean women into the factories as well (Chosen 1944; Chosen 1945; Hatarakeru 1943; Higuchi 2005: 53).

Brothels were the least of the government's worries. Steadily, brothels and high-end restaurants began to close. The army was shifting all plausible Japanese men from civilian production to the front. To replace them it was moving Korean men to Japan. It was moving both Japanese and Korean women out of homes and inessential jobs and into munitions production (Senso 1943; Hanto 1944; Chosen 1944). Think *Rosy the Riveter in Korea: the Mainichi shimbun* newspaper (1944) published a letter from a woman hauling freight in Pusan harbor. Our country needs us, she exclaimed. "Just because we're women doesn't mean that we can closet ourselves in our homes." Between the general austerity in the air and the loss of prostitutes to the factories, brothels steadily went out of business (Senso 1943; Hata 1992: 330, 333; Hakken 1943).

V. Conclusion

The "model story," Gluck (2007, 76-77) calls it: the account that young Korean women "were kidnapped and gang-raped as young virgin[s]." Yet the "model story" is implausible on its face. It demeans the intelligence and resourcefulness of the impoverished young women whose history it purports to protect. It is contradicted by the documentary evidence, is based on uncorroborated oral accounts of dubious veracity, and is pushed aggressively by a North-Korean-affiliated organization.

The actual story is more straightforward. The Japanese army had a problem. It did not lack for brothels. Prostitutes follow armies everywhere, and they had followed the Japanese army in the 1930s and 1940s. The problem was medical: these local prostitutes suffered from very high

levels of debilitating venereal disease. If their soldiers were going to frequent brothels, the command at least wanted them in healthy brothels.

Toward that end -- not toward better public health but toward maintaining a deadlier military force -- the military imported the standard Japanese and Korean licensing system. Brothels and prostitutes registered with it. Designated physicians conducted weekly medical examinations. Brothels required condoms, and prostitutes were told to refuse clients who balked. Both clients and prostitutes were to wash with disinfectant after every encounter.

The contracts themselves followed basic game theoretic principles of "credible commitments." Brothel owners (not the military) hired the bulk of the new prostitutes, and hired most of them from Japan and Korea. Realizing the incentive brothel owners had to exaggerate their future earnings, women wanted a large portion of their pay upfront. Brothels agreed. Knowing that they were headed for the front, women wanted a maximum service length. Brothels agreed. In turn, realizing the incentive the women had to shirk within their unmonitored quarters, the brothels wanted terms that gave women an incentive to work hard. The women agreed. Together, the women and brothels concluded indenture contracts that coupled a large advance with one or two year terms. Until the later years of the war, the women served their terms or paid off their debts early, and returned home.

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