

The Comfort Women and State Prostitution

Onozawa Akane with an introduction by Nishino Rumiko, Kim Puja, Onozawa Akane. Translation by Robert Ricketts

INTRODUCTION

Nishino Rumiko, Kim Puja, Onozawa Akane

The article by Onozawa Akane below is adapted from Chapter 3 (Comfort Women and State Prostitution) in *Denying the Comfort Women: The Japanese State's Assault on Historical Truth* (London: Routledge, 2018).¹ Originally published in Japanese by Ōtsuki Shoten in 2013, the volume was written by prominent Japanese and Korean scholars—several of them contributors to *The Asia-Pacific Journal*—and edited by Nishino Rumiko, Kim Puja, and Onozawa for the Violence Against Women in War Research Action Center (VAWW RAC) in Tokyo. To place Onozawa's essay in a broader context, we introduce the book as a whole before commenting briefly on the significance of her contribution.

Denying the Comfort Women

Denying the Comfort Women was written to counter Japanese neonationalist government officials, politicians, opinion makers, and business leaders who, over the past two decades, have loudly disavowed the paramount role of the Japanese Imperial military, notably its use of coercion, in creating, managing, and expanding the military comfort women system during the Asia-Pacific War (1931-45). Below is a short discussion of events leading up to the book's publication in 2013.

The Kōno statement and its limitations (1993)

In August 1991, three South Korean former comfort women, one using her real name, went public with their wartime experiences, filing civil charges against the Japanese state later that year for the abuses they had suffered. As other victim-survivors stepped forward, transnational support groups formed in South Korea, Japan, and elsewhere to assist them in the lawsuits they initiated in Japanese courts. Teams of lawyers, researchers, and human rights activists helped compile survivor testimonies in Korean, Chinese, Filipino, and English and translate them into Japanese, while scholars began scouring Japan's national archives for historical documents bearing on the comfort women issue.

In light of the revelations that ensued, the Japanese government conducted two internal investigations of its own. On August 4, 1993, Chief Cabinet Secretary Kōno Yōhei announced the government's conclusions, candidly admitting that the Imperial armed forces had been "involved in the establishment and management of the comfort stations and the transfer of comfort women," and that "at times" the military took part in the recruitment of women "against their own will, through coaxing, coercion, etc." The women, he noted, "lived in misery at comfort stations under a coercive atmosphere." The so-called Kōno statement ended with a clear expression of apology on behalf of the nation "to all those, irrespective of place of origin, who suffered immeasurable pain and incurable physical and

psychological wounds as comfort women" and pledged to "face squarely the historical facts."²

The Kōno pronouncement was a landmark event that could have begun a process of decolonizing Japanese perceptions of their country's colonial and wartime past. As we show below, however, the statement failed to fully recognize the preponderant role of the Imperial military and its use of force in creating and maintaining the comfort women system. As a result, a unified and sustained policy response for providing appropriate legal, moral, and material relief to victims was never implemented.

Nonetheless, energized by the state's belated admission of limited responsibility for the comfort women system, the advocacy movement joined forces with international human rights groups and worked to apply international humanitarian law in the search for a fair and durable solution to this injustice. In 1998, Gay J. McDougall in her report to the U.N. Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities noted that the so-called comfort women were sexual slaves, pure and simple, and characterized the "enslavement and rape of women in 'comfort stations' during the Second World War" as a crime against humanity. She urged the Japanese government to provide surviving victims with state compensation and identify and punish Japanese civil and military officials responsible for "wartime military sexual slavery."³

McDougall's findings on sexual slavery have become part of the definition used by world human rights organizations in discussing the military comfort women problem, one that continues to provide us with a basic point of reference. Although Japanese officials acknowledge the existence of this wartime system, they have rejected the U.N. designation of "sexual slavery" based on the use of military force, a stance the administration of Prime

Minister Abe Shinzō continues to defend—this despite a 2015 memorandum of agreement between the Japanese and South Korean foreign ministers purporting to have settled the issue "finally and irreversibly" (a subject we address in our epilogue—see Note 7 below).

For the transnational redress movement, the high point of the 1990s was the Women's International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan's Military Sexual Slavery, organized by world human rights groups and prominent jurists with the attendance of many former comfort women. Convened in Tokyo in December 2000, the tribunal convicted Emperor Hirohito and nine high-ranking civil and military leaders of institutionalizing rape and sexual slavery, which it characterized as a crime against humanity. The verdict also ruled that international laws in force at the time those crimes were committed now require the Japanese government to provide survivors with legal reparations, including a "full and frank apology" and "compensation through the government ... in amounts adequate to redress the harm [done] and deter its future occurrence."⁴ This judgment was fully in line with the formal recommendations of U.N. human rights mechanisms.

The Asian Women's Fund (1995-2007)

During the 1990s, the government, for its part, could not ignore the Kōno statement. Beginning with the administration of Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi (1994-96), it arranged for privately subscribed "atonement" payments to selected survivors in South Korea, Taiwan, and the Philippines and issued individual apologies signed by four prime ministers through an ostensibly non-governmental body, known as the Asian Women's Fund.⁵ State officials extolled the AWF as proof that Japan was working to resolve the comfort women issue, using the fund to deflect criticisms from foreign governments and international human rights

organizations.

Created in 1995, the Asian Women's Fund operated until 2007. The government insisted that the fund was a strictly humanitarian measure, vigorously denied that its payouts constituted official state redress, and presented the fund to the public as a quasi-private venture—"atonement" gratuities, it insisted, were subscribed only from private donations, although considerable state funding also was actually involved. Thus, the state dodged its obligations under international law to legislate a formal apology and provide surviving victims with legally mandated compensation.⁶

To survivors, attempts to make amends through the semi-private Asian Women's Fund seemed arbitrary and inconsistent, prompting many to reject its overtures, with their taint of charity, as insincere and even humiliating. Ultimately, the fund only created more confusion about the real intentions of the state. Worse, instead of healing wounds, the AWF's premises and procedures created fierce internal dissonance among victims and their supporters over whether to accept the solatia. That led to divisions within the redress movement that intensified the isolation and psychological distress of many survivors. Several years after the AWF closed its doors in 2007, former managing director Wada Haruki concluded frankly that the 12-year endeavor had failed to achieve reconciliation with either South Korea or Taiwan.

A glint of hope for supporters during the late 1990s was the revision of Japanese middle school history texts. The Kōno statement had promised to upgrade Japanese history education to reflect the known facts about the comfort women, and by 1997, all state-approved history books had been rewritten to include some mention of the issue—although the central role played by Japanese civil and military authorities was sidestepped. By 2006, however, persistent pressure from revisionist

government officials and opinion leaders led textbook publishers to remove even these limited references to the comfort women.

"Recolonizing" the national consciousness?

Beginning in 1996, ultranationalist political, business, and intellectual elites began to publicly target textbook revision, denying the facts of military wartime sexual servitude and castigating the "masochistic" view of Japan's modern history. Abe Shinzō and other revisionist politicians rode this wave of discontent to power, displacing more moderate factions inside the ruling Liberal Democratic Party. Abe's first term as prime minister (2006-07) epitomized this reverse course, which we view as an attempt to "recolonize" Japan's perceptions of history by reinstating discredited prewar ultranationalist ideas. In June 2007, a powerful revisionist coalition, including leading LDP Diet members, posted a full-page advertisement in *The Washington Post* to refute charges of sexual slavery by alleging that comfort women were not victims but "volunteers" or paid professionals—hence no military coercion involved and thus a false issue.

One month later, in July 2007, the U.S. House of Representatives adopted a resolution urging Tokyo to live up to its responsibilities under international law and legislate a formal apology accompanied by official restitution. This was followed in short order by similar resolutions from the Dutch House of Representatives, the Canadian House of Commons, the European Parliament, and other national legislative bodies. In 2011, the Constitutional Court of Korea found that the South Korean government's repeated failure to seek third-country arbitration to resolve the comfort women issue was a breach of its constitutional duties.

Right-of-center media outlets dismissed

international protests as a form of Japan-bashing and reiterated revisionist claims about textbook revision and the comfort women. At a popular level, rightwing activists, some engaging in hate speech, broadcast these messages through social networking services. Abe's aggressive stance on the issue of sexual slavery set the tone for his second administration, inaugurated in December 2012, and "comfort women bashing" plumbed new depths. By then, the emotional diatribes of bloggers disparaging victim-survivors had reached a deafening crescendo. Denialist rhetoric had also become a prominent feature of national political discourse and diplomacy and remains so today despite the 2015 Japan-ROK agreement.⁷

During this period, the redress movement was struggling to recover from internal divisions created by the Asian Women's Fund controversy. The movement's disarray was compounded by the emergence in 2007—the year the AWF closed—of a "reconciliation discourse" promoted by a South Korean professor of Japanese literature and others. The Japanese version of our book, *Beyond Comfort-Women Bashing*,⁸ was conceived as a first step toward overcoming this internal rift and reunifying the movement around the basic demands for justice and closure put forward by victim-survivors themselves. It was published in June 2013, six months after Abe ascended for the second time to the premiership.

Our book is tightly focused on attempts by the Japanese state over the last two decades to disavow the violent nature of the Imperial military's systematic sexual enslavement of tens of thousands of girls and women throughout Asia and the Pacific. For that reason, we do not provide a thorough account of the origins and operation of the military comfort women system,⁹ its social and psychological impact on victims (stigmatization, post-traumatic stress), and the postwar aftermath for survivors (neglect, denial, and,

after 1997, public disparagement and re-traumatization). Nor have we attempted to analyze in depth the numbers or the national and ethnic origins of the women enslaved in comfort stations between the system's inception in 1932 and Japan's defeat in 1945. Another important question we do not address in detail is the use or establishment by other World War II belligerents of special facilities to provide their soldiers and sailors with regulated sex.¹⁰

The English edition

To update the English version, the editors have thoroughly revised the introduction, written an epilogue, added a new chapter on the mobilization of Korean girls as comfort women, and appended a chronology of events (1988-2017). Six authors have affixed postscripts to their original essays that dissect and critique the Japan-ROK agreement of December 2015, which was reached without consulting South Korean victims themselves. The 2015 bilateral accord is also discussed at some length in both the introduction and epilogue.¹¹ Photos and tables not included in the original have also been added. Where pertinent, new information is introduced in the endnotes.

The book is divided into three sections, as in the original. Part I provides a historical overview of the comfort women system—what we know about it today based on recent research. Chapter 1 by Yoshimi Yoshiaki examines the historical significance and shortcomings of the Kōno statement, focusing on the primary question of military violence in the recruitment of women. In Chapter 2, Nishino Rumiko analyzes the personal stories and court testimonies of more than 180 survivors from 10 countries to establish a typology of coercive procurement practices, all expressly banned under Japanese and international law at the time. Chapter 3 by

Onozawa Akane is reproduced in its entirety below. Two special *Insight* essays (in Japanese, "columns") have been appended to Chapters 2 and 3. Ikeda Eriko's analysis of military rape centers and wartime sexual violence in China and Maeda Akira's discussion of guilty verdicts upheld in 1935 and 1937 under the 1907 Penal Code against the traffickers of comfort women round out Part I.

Part II asks why the Asian Women's Fund (1995-2007), which successive Japanese administrations have promoted as Japan's answer to the comfort women problem, failed to resolve the issue. In Chapter 4, Kim Puja analyzes the AWF, which operated under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and explains why large numbers of survivors rejected selective, non-binding state compensation as an evasion of Japan's legal responsibilities. In Chapter 5, Nishino Rumiko looks critically at the rise of a liberal "reconciliation discourse" in Japan, characterized by the work of Park Yuha,¹² which prioritizes political expedience and state interests over the survivors' need for official vindication, legal relief, social justice, and personal closure. She demonstrates that the problem-ridden Japan-ROK agreement of late 2015 was the logical outcome of such thinking.

Two *Insight* essays complete Part II. Hayashi Hirofumi focuses on the legal obligation of the Japanese state under the 1952 San Francisco Peace Treaty to accept the verdicts of postwar Allied military tribunals, including those involved the crime of forced military prostitution. Kim Puja asks why the Japanese military mobilized disproportionately large numbers of underage Korean adolescents as comfort women, tracing the causes to Japan's wartime civil and military policies and the nature of colonial control.

Part III examines the comfort women issue from three different perspectives. Chapter 6 by Tawara Yoshifumi shows how "New Right"

revisionists used the comfort women controversy to seize power within the ruling Liberal Democratic Party after 1996 by linking it to textbook revision. In Chapter 7, Yoshizawa Fumitoshi analyzes the 1965 Japan-ROK claims agreement, which barred all foreign war victims from pursuing personal claims against the Japanese state for human rights abuses. The parallels between the 1965 accord, which declared the issue of official state compensation to be settled "completely and finally," and the Japan-ROK diplomatic compromise of 2015 pronouncing the comfort women problem "finally and irreversibly" resolved, are clear.

In Chapter 8, Yang Chingja puts forward the simple but powerful proposition that a realistic settlement is one that victimized women can accept. Based on more than 20 years of experience working with Song Shin-do,¹³ a *zainichi* Korean survivor, Yang suggests that a workable settlement should include: 1) a clear, official apology that cannot be easily reversed later by a different administration, 2) legislated state compensation as proof of the apology's legitimacy and binding power, 3) a full public accounting of the truth, and 4) the revision of school curricula to include comfort women content and the adoption of educational policies to foster public awareness of institutionalized wartime sexual violence.

As we note in our epilogue, U.N. human rights bodies have raised all of these demands in their critiques of the 2015 bilateral pact. Moreover, since early 2016, they have also reproached the Japanese and South Korean governments for not including as a basis for agreement a consultative mechanism involving the survivors themselves. In the words of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, it is vitally important for "the relevant authorities [to] reach out to these courageous and dignified women; ultimately only they can judge whether they have received genuine redress."¹⁴ Furthermore, a just and lasting

solution to this egregious human rights abuse must be tendered to all surviving victims, regardless of nationality, ethnicity, or place of residence, assuring them and surviving family members, in the words of a 2017 U.N. report, of "the right to truth, reparation and assurances of non-repetition."¹⁵

Onozawa Akane on licensed public prostitution and military sexual slavery

Chapter 3 occupies a pivotal position in *Denying the Comfort Women*. Beginning with the 2007 advertisement in *The Washington Post* sponsored by leading Japanese revisionists, Onozawa deconstructs the argument that "sex slaves" were actually paid prostitutes with no claim on victimhood or public sympathy by analyzing Japan's system of pre-1945 licensed prostitution. In so doing, she reveals the complex but hitherto unexamined institutional linkages that existed between Japan's state-regulated peacetime sex industry and the Imperial military's regime of wartime comfort stations. In fact, acting on military orders, Japanese brothel keepers, with the assistance of local police, recruited considerable numbers of indentured "prostitutes" after 1932 and trafficked them to China and other foreign battlegrounds as comfort women.

Licensing based on bonded sexual labor and forced military prostitution employed different modalities and levels of violence and should not be confused, she argues, but in essence both were institutions of sexual slavery and as such violated the international laws of the day. Officialdom's support of public prostitution in peacetime fostered social acceptance of the wholesale trafficking of young women by the Japanese military during the Asia-Pacific conflict. The dense networks created by Japanese brothel owners and their auxiliaries created an organizational model and a ready-made infrastructure spanning the Empire that

facilitated the rapid and massive mustering of Asian girls and women for military sexual servitude after Japan's invasion of China in 1937.

The Comfort Women and State Prostitution

Onozawa Akane

The flaw in revisionist logic

On June 14, 2007, a group of neonationalist lawmakers, academics, political commentators, journalists, and cultural figures signed a full-page advertisement in *The Washington Post* entitled "THE FACTS" to expound a peculiar theory. Seeking to disavow the iniquities of the Japanese military's comfort women (*ianfu*) system, their polemic listed five so-called facts, the last of which made the following claim.

Fact 5: The *ianfu* who were embedded with the Japanese army were not, as is commonly

reported, "sex slaves." They were working under a system of licensed prostitution that was

commonplace around the world at the time. Many of the women, in fact, earned incomes

far in excess of what were paid to field officers and even generals ... and there are many

testimonies to the fact that they were treated well.¹

The advertisement alleges that the comfort women were prostitutes, licensed and

supervised by the state, who were plying their trade for personal gain and contributing to their country's war needs. The ad refutes the existence of military sexual slavery and denies any moral or legal obligation by the postwar state to apologize to or compensate victim-survivors for the traumas they experienced. This revisionist credo dismisses overwhelming historical evidence that during the Asia-Pacific War (1931-45) many tens of thousands of girls and women across Asia and the Pacific with no experience of prostitution were coercively mobilized and compelled to provide sex on demand to Japanese troops in so-called comfort stations. Nor do the ad's sponsors see anything unusual about requisitioning women already licensed for prostitution in Japan and packing them off to military sex venues in foreign lands. Underlying these assumptions is a overweening patriarchal contempt for the victims and a stunning ignorance of basic human rights. Many ordinary citizens as well as political and opinion leaders share these perceptions, which over the past decade or so have become widespread in Japan with the rise of historical revisionism.

The Japanese state has regulated prostitution since the Tokugawa period (1603-1868). After the overthrow of the feudal regime in 1868, the new Meiji government devised a licensing system patterned on "modern" European models. Following the takeover of Taiwan (1895), southern Sakhalin and the Kwangtung Leased Territory (1905), and Korea (1910) and the subsequent establishment of a Japanese puppet state in Manchuria (1932), Japanese-style licensing was gradually imposed on the sex industry in these regions as well. Japanese and other entrepreneurs set up brothels there, bringing in Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese, Chinese, and other women to staff them.²

After the garrisoning of Imperial troops in Shanghai in 1932, the Japanese military began to plan and implement an independent system of sex venues for its troops in China. The high-

ranking officers who devised these facilities called them "comfort stations" (*ianjo*). Following Japan's full-scale invasion of China in 1937 and the start of the Pacific conflict in late 1941, military sex establishments expanded rapidly, including to regions where licensing systems did not exist. In the latter areas, women were rounded up directly by Imperial forces or recruited by procurers acting on army or navy orders, often with the assistance of local civil authorities. As sexually exploited victims, they shared a common plight with state-registered Japanese prostitutes, but under wartime conditions, they were denied even the illusion of freedom enjoyed by the latter.

We know that the great majority of comfort women were marshaled against their will by means of enticement, fraud, intimidation, and the raw violence of abduction. We also know that while comfort stations were run according to military regulations, in rape centers and similar settings, there were no formal restraints on soldiers—particularly in or near combat zones—and the women incarcerated there were subjected to repeated gang rapes, torture, and other forms of sexual brutalization. Comfort women could not leave the stations without military permission. Duped or dragooned into sexual bondage, with no hope of escape, they lived under conditions that differed radically from those of women prostituted in peacetime under state sanction, whose right to quit without notice was, in principle at least, ordained by law.

On the other hand, we have discovered that once the Sino-Japanese War began in 1937, licensed brothel keepers and their agents in Japan proper, acting on orders from the military, vigorously recruited *shōgi* (licensed prostitutes), *geigi* (geisha), and *shakufu* (Japanese-style bar workers)³ to staff army and navy comfort facilities abroad. Dangling the lure of advance cash payments supplied by military recruiters, these concessionaires solicited bonded women for sexual labor

overseas, specifying a fixed term of service during which voluntary termination was impossible. From the handful of memoirs and testimonials these women left, it is clear that some were treated better in military sex stations than in the licensed quarters of civilian life. A few even amassed sizeable earnings and managed to return home safely before Japan's defeat.

It is important, however, not to confuse the institution of legalized prostitution with the comfort women system run by the military. At the same time, we must remember that during the war years, the two systems became closely entwined as Imperial armies recruited Japanese from among those already subordinated to the state-regulated sex industry. The revisionists in their *Washington Post* ad assert that virtually all comfort women were "prostitutes" from the outset. This statement not only warps historical reality but also disguises the fact that the comfort women system operated from start to finish under the authority and control of Imperial armed forces.

Unfortunately, researchers have tended to overlook the victimization experience of the many Japanese *shōgi*, *geigi*, and *shakufu* who were lured away from state-approved brothels and other venues at home and transferred to military sex facilities abroad. Obviously, as scholars our first priority must be to examine and clarify the suffering inflicted on the great multitude of girls and women who were forcibly mobilized in Japan's colonial possessions and in the territories invaded and occupied by Imperial troops. It is incumbent upon us to continue deepening our understanding of the gross injustices done to these victims. Yet if we hope to effectively refute the premises of the *Washington Post* ad, we must also take a closer look at the fate of prostituted Japanese who subsequently joined the ranks of comfort women and ask how they were recruited, what kinds of oppression they endured, and which laws—national and international— were

violated in the process.

In the following essay, I first present an overview of state-supervised prostitution in pre-1945 Japan. I then discuss the recruitment of *shōgi*, *geigi*, and *shakufu* to meet army and navy quotas and introduce the life history of a legally indentured individual who was dispatched from a sex establishment in Japan to a comfort station in the South Pacific. I go on to demonstrate that a basic understanding of universal human rights and the strictures of existing international law should have obliged Japan to abolish the licensing and trafficking of human beings for sexual exploitation. Specifically, I examine how the Japanese state consistently sidestepped demands for reform from both home and abroad in order to maintain the patriarchal social order, which it had no intention of changing.

In the final section, I return to the revisionist proposition that the comfort women controversy is a false issue because coercion was not involved: the alleged victims were in fact "professionals" who earned a good living from the system of military prostitution. I argue that the extensive and swift rounding up of girls and women throughout the Japanese Empire to satisfy the Imperial military's voracious appetite for sex was feasible in large measure because of the existence of state-managed prostitution. This institution had created a vast infrastructure for the procurement of women based on debt slavery, one sustained by permissive social norms that naturalized sexual oppression, allowing the buying and selling of women to run rampant. The Japanese military was able to exploit these features when it embarked on the hasty expansion of comfort stations in the late 1930s.



Licensed Prostitution in Japan

Japan's prewar system of government-approved prostitution (*kōshō seido*) was based on the inspection, certification, and licensing of brothels in the so-called pleasure quarters (*yūkaku*) and the women, aged 18 or above, who were prostituted there. Procurers and intermediaries who solicited impoverished young people and herded them into the sex industry were, in principle, also required to undergo screening and licensing by the state.

A defining feature of the Japanese system was its reliance on a legalized form of bondage. During the Tokugawa period, women of the "pleasure quarters" were sexual commodities sold at will by their parents to brothels and then resold by owners and transferred from one sex venue to another for the rest of their lives. This custom remained basically in tact when Japan dismantled the feudal regime and began building a modern state after 1868. In Tokugawa times, a woman's sales price was called a ransom (*minoshirokin*). With the dawn of the modern era, this nomenclature was changed to the duplicitous "advance cash payment" (*zenshakkin*), but the two were virtually indistinguishable.

When a woman was contracted to enter a *shōgi* or geisha establishment, her parents or legal guardians signed on as guarantors "jointly and

severally liable" (*rentai hoshōnin*) for their ward. Based on that pledge, brothel and geisha-house managers advanced substantial cash "loans" to the guarantors, which the new recruit was then obliged to pay off with her body. Until these de facto ransoms were redeemed in full, a woman could not leave her place of employment. A large share of the fees she earned went to the housemaster, leaving the prostituted inmates with scant resources to redeem their bond. As a result, repayment generally was a long-term endeavor, with the woman having to secure new loans to cover ever-mounting living and other expenses. Many such individuals eventually became trapped in a sophisticated system of debt peonage from which escape was extremely difficult, if not impossible.

Licensed prostitution constituted a system of indentured sexual labor rooted in an intricate network of brothel businesses, brokers, and other sex contractors who made their living by buying and selling young women. For all intents and purposes, this was a form of enslavement. Indeed, before 1945, many Japanese commonly referred to state-controlled prostitution as slavery (*doreisei*), and in the postwar era, the eminent sociologist of law Kawashima Takeyoshi characterized the prewar licensing of *shōgi* and *geigi* as a "virtual slave system."⁴ The term "sexual slavery" that so offends revisionists today in fact has its roots in Japan's prewar regime of public sex.

In 1872, the Meiji Grand Council of State enacted the Ordinance Liberating Geisha and Prostitutes, which in principle outlawed the trafficking of women and purportedly freed *shōgi* and geisha from chattel-like conditions. Brothels and related businesses responded by renting out "*tatami*-mat salons" (*kashi zashiki*). Under this arrangement, prostituted women ostensibly leased space from house managers. There they met their clients and conducted business, and bordellos became popularly known as *kashi zashiki*—leased drawing rooms.

Needless to say, this was a deceptive convention that tied the victims more firmly to the terms of their contracts.

Subsequently, prostituted women launched “freedom-to-quit” campaigns in order to compel brothel owners to void their contracts. In 1900, Japan's highest tribunal, the Great Court of Cassation (*Daishin'in*), issued a verdict to the effect that service contracts infringing on the personal freedom of *shōgi* and geisha were invalid, even if the individual still owed money on her bond. That same year, the government adopted the Laws Regulating Prostitutes, which established the legal right of licensed individuals to end employment whenever they wished. With assistance from groups such as the Salvation Army and the Japan Women's Christian Temperance Union, a few women actually managed to have their contracts canceled and win back some degree of autonomy from housemasters.

In 1902, however, the Great Court of Cassation ruled that while service contracts prohibiting discretionary job termination were invalid, cash advances were a different type of contractual instrument. These obligations, the court said, remained in force and had to be met, even if the person involved had already left her place of work. In fact, “room brokers” and other entrepreneurs continued to advance money to parents in order to tie their daughters to the sex “amenity,” depriving the latter of the free disposition of their own bodies.

To the purveyors of women, the cash advance and the service contract were two sides of the same coin: the bond agreement ensured that the contract, with its implicit no-termination provision, would be honored. If the government had seriously intended to curtail human trafficking, it would have categorically outlawed the advance payment of bond-like financial obligations. Japan had to wait until 1955, ten years after the end of World War II, for the courts to ban this onerous practice.⁵

Under the regime of public prostitution, licensed women were subjected to regular medical examinations in an effort to prevent the spread of venereal diseases. As in Europe, licensing was a system by which the state undertook to protect the clients of prostituted women from infection. In Japan, this was the first of two rationales used to defend government intervention in the sex industry. The second was “rape prevention”—prostitution protected “decent girls” from the supposedly irrepressible male libido.

In France, a state regulatory model for Japan, government control victimized pauperized lower class women with little or no education and few social resources. Yet in both France and England, women enjoyed far more autonomy vis-à-vis brothel operators than their Japanese counterparts. There was nothing resembling, for instance, Japan's legally established practice of having the parents of a young woman in effect borrow money from brokers to become co-guarantors of a loan that condemned their daughter to a life of sexual servitude.

This nefarious practice secured an inmate's submission to the housemaster or creditor until her debt could be discharged, but repayment was often impossible.⁶ Such women were victims of the patriarchal household (*ie*). The fealty they owed their fathers translated readily into the obedience they were expected to show their housemasters, doubly secured by the cash advance. A daughter's willingness to sell herself to improve her family's fortunes was celebrated as the epitome of filial piety.

In Japan, houses of assignation (*kashi zashiki*) everywhere normally maintained close relations with local military installations, even in peacetime. The creation of a new garrison would often prompt town fathers to deliberate the merits of inviting brothels to set up shop, and in several instances, red-light districts

were actually built from scratch for that purpose.⁷ These venues were managed directly by the owners, however, and while they engaged freely in the trafficking of women, hiring was nominally contractual and sanctioned by the obligatory parental authorization.

Comfort stations, on the other hand, were set up by explicit order of the military. The Imperial army and navy directed the procurement of women, albeit through private contractors in many cases, and the women interned there could not quit without permission from local military commanders. In the occupied territories of China and later the Philippines and other parts of Southeast Asia, the capture, sequestration, and perpetual gang rape of women were rife.

Seen in this light, the comfort women system is best understood as a wartime mechanism of sexual violence devised, activated, and maintained by Imperial forces as they rapidly expanded their presence on the Asian continent after the late 1930s. For that reason, while acknowledging the inhumanity of "official" prostitution, we should not conflate it with the comfort women system, which I believe requires special treatment. Simply equating the two institutions risks minimizing a salient feature of the comfort facility: the threat of extreme physical violence to ensure compliance and sexual brutality, including serial rape and other atrocities, at the hands of Japanese troops.

From *shōgi*, *geigi*, and *shakufu* to comfort woman

Next, we consider the case of regulated "professionals"—*shōgi*, geisha, and *shakufu*—recruited as comfort women from Japan's licensed quarters. National Police Agency (NPA) archives provide a revealing glimpse of civilian procurers working discretely

with local police at the army's bidding to recruit women from the sex industry for comfort stations in China.⁸ One NPA document, in particular, records inquiries made by several prefectural governors to the Ministry of Home Affairs in early 1938. The governors were conveying their concerns about the activities of private agents operating in Gunma, Yamagata, Kochi, Wakayama, Ibaraki, Miyagi, and other prefectures who were attempting to solicit women for comfort stations being built, they said, by Japanese forces in Shanghai. The agents claimed they had been commissioned by the Special Services Agency, a logistical unit attached to Japan's Shanghai Expeditionary Army.

Prefectural police reported that the operatives had been propositioning bar workers (*shakufu*) for jobs in Shanghai but suspected that their real intention was to assemble women and traffic them to sex establishments in distant parts of Asia. After investigating the matter, they learned that the men were in fact *kashi zashiki* proprietors and licensed recruiters hailing from Kobe, Osaka, and other large cities. The police investigation also confirmed that the Shanghai Expeditionary Army had indeed asked prefectural police authorities to help recruit brokers for the purpose of rounding up some 3,000 *shakufu* for comfort stations being planned for the Chinese interior.

To verify the procurers' stories, the Wakayama Prefectural Police contacted the Kujō Police Station in Osaka and the Foreign Affairs Section of the Nagasaki Police. The investigators ascertained that prefectural police in Osaka, Nagasaki, and elsewhere were facilitating the agents' efforts to enroll women for military prostitution in Shanghai.

The business agents and brokers were in possession of service contracts, certificates of parental consent, receipts for loan agreements, and documents specifying the length of duty. The terms of employment included a two-year

obligation, a requirement that the women be between 16 and 30, and a promise to repay the monetary advance upon completion of the contract. The women were entitled to keep 10% of their earnings, but if they quit prematurely, they had to return the original loan with interest.⁹

Accounts by former army officers also prove beyond a doubt that brothel keepers in Japan were instructed by military authorities to recruit women and set up sex facilities in China. For example, Nagasawa Ken'ichi, a former military physician, and Yamada Seikichi, a superintendent of comfort stations, both note in their memoirs that Japanese housemasters and their auxiliaries in the old licensed quarters of Matsushima (Osaka) and Fukuhara (Kobe) were ordered by the army to assemble women in Japan and set up sex venues in Hankou (now Wuhan) under military auspices. Both authors state unequivocally that the Imperial military took a direct hand in running these venues.¹⁰

Testimonials of victim-survivors corroborate these stories, indicating that the army and navy relied directly or indirectly on the trafficking networks of licensed brothels in Japan to meet comfort station staffing quotas overseas.¹¹ Yamauchi Keiko's recollections are a good example. Born in Aomori Prefecture in 1925, Yamauchi was indentured to a geisha house (*okiya*) in Otsuka, Tokyo for a \$300 advance from her parents following her father's bankruptcy. Although not yet 10 at the time, she was tied to a 10-year contract. Yamauchi became a geisha, adopting the sobriquet Kikumaru as her professional name. While working in Tokyo's Nishi Koyama area, a geisha friend invited her to apply for work at a frontline comfort station in the South Pacific. Told that the navy would shoulder her debt, which by that time had grown to \$4,000, she jumped at the opportunity and enlisted.

Indebtedness was not the only factor that

pushed Yamauchi to enter a comfort facility. Equally decisive was the recruiter's admonition to serve her country and his promise that if she died, her spirit would be enshrined at Tokyo's Yasukuni Shrine, where Japan's war dead are commemorated. So in March 1942, Yamauchi sailed for Toloas in the Truk Islands (now Chuuk Lagoon). After moving into the new venue, she was assigned to serve senior naval officers.

Yamauchi later remembered that period of her life as "enjoyable," and she returned to Japan with the generous sum of \$10,000 in her pocket. After the war, however, rampant postwar inflation quickly eroded those savings, and her past as a comfort woman followed her as she moved from job to job, working as a geisha or bar hostess. She grew bitter that she and other women who had served their country in its time of need would be treated so poorly by society in peacetime. In April 1972, at the age of 48, she gassed herself to death in her room.¹²

Yamauchi's case may appear at first glance to fit the caricature of the comfort women in the revisionists' *The Washington Post* ad. She began her career as a geisha but later volunteered to work in a comfort station, where she found herself better off than before. But consider things from her perspective. Sold by her parents before the age of 10, forced into a life of subjugation with no realistic prospects of leaving, and held in contempt by society at large, she must have found it impossible to resist the dual opportunities of clearing her debts and serving her country under military sponsorship. In other words, she might not have agreed to such a proposal had she not been bonded to a profession that required her to discharge her financial obligations with her body (but with little hope of ever being freed). A person's idea of what is enjoyable depends on their life circumstances at the time, and these can vary considerably.¹³ The fact that women like Yamauchi made money and derived a

fleeting contentment from some part of their experiences does not justify sexual servitude. Not even for a day.

Moreover, Yamauchi happened to work for officers and was lucky to be able return to Japan alive after finishing her contract. Other comfort women were not so fortunate. As the war drew to an end, many were killed in the fighting, forced to participate in group suicides, or left to fend for themselves in the jungles of Southeast Asia and the Pacific by the same soldiers who had prostituted them day in and day out.¹⁴ Recruited by appeals to their patriotism and yet scorned and abused when they returned home, these women were victims, trapped by poverty and debt in a life of continuous misery. The state and the military cynically used and mistreated them and then, ultimately, discarded them.

It is important to note, however, that by the 1930s, licensed prostitution and the system of debt slavery that underwrote it were increasingly viewed by domestic and world opinion as embarrassing anachronisms to be abolished. The 1872 state ordinance that purportedly liberated prostituted women failed to do so because of the obfuscation of government authorities and the connivance of the courts, which allowed this system to flourish. In the 1920s and 1930s, however, an international consensus had emerged that condemned the selling of women into sexual bondage as a serious human rights abuse. By this time, it was no longer the case that “licensed prostitution was commonplace around the world,” as the 2007 revisionist ad would have us believe. In fact, the institution was on its last legs. But the Japanese government refused to concede to world opinion. Instead, it sought new justifications to postpone a final resolution of the question, and in Japan and its colonies, trafficking in human lives continued unabated.

Japan and the international movement for the abolition of the trafficking of women

By the early 20th century, the Western system of certifying brothels, registering prostitutes, and requiring periodic medical checks was regarded as abetting the trafficking of women. In the 1920s, many Western nations eliminated state licensing both at home and in their Asian colonies. The United Kingdom, the United States, and the Netherlands, for example, closed down bordellos and other sex venues in Singapore, Manila, and the Dutch East Indies; drove out the pimps; and repatriated their nationals. These efforts were not entirely wholehearted and achieved very uneven results, but they represented an important departure from the past.

In 1921, the newly created League of Nations enacted the International Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women and Children, which superseded the 1910 International Convention for the Suppression of the White Slave Traffic. Japan acceded to both treaties in 1925. The League’s anti-trafficking covenant raised the legal age of consent for women from 20 to 21 “completed years of age” (Article 5) but committed the contracting parties to honor the key provisions of the 1910 white slave traffic accord, notably Articles 1 and 2. Article 1 stated that: “Whoever, in order to gratify the passions of another person, has procured, enticed, or led away, even with her consent, a woman or girl under age, for immoral purposes, shall be punished.” Article 2 read: “Whoever, in order to gratify the passions of another person, has, by fraud, or by means of violence, threats, abuse of authority, or any other method of compulsion, procured, enticed, or led away a woman ... over age, for immoral purposes, shall also be punished.”¹⁵

Japan’s licensing regime was in flagrant violation of the 1921 treaty. When the government ratified the accord in 1925, it demanded and was granted an exception

allowing women over 18 to be indentured for prostitution. In so doing, it also handed brothel operators and concessionaires the legal authority to solicit these young women—minors under international law—for sexual exploitation.¹⁶ More importantly, the licensing system in effect segregated and interned prostituted women until they could repay their debts. Under the 1921 treaty, the Japanese government was required to outlaw this method of compulsion regardless of the women's ages.

In the Japanese home islands, abolitionists worked to raise public awareness of the global movement to end legalized prostitution. Christian social activist Kagawa Toyohiko (1888-1960) alerted League of Nations officials to the inequities of licensing in Japan, and in the 1920s and 1930s, popular support for prohibition grew apace. Bills to repeal state prostitution were submitted repeatedly in the Imperial Diet and provincial legislatures. By late 1937, at least 21 prefectural assemblies (nearly 45% of the total) had passed resolutions urging the abolition of state-licensed prostitution.¹⁷ A good number of those prefectures actually went on to formally outlaw that institution.¹⁸

The government, for its part, went so far as to repatriate Japanese prostitutes from Western colonies in Asia, but in its own colonies, overseas possessions, and spheres of influence, it openly ignored the League's abolitionist program and actually expanded Japanese-style licensing controls.¹⁹ As some other colonial powers had done, Japan argued that the international conventions did not apply to its colonies and mandates, removing Koreans, Taiwanese, and other Asian and Pacific peoples from their purview.

A League survey of the early 1930s (see below) reported more than 50,000 registered prostitutes in the Japanese main islands, but pointed out that another 2,000 Japanese

nationals—ethnic Japanese, Koreans, and Taiwanese—had been prostituted in areas outside the Japanese Empire, including northern China and Shanghai.²⁰ In these regions, the survey noted, "the recruitment of prostitutes took place in the same way as in Japan itself. It was the usual system of recruitment ... for licensed brothels." Since the majority of these recruits had to travel abroad, the "engagements of Japanese girls ... undoubtedly involved an element of traffic." The study continued:

The system of licensed brothels brings in its train a well-organized system of recruitment of

women as inmates. The keeper of a Japanese brothel in China must get into touch with

persons in other places of China or in places within the Japanese Empire in order to keep his

establishment supplied with inmates.... According to Japanese laws and regulations, special

employment agencies for the engaging of prostitutes were permitted, and this referred to

engagement of prostitutes for brothels abroad as well as for brothels within the Japanese

Empire.²²

Domestically, brothel owners, procurers, and related agents constituted a potent political force whose clout was not easily ignored. As a result, Japan never implemented an effective policy to prevent trafficking. On the world stage, it paid lip service to the ideal of abolition, belatedly ratifying the anti-trafficking

covenant in 1925, but made no substantial effort to reform the system of state licensing and trafficking.²³

During the 1920s, the League initiated a series of fact-finding surveys in each region of the world to track the transport of women across national boundaries for sexual exploitation. But when investigators attempted to canvass Japan's East Asian colonies and other dependencies, where many Japanese and other Imperial subjects had been traded, the Japanese government used every means at its disposal to thwart that effort. It shrugged off other nations' criticisms of the licensing system, arguing that it would be difficult for Westerners to accurately evaluate the situation in Asia, whose geography, languages, religions, and customs were profoundly different from those of the West. Japan did its utmost to dissuade the League from undertaking the Asian survey.

Undeterred, in 1931, the League dispatched the Commission of Enquiry into Traffic in Women and Children in the East to study conditions in Asia, including areas where Japan controlled the trade in women. The commission interviewed Japanese officials in the Office of the Governor-General of Korea, the Acting Governor of the Kwantung Leased Territory, and the Home Ministry in Tokyo. The interviews focused on two primary concerns: 1) was prostitution based on debt servitude really entered into by "independent women" acting of their own "free will," and 2) was it permissible [under the anti-trafficking treaty of 1921] to publicly certify procurers and other intermediaries involved in the sex industry.²⁴

Bureaucrats in the office of the Kwantung Leased Territory, for instance, replied vaguely that cash-advance contracts were different from employment contracts and that the women could quit before the advance was fully repaid, thus no coercion was involved. The women were able to use the cash loan as they

liked, spending it all on themselves if they wished, the officials explained. It was the woman's decision whether or not to entrust the money to her parents and work to repay it. Neither fraud nor compulsion was involved, hence no trafficking. The women were independent and exercised free will, the bureaucrats insisted implausibly. The certification of proprietors and procurers was also a false problem: licensing allowed the authorities weed out the bad elements. The police verified applications, conducted identity checks, and made certain that only the most qualified were approved.²⁵

Unimpressed by these answers, League investigators pressed the Home Ministry with tough counterarguments, to which the ministry was unable to respond. For example, they gave the example of a young woman who, believing it her final duty to help her parents, signed a cash-advance contract and became a licensed prostitute. Would the ministry say she was acting of her own free will, the investigators wanted to know. How does the ministry define "free will," they asked. The officials could not answer. The investigators probed further: "Since women are being placed in a questionable occupation in order to settle their parents' debts, we find it odd that disputes don't arise over the validity of such contacts with respect to the maintenance of public order and morality." The ministry said only, "we cannot answer that without consulting our records."²⁶

Finally, the League team cross-examined the bureaucrats relentlessly on the question of licensing procurers and auxiliaries. Listening to the bureaucrats' side of the story, they said, it sounded as if licenses are only granted to people of good character. But do reputable people trade in young women, they asked. The officials merely repeated, "We only give licenses to those who are suitable."²⁷ Clearly, the Home Ministry had no creditable answers. When the commission filed its initial report in

1932, Tokyo protested mightily. Eventually it succeeded in having three of four offending criticisms watered down or deleted from the final report, which was issued on December 10, 1932.

The commission's first draft singled out four aspects of Japan's licensing system as problematic. 1. Brothel businesses, of course, but procurers and other contractors also are publicly certified to trade in registered prostitutes, geisha, and barmaids. 2. In principle, the cash advance collected by the women's parents is said to be unrelated to their earnings as prostitutes, but in reality, that loan deprives them of the freedom to leave their employer voluntarily, compelling them to continue working against their will. 3. Police officers often intervene to prevent prostitutes from terminating their contracts. 4. Geisha houses habitually adopt girls as apprentices and then urge them to take patrons. Of these objections, only the first remained unchanged in the commission's final report. Points 2, 3 and 4 were either modified or eliminated altogether.²⁸

In any event, the League of Nations had spoken, and in 1935, the Japanese government felt obliged to actually draft a policy proposal for phasing out the state administration of prostitution. The policy paper called for eliminating, in principle, the licensing system and drawing-room rental business. Yet it left the most notorious features of the system intact by refusing to ban loan advances and the certification of sex contractors.²⁹ The proposal was never adopted. Through a combination of diplomatic feint and verbal sophistry, the government managed to protect licensed prostitution at a time when world opinion favored eliminating the trafficking of women and children. By then, however, the Imperial military had committed itself to the invasion of China, and the Asia-Pacific War lay just around the corner. Abolition would have to await the conclusion of World War II.

Coercion disguised as "free will"

Even if it were true, as the revisionists insist, that the comfort women were licensed sex practitioners, that would still be nothing to brag about. The prewar licensing system was built on coercive practices and a sophisticated trafficking network that the League of Nations condemned as a violation of human rights. Many of the concessionaires hired by the Japanese military to round up women for its wartime sex venues abroad were the same people who had been formally authorized by the state to buy, sell, and sexually exploit young women in Japan. Moreover, the infrastructure these agents built extended to Japan's colonial acquisitions and beyond. In that sense, licensing was one of the deeply embedded elements that facilitated the systematic, large-scale recruitment of comfort women in Japan proper, Korea, and Taiwan after 1937. The women legally prostituted in Japan and trafficked so effortlessly outside the Empire into military comfort stations in Asia and the Pacific are a case in point.

To grasp what made this unprecedented mobilization of women possible, we must look critically at two closely related factors. One is a prewar society with its culture of male sexual prerogative that allowed the licensing of socially vulnerable women for public sex to flourish unobstructed. The other is a state that systematically ignored and even actively subverted opportunities to terminate this antiquated institution in order to perpetuate the status quo.

Even so, it is still jarring to discover just how seamlessly the arguments of today's comfort women deniers (e.g., the 2007 *Washington Post* ad) meld with those of the government apologists who frustrated the League of Nations policy on Japanese trafficking in Asia some 80 years ago. The common thread uniting them is the assertion that all comfort

women—both those prostituted under state license and those commandeered by some combination of enticement, fraud, intimidation, or brute force—elected that fate willingly for personal gain.

Such thinking was firmly rejected more than 80 years ago, well before the advent of the Asia-Pacific conflict, by an influential segment of domestic and international opinion. When the current prime minister of Japan and revisionist political and intellectual leaders openly espouse the same discredited patriarchal ideology of the prewar era, they reveal an ignorance not only of history but also of fundamental human rights that is profoundly disturbing.

The denialists admit the existence of the military comfort system itself. But they are determined to conceal the coercive apparatus that undergird this institution, exculpate the wartime state and Imperial armed forces, and absolve the present government of any legal responsibility for the depredations of its war-era predecessors. It is our task as researchers to serve the cause of truth and justice by exposing the historical distortions and misrepresentations that inform revisionist arguments. We will continue to do so by illuminating the interconnections between the state-managed prostitution of women in pre-1945 Japan and the Imperial military's wartime system of sexual enslavement.

Editors

The Violence against Women in War Research Action Center (VAWW RAC) was founded in September 2011 to broaden the activities of the Violence against Women in War Network Japan (VAWW-NET Japan), the principal organizer of the Women's International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan's Military Sexual Slavery (December 2000). Espousing the ideals of non-violence, peace, and postcolonial justice, VAWW RAC is dedicated to creating a society that respects the human rights of women. Since its inception, the group has engaged in extensive research on the historical facts behind the "comfort women" system and worked toward a resolution of this issue that is acceptable to victim-survivors.

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The English editor

Robert Ricketts adapted this book from the Japanese based on a draft translation by Lingua Guild in Tokyo, translated supplementary materials, and edited the English volume. He taught intercultural relations at Wako University (Tokyo) until his retirement in 2015 and has written on Koreans in Japan under the American Occupation. He is co-translator and co-editor, with Sebastian Swann, of Takemae Eiji's *The Allied Occupation of Japan* (New York: Continuum, 2003).

Notes

¹ We wish to express our gratitude to Routledge (Taylor & Francis Group) for permission to reproduce Onozawa's seminal essay here with minor editorial changes.

² Kōno, Yōhei (1993). [On the Issue of "Comfort Women."](#) Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan

Official Website. August 4. [online] [Accessed 13 April 2018].

³ McDougall, G. J. (1998). *Contemporary forms of slavery: Systematic rape, sexual slavery and slavery-like practices during armed conflict*. Report to the U.N. Commission on Human Rights, Sub-commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities (Economic and Social Council), June 22. Geneva: Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, p. 28.

⁴ The comfort women system was found to have violated Japan's international treaty obligations under the 1907 Hague Convention Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land, the 1921 International Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women and Children, and the 1930 ILO Convention Concerning Forced Labor, in addition to the norms of customary international law encoded in the 1907 and 1926 covenants. See [The Women's international War Crimes Tribunal \(2001\)](#). *Judgment*. Part 1. December 4, pp. 182 ff. Quotation is from p. 262. [Accessed 13 April 2018].

⁵ The National Asian Peace Fund for Women (*Josei no tame no Ajia Heiwa Kokumin Kikin*) is generally rendered in English in abbreviated form as the Asian Women's Fund (*Ajia Josei Kikin*). This is the term employed by the fund's official home page (the Digital Museum) and by government officials, journalists, and academics of many political persuasions. We prefer the term National Fund (*Kokumin Kikin*), which strictly speaking is more accurate and avoids the paternalistic, self-congratulatory nuances of Asian Women's Fund. With this reservation, we follow established usage here and employ the familiar English term.

⁶ Between 2000 and 2006, Japan's leading opposition parties jointly submitted "wartime sexual coercion" bills to the House of Councilors on 12 occasions. The draft legislation would have obliged the government to apologize "for violating the honor and dignity" of the victims and provide them with formal state compensation. With a single exception, however, conservative lawmakers succeeded in keeping the bills from even reaching the legislative docket, and the proposals were never debated. See The Digital Museum: The Comfort Women and the Asian Women's Fund (2007). [Attempts at Legislation in the Japanese Diet](#). The Asian Women's Fund. [online] [Accessed 23 April 2018].

⁷ The bilateral ministerial agreement of December 2015 was reached without consulting South Korean victim-survivors. In the unsigned joint memorandum, Foreign Minister Kishida Fumio conveyed indirectly on behalf of Prime Minister Abe a vaguely worded apology acknowledging some degree of Imperial military culpability in the comfort women system. Tokyo agreed to make a one-time humanitarian contribution of \$1 billion (then US\$8.3 million) to Seoul on condition that the ROK government set up a foundation to help recover "the honor and dignity and [heal] the psychological wounds of all former comfort women." The agreement declared the comfort women issue thereby "resolved finally and irreversibly" and committed both Japan and South Korea to "refrain from accusing or criticizing [each other] regarding the issue in the international community, including at the United Nations." On January 18, 2016, however, Japan reverted to business as usual. Japanese Foreign Minister Kishida told the House of Councilors Budget Committee that, "The term 'sex slaves' doesn't match the facts and ... should not be used." Abe, also present, added that, "There is no written evidence to show that military and civilian authorities employed force directly [in procuring women].... The government's stance has not changed at all since the ... first Abe administration." A month later, on February 16, then Deputy Ministry for Foreign Affairs Sugiyama Shinsuke (now Japanese Ambassador to the United States) declared in an official

statement to the U.N. Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) that, "it is not appropriate ... to take up the comfort women issue in terms of the implementation of [Japan's] duties regarding the Convention [on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women]. The next day, he told the CEDAW that, "the forceful taking away" of women by Japanese administrative and military authorities "could not be confirmed in any of the documents that the Government of Japan was able to identify in [its 1993] study." The expression "sex slaves," he said, contradicts the facts. Asked by a member of the committee, "if Japan [is] so willing to solve the issue, would it send an apology to all comfort women," Sugiyama ignored the question altogether. The query was well founded, however. Chief Cabinet Secretary Kōno Yōhe's 1993 apology had been to all comfort women "irrespective of place of origin." Finally, on October 26, 2016, the South Korean foundation created to administer the Japanese humanitarian contribution, set up in July of that year, asked Abe to provide an official letter of apology to South Korean survivors, Abe replied dismissively that he was "not considering such an idea at all." For the Kishida and Abe statements, see [Session No. 3](#). House of Councilors Budget Committee, 190th National Diet. January 18, 2016. [online] [Accessed 4 May 2018]. For Sugiyama's statements to CEDAW, see [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women: Statement by the Head of the Delegation of Japan for the Seventh and Eights Periodic Reports](#). Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. February 16, 2016, p. 8. [pdf] [Accessed 4 May 2018].

⁸ Nishino, Rumiko, Kim, Puja, and Onozawa, Akane with the Violence against Women in War Research Action Center, eds. (2013). *"Ianfu" basshingu o koete—"Kōno danwa" to Nihon no sekinin* (Beyond "comfort women" bashing: the "Kōno statement" and Japan's legal responsibility), Tōkyō: Ōtsuki Shoten.

⁹ For those requiring readily accessible information, the Japanese government's original 1993 investigation of the comfort women system is available online in English, Japanese, and Korean at the website of the now defunct Asian Women's Fund (see below). Although incomplete, the military and related documents displayed there are essential reading for a deeper understanding of this problem. Digital Museum: The Comfort Women Issue and the Asian Women's Fund (2007). *The Japanese Military and Comfort Women*. [online] Available at: <http://www.awf.or.jp/1/index.html>. These documents form the basis of the 1993 Kōno statement. Since then, researchers have discovered more than 1,000 additional wartime military and government records related to the comfort women system—materials government officials refuse to acknowledge. Some of these are available in PDF format at the *Fight for Justice* web page: http://fightforjustice.info/?page_id=608. The site is maintained in Japanese, Korean, Chinese, and English, but documents are in Japanese only. Many of these documents have been found by Hayashi Hirofumi. See Hayashi (2015). *Nihongun "ianfu" mondai no kakushin* (The essence of the Japanese military "comfort women" problem). Tōkyō: Kadensha.

¹⁰ A recent attempt to place Japan's system of military sexual servitude in international perspective is Onozawa, Akane (2017). Sei baibai, Nihongun "ianfu" mondai to kokkashakai (The buying and selling of sex, the Japanese military "comfort women" problem, and the state actor). In: Rekishigaku Kenkyūkai hen [The Historical Science Society of Japan], ed. *Dai yonji gendai rekishigaku no seika to kadai* Fourth annual issue: accomplishments and problems of modern historiography), Vol. 2. Tōkyō: Seikibundō Shuppan, pp. 147-64.

¹¹ A new critique of the Japan-ROK agreement is Nakano, Toshio; Kim, Chang Rok; Kim, Puja;

Itagaki, Ryūta; Okamoto, Yūka, eds. (2017). "*Ianfu*" *mondai to mirai e no sekinin: Nikkan "Gōi" ni kōshite* (The "comfort women" issue and responsibility to the future: challenging the Japan-ROK "agreement"). Tōkyō: Ōtsuki Shoten. Five of the authors writing in *Denying the Comfort Women* have contributed essays to this volume.

¹² Park, Yuha (2006). *Wakai no tame ni: kyōkasho, ianfu, Yasukuni, Takeshima* (Towards reconciliation: textbooks, comfort women, Yasukuni Shrine, the Liancourt Rocks). Translated by Satō Hisashi. Tōkyō: Heibonsha, and Park, Yuha (2014). *Teikoku no ianfu: shokuminchi shihai to kioku no tataikai* (Comfort women of the Empire: the battle over colonial rule and memory), Tōkyō: Asahi Shimbun Shuppan.

¹³ Song Shin-do passed away on December 16, 2017 at the age of 95.

¹⁴ Zeid, R. A. H. (2016). [Statement by Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, to the Human Rights Council's 31st Session](#). Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, March 10. [online] [Accessed on 14 April 2018]. See also the March 11, 2016 report of U.N. human rights experts on discrimination against women, transitional justice, and torture issued immediately after Zeid's statement. Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (2016). [Japan/S. Korea: The long awaited apology to "comfort women" victims is yet to come](#). March 11. [pdf] [Accessed 14 April 2018].

¹⁵ United Nations Committee Against Torture (2017). [Concluding Observations on the Combined Third to Fifth Periodic Reports of the Republic of Korea](#). United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. May 12, p. 13. [pdf] [Accessed on 14 April 2018].

¹⁶ Committee for Historical Facts (2007). THE FACTS. *The Washington Post*, June 14. This public comment was released toward the end of Prime Minister Abe Shinzō's first term (2006-2007) and signed or assented to by more than 60 prominent revisionists. The ruling Liberal Democratic Party contributed 29 "assenters," but 13 belonged to the centrist Democratic Party of Japan. The advertisement was written and endorsed by the Committee for Historical Facts, which was responding to a full-page ad in the *Washington Post* of April 26, 2007, paid for by the Washington Coalition for Comfort Women Issues and entitled "The Truth about Comfort Women." April's ad had been timed to coincide with Prime Minister Abe's visit to Washington, D.C. on April 26 and 27. The Washington Coalition accused the Abe Cabinet of "retreating from previous statements of contrition and launching a campaign to deny that the government was directly involved" in the mobilization of comfort women. The larger backdrop to the dueling ads, however, was an imminent U.S. House of Representatives resolution calling on Japan to admit full responsibility for military sexual slavery and make just restitution to survivors (the resolution was passed on July 5, 2007). Five years later, the Committee for Historical Facts placed a nearly identical advertisement in the *New Jersey Star-Ledger* on November 4, 2012 almost two months before the second Abe administration took office. The ad abridged the list of "facts" from five to three, retaining the accusation that the comfort women were licensed prostitutes (Fact 3). This time, Abe himself and nine of his soon-to-be Cabinet members signed on as "assenters." The ad was entitled "Yes, we remember the facts." It was intended to rebut a large poster erected in October in New York City's Times Square under the heading "Do You Remember?" and calling on Japan to apologize for the comfort women system (the same text had also appeared as an ad in the *New York Times* in May of that year).

¹⁷ In occupied Korea, the legal age for women was 17, one year younger than in Japan proper. Regulations regarding the rights of prostituted women were also stricter than in the home

islands. These differences are the subject of ongoing research. See Fujinaga, T. (2004). *Shokuminchi Chōsen ni okeru kōshō seido no kakuritsu katei* (The establishment of the licensed prostitution system in colonial Korea). *20 seiki kenkyū*. No. 5, pp. 13-36; (2010). Song, Y. (2010). *Seiki tenkanki no gunjisenryō to "baishun" kanri* (Japanese occupation at the turn of the century and the control of prostitution). In: Y. Song and Y. Kim, eds., *Guntai to seibōryoku: Chōsen Hantō no 20 seiki* (The military and sexual violence: the Korean Peninsula in the 20th century). Tokyo: Gendaishiryō Shuppan, pp. 127-82; Song, Y. (2015). *Shokuminchiki Chōsen no kōshō seido* (Colonial Korea and the system of licensed prostitution). In: Violence against Women in War Research Action Center (VAWW RAC) with R. Nishino and A. Onozawa, eds. *Nihonjin "ianfu": aikokushin to jinshin baibai to* (Japanese "comfort women": patriotism and human trafficking). Tokyo: Gendai Shokan, pp. 52-69; and Kim, P. (2014). *Shokuminchi Chōsen ni okeru yūkaku no ishoku to tenkai* (The transfer and development of the licensed quarters in colonial Korea). *Shirīzu yūkaku shakai*. Vol. 2, pp. 261-91.

¹⁸ *Shōgi* were licensed prostitutes permitted to charge a fee in exchange for sexual intercourse with a client. *Geigi*, or geisha, were entertainers trained through long apprenticeships to sing, dance, and play the samisen. They were allowed to charge a venue fee for their cultural skills, but most also furnished sex to paying clients on the side. *Shakufu* were prostitutes working in Japanese-style eating and drinking establishments. They were not legally licensed to sell their bodies, but the authorities turned a blind eye to their prostitution. See Chūō Shokugyō Shōkai Jimukyoku [Secretariat, Central Employment Placement Service] (1926). *Gei/shōgi/shakufu shōkaigyō ni kansuru chōsa* (Survey of employment placement agencies for geisha, licensed prostitutes, and barmaids). Reprinted in Tanigawa, K. (1971). *Kindai minshū no kiroku 3: shōfu* (A record of the Japanese people in the modern era (3): prostitutes). Tokyo: Shinjinbutsu Ōraisha, pp. 373-438.

¹⁹ Kawashima, T. (1951). *Jinshin baibai no hōritsu kankei* (1): *Geishōgi no marugakae keiyaku no kōryoku ni tsuite* (Laws related to human trafficking (1): the binding power of comprehensive contracts for licensed prostitutes and geisha). *Hōgaku Kyōkai zasshi*. Nos. 68-67, February, pp. 1-44.

²⁰ See Maki, H. (1971). *Jinshin baibai* (Human trafficking). Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, pp. 222-23, and generally, Onozawa, A. (2010). *Kindai Nihon shakai to kōshō seido: minshushi to kokusai kankeishi no shiten kara* (Modern Japanese society and the system of licensed prostitution: from the viewpoint of a people's history and the history of international relations). Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan.

²¹ Regarding the situation in England, see Walkowitz, J. R. (1982). *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 13-31. For France, see Corbin, A. (1978). *Les Filles de noce*. Paris: Éditions Aubier-Montaigne. Reading these accounts, one has the strong impression that English and French prostitutes were indeed more independent than Japan's *shōgi*, *geigi*, and *shakufu*.

²² Arakawa, S. (2001). *Guntai to chiiki* (The military and regional society). Tokyo: Aoki Shoten, p. 120, and Matsushita, T. (2013). *Guntai o yūchi seiyo: Rikugun to toshi keisei* (Let's invite in the military: the Japanese army and urban formation). Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, pp. 210-27. In Manchuria and the colonies, in particular, brothels and the military were closely associated from the start, but further research is needed. See, for instance, Song Y. and Kim, Y., eds. (2010). *Guntai to seibōryoku: Chōsen Hantō no 20 seiki* (The military and sexual

violence: the Korean Peninsula in the 20th century). Tokyo: Gendaishiryō Shuppan, pp. 28-91.

²³ Josei no tame no Ajia Heiwa Kokumin Kikin (The Asian Women's Fund), ed. (1997). *Seifu chōsa "jūgun ianfu" kankei shiryō shūsei (Compendium of materials relating to the wartime comfort women issue: Government of Japan survey)* Vol. 1. Tokyo: Ryūkei Shosha, pp. 3-112; Nagai, K. (2015). Nihongun no ianjo seisaku ni tsuite (The Japanese military's comfort station policy). In: VAWW RAC with R. Nishino and A. Onozawa (Japanese "comfort women"), pp. 86-108; and Onozawa, A. (2014). *Geigi, shōgi, shakufu kara mita senji taisei: Nihonjin "ianfu" mondai to wa nani ka (Japan's wartime regime as seen by geisha, licensed prostitutes, and barmaids: the controversy over Japanese "comfort women")*. In: Rekishigaku Kenkyūkai (The Historical Science Society of Japan) and Nihonshi Kenkyūkai (The Japanese Society for Historical Studies), eds. *"Ianfu" mondai o/kara kangaeru (Thinking about the "comfort women" issue and its implications)*. Tōkyō: Iwanami Shoten, pp. 96-97.

²⁴ Onozawa, A. (2014), pp. 89-129.

²⁵ See Nagasawa, K. (1983). *Kankō ianjo (The Hankou comfort stations)*, Tokyo: Tosho Shuppan, pp. 51-70, and Yamada, S. (1978). *Bukan Heitan: Shina hakengun ian kakaricho no shuki (The Wuhan Commissariat: a memoir by a subsection chief of the [Imperial Japanese] China Expeditionary Army in charge of comfort stations)*. Tokyo: Tosho Shuppansha, pp. 70-85.

²⁶ Representative works include Senda, K. (1985). *Jūgun ianfu Keiko: Chūgoku, Gatō, Biruma—shisen o samayotta onna no shōgen (Keiko the military comfort woman—China, Guadalcanal, Burma: the testimonial of a woman who has been to hell and back)*. Tōkyō: Kōbunsha; Senda, K. (1978). *Jūgun ianfu (Military comfort women)*. Tokyo: San'ichi Shobō; and Shiota, S. (1971). *Maria no sankā (Maria's song of praise)*. Tokyo: Nihon Kirisutokyōdan Shuppankyoku. It bears repeating that while a sizeable number of Japanese comfort women were indeed licensed by the state, many others had nothing to do with prostitution, institutionalized or otherwise.

²⁷ Hirota, K. (1975). *Shōgen kiroku—jūgun ianfu kangofu: senjō ni ikita onna no dōkoku (Oral history: military comfort women and nurses—lamentations of the women who lived at the front)*. Shinjinbutsu Ōraisha, p. 11, and Hirota, K. (2015). Nihonjin "ianfu" no sengo: Kikumarū-san no ba'ai. In: VAWW RAC with R. Nishino and A. Onozawa (Japanese "comfort women"), pp. 194-205. See also Fight for Justice. *Were "Comfort Women" "Licensed Prostitutes?"* [online] [Accessed May 15, 2017].

²⁸ A few Japanese comfort women even attended gatherings of their former military units' social clubs after the war. Refer also to Nishino, R. (2012). Nihongun "ianfu" mondai o saikōsei suru: Nihonjin "ianfu" to jendā (Reconstructing the military "comfort women" issue: gender and the Japanese "comfort women"). *Dōjidaishi kenkyū*. Vol. 5, p. 72, and Senda (1978), pp. 201-10.

²⁹ Senda, K. (1985), pp. 146-58, 261-77, and (1978), pp. 133-66. See also Nishino, R. (2003). *Senjō no "ianfu": Ramo zenmetsusen o ikinobita Pak Yōng-sim no kiseki ("Comfort woman" on the frontline: the journey of Pak Yōng-sim, a survivor of the destruction of Ramo)*. Tokyo: Akashi Shoten, pp. 102-15, 136-56.

³⁰ League of Nations (1932). *Report to the Council. Commission of Enquiry into Traffic in Women and Children in the East*, CTFE/Orient 39 (1). Geneva: League of Nations, pp. 522-29. It should be noted that the Japanese Penal Code of 1907 mirrored the concerns of the 1910 International Convention for the Suppression of the White Slave Traffic. The code's Article

226 stated clearly that, "Whosoever shall have, for the purpose of transporting him or her out of the Empire, allured or kidnapped a person shall be punished with limited penal servitude for a period of not less than two years. The same penalty shall be inflicted upon whosoever shall have, with intent to carry him or her out of the Empire, sold a person or transported to a foreign country a person who has been sold or kidnapped." Based on this provision, in 1935 and 1937, Japan's Great Court of Cassation, the equivalent of today's Supreme Court, upheld guilty verdicts by lower courts for brokers attempting to kidnap or fraudulently deceive young women (including a minor) for trafficking to sex venues in Manchuria and Shanghai. These cases were exceptional, however, and after 1937, Japanese courts turned a blind eye to the illegal recruitment and trafficking of comfort women within Japan. See Maeda, Akira (2018). *Insight on the Issues: Guilty Verdicts for the Traffickers of Comfort Women—The Shizuoka and Nagasaki Incidents*. In: Rumiko Nishino, Puja Kim, and Akane Onozawa, eds. *Denying the Comfort Women: The Japanese State's Assault on Historical Truth*, London: Routledge, pp. 87-90.

³¹ In 1927, wary of international criticism, Japan lifted its reservation, nominally raising the legal age to 21 in line with the 1921 anti-trafficking convention. In fact, however, Japan's licensing system was never brought into line with the anti-trafficking law and retained the age of 18 as its criterion.

³² Kokumin Junketsu Dōmei [National Purity League] (1936). *Haishō ketsugi ichiran* (List of prefectures adopting resolutions for the abolition of state prostitution), September, and Kakuseikai [Purity Society] (1938). *Haishō ketsugi ichiran* (List of resolutions for the abolition of state prostitution, excerpt), September. These documents are reproduced in Suzuki, Y., ed. (1998). *Nihon josei undō shiryō shūshū* (Compendium of documents relating to the Japanese women's movement). Vol. 9 (Human rights and the abolition of prostitution, Part 2). Tokyo: Fuji Shuppan, pp. 388-398, 398-401.

³³ By the end of the Asia-Pacific War in 1945, 15 prefectures (Gunma, Saitama, Akita, Nagasaki, Aomori, Toyama, Mie, Miyazaki, Ibaraki, Kagawa, Ehime, Tokushima, Tottori, Ishikawa, and Wakayama) had prohibited the licensing system. The abolition movement organ *Kakusei* (Purity), published in Tokyo by the Kakuseikai (Purity Society) from 1911 to 1945, traces this development. In 1995, Fuji Shuppan reprinted the entire series in 33 volumes.

³⁴ Onozawa, A. (2010), pp. 143-48.

³⁵ League of Nations (1934). *Summary of the Report to the Council*. Commission of Enquiry into Traffic in Women and Children in the East, Geneva: League of Nations (CTFE 606), February 20, pp. 12, 17.

³⁶ League of Nations (1934), p. 10.

³⁷ League of Nations (1934), pp. 24-25.

³⁸ Onozawa (2010), pp. 153-79. Looking at the European campaign to prohibit trafficking in women, we find many problems. For example, the movement was partially motivated by the desire to protect the virtue of "girls from good families." The post-World War I colonial powers set out to abolish licensed prostitution in their colonies largely for the sake of appearances. Conversely, Japan outlawed neither advance cash payments, nor the licensing of prostituted women and concessionaires, nor compulsory medical exams. As we have seen, it maintained all of these onerous practices, both in the home islands and in its colonies and overseas mandates. Just as European countries were proceeding to ban legalized prostitution (whatever their reasons for doing so), Japan distinguished itself by heading in the opposition

direction, rapidly expanding the domestic licensing system to its Korean colony following the 1910 annexation of that country.

³⁹ See the discussion in Onozawa (2010), pp. 200-01, 213.

⁴⁰ Naimushō [Home Ministry], ed. (1931). *Fujin Jidō Baibai Jitchi Chōsa Kaigi gijiroku: Tōyō ni okeru Fujin Jidō Baibai Jitchi Chōsa Iin —Rokugatsu 12, 13, 16*. Tokyo Naimudaijin Kantei ni okeru Chōsakakaigi gijiroku yōyaku (Summary of minutes of the Committee on Matters concerning the Commission of Enquiry into Traffic in Women and Children in the East: by members of the Committee at the Home Office in Tokyo, June 12, 13, 16). Vol. 3. Tokyo: Naimushō, p. 63 [Available at: Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan].

⁴¹ Naimushō (1931). *Summary of Minutes*, pp. 93-94.

⁴² Naimushō (1931). *Summary of Minutes*, p. 63.

⁴³ See Naimushō (1932). *Tōyō e no Fujin oyobi Jidō Baibai Kakuchō Jitchi Chōsa: Nihon ni kansuru hōkoku* (Enquiry into the Spread of Traffic in Women and Children in the East: report on Japan). July 1. Tōkyō: Naimushō, pp. 15, 21-22, 37, 47-48, and Naimushō (1932). *Kokusai Renmei Fujin Jidō Baibai Chōsa Iinkai no Nihon ni kansuru hōkokusho ni taisuru Teikoku Seifu ikensho* (The Imperial Government's position paper on the Japan report by the League of Nations Commission of Enquiry into Traffic in Women and Children in the East). August, pp. 1-2, 4-6, 18-20. These documents are included in *Kokusai Renmei fujin jidō mondai ikken: Tōyō ni okeru Fujin Baibai Jitchi Chōsa no ken (Honpō kankei chōsa hōkokusho narabi ni Teikoku ikensho)* [A matter pertaining to the question of the League of Nations enquiry into trafficking in women and children: the Enquiry into Traffic in Women and Children in the East (Enquiry report on Japan together with the Imperial Government's position paper)] Available at: Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. See also Kokusai Renmei Jimukyoku Tokyo Shikyoku [Tokyo Office, Japan Section of the League of Nations], ed. *Kokusai Renmei Tōyō Fujin Jidō Chōsa Iinkai hōkokusho gaiyō* (Outline of the report by the League of Nations Commission on Women and Children in the East). March 15, 1933, pp. 1-27. This document is included in the collection by Fuji Shuppan, ed. (2013): *Baibaishun mondai shiryō shūsei: senzenki* (Compendium of documents relating to the problem of prostitution and trafficking: prewar period), Vol. 21, pp.192-198.

⁴⁴ Naimushō Keihokyoku [Police Affairs Bureau, Home Ministry] (1935). *Kōshō seido taisaku* (Countermeasures for licensed prostitution). September. Reprinted in Suzuki, Y., ed. (1998). *Nihon josei undō shiryō shūshū* (Compendium of documents relating to the Japanese women's movement). Vol. 9 (Human rights/abolition of prostitution, Part 2). Tōkyō: Fuji Shuppan, pp. 303-08.