

Clemson University

TigerPrints

All Theses

Theses

8-2024

A Retrospective of "Comfort Culture:" a Paradigmatic Study on the Creation of the "Comfort Women" System Constructed by the Imperial Japanese Military From 1932 to 1945

Emma Nicolini

Clemson University, enicoli@clemson.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://open.clemson.edu/all_theses



Part of the [Asian History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Nicolini, Emma, "A Retrospective of "Comfort Culture:" a Paradigmatic Study on the Creation of the "Comfort Women" System Constructed by the Imperial Japanese Military From 1932 to 1945" (2024). *All Theses*. 4380.

https://open.clemson.edu/all_theses/4380

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses at TigerPrints. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Theses by an authorized administrator of TigerPrints. For more information, please contact kokeefe@clemson.edu.

A RETROSPECTIVE OF “COMFORT CULTURE:” A PARADIGMATIC STUDY ON
THE CREATION OF THE “COMFORT WOMEN” SYSTEM CONSTRUCTED BY
THE IMPERIAL JAPANESE MILITARY FROM 1932 TO 1945

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Masters of Arts
History

by
Emma Caroline Nicolini
August 2024

Accepted by:
Dr. Ryan Hilliard, Committee Chair
Dr. Archana Venkatesh
Dr. Douglas Seefeldt

ABSTRACT

From 1932 to 1945, the Imperial Japanese military sexually enslaved approximately two hundred thousand Asian women from Japan, Korea, China, Indonesia, Taiwan, and the Philippines. This institution was known as the comfort women system, which the Imperial Japanese government created to ensure the sexual and mental health of Imperial Japanese military personnel. This provision of comfort for Imperial Japanese military personnel was enabled by cultural influences introduced in the Early Modern period of Japan, which normalized a contemptuous attitude toward sexual labor. This blend of Early Modern Japan, as well as the beliefs that facilitated the need for comfort women, creates what this thesis contends is the “comfort culture” of Japan. This retrospective study of the comfort women phenomenon includes the continuities of stigmatic conduct against sex workers, the national entity of Japan, and political sponsorship of sex work. It coincided with the discontinuities that manifested throughout Japan's imperial period, such as nationalistic ideologies, the Japanese economy, and imperial notions of race, which contributed to the creation of the comfort women system. The effects of this system did not stop following the conclusion of World War II as contemptuous attitudes towards sexual laborers relayed into postwar memory, which promoted a narrative that associated the former comfort women as sex workers rather than sex slaves.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my parents, Angie Walker Nicolini and Peter Joseph Nicolini. Thank you both for your constant love and support throughout my academic journey.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Ryan Hilliard, Dr. Archana Venkatesh, and Dr. Douglas Seefeldt, for their continued support throughout this process. This thesis would not have been possible without your guidance and support. I would also like to thank Dr. Stephanie Hassell for encouraging me to continue this topic from my time as her student as an undergraduate. Lastly, I would like to thank the other members of my graduate cohort who played a role in helping me get through the writing process of this thesis.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
TITLE PAGE	i
ABSTRACT.....	ii
DEDICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
LIST OF TABLES.....	v
LIST OF FIGURES	vi
 CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION:	1
Continuities vs. Discontinuities	4
Thesis Framework.....	12
Conclusion	14
II. COMMODIFYING COMFORT IN IMPERIAL JAPAN.....	16
The Influence of the Tokugawa	19
The Sakoku Period.....	21
Sanctioned Safe Spaces or Sanctioned Cages.....	23
Giving the Green Light for Red-Light Districts	25
Inescapable Contracts	27
The National Influence of Sex Work	29
The Karayukisan of the Meiji Period.....	32
An Opportunity to Survive.....	33
The Rise to Imperial Power in the Twentieth Century	37
III. FAILURE TO FOLLOW.....	43
Initiating War with China	46
The First Official “Comfort” Station	49
The “Comfort” Station Expansion.....	53

Table of Contents (Continued).....	Page
Methods of Recruitment	57
The Variations of “Comfort” Stations	62
Statistics	66
IV. <i>DAMNATIO MEMORIAE</i>	71
Etymology	76
Exploiting the Stigmatized.....	80
The Need to Remember	84
The Downfall of the Collective.....	88
The Death That Brought the Reckoning	93
Educational War.....	95
V. CONCLUSION.....	101
BIBLIOGRAPHY	108

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1.1 Statistics collected by the consulate based on Japanese subjects in 1939	68

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1.1 Two Dutchmen survey Nagasaki from Dejima	29
1.2 A Maruyama <i>yūjo</i> looks through a telescope at passing ships in Nagasaki Harbor	30
1.3 Osaki, Ohana, and Tsugiyo	1.3
2.1 Condom given to Japanese soldiers at comfort stations	51
2.2 Concerning the recruitment of women for military comfort stations	60
2.3 Japanese soldiers waiting in line at a “comfort station”	63
3.1 Korean comfort women who survived and were protected in Lameng, Yunnan	73
3.2 “Hwang Keum-ju speaks in the talk of “The Story of the Comfort Woman”	74
3.3 The Arrival of Yoshitsune (<i>Yoshitsune sanchaku</i>)/Camp at Kisegawa (<i>Kisegawa no jin</i>)	78
3.4 Lady Kusunoki	79
3.5 Kim Bok-dong in April 2014 touches the Statue of Peace	84
3.6 “Story of a Prostitute”	87
3.7 “Escape at Dawn”	87
3.8 Kim Hak-sun testifying about her experience as a former comfort woman	95

List of Figures (Continued).....	Page
4.1 Yong Soo-lee giving her testimony to the US House of Representatives.....	102

INTRODUCTION

THE HISTORICAL, SOCIAL, AND POLITICAL EFFECTS OF “COMFORT CULTURE”

I turned thirteen in 1942 and I began menstruating that year. Mrs. Shanben smiled at me. “Congratulations!” she said, “You are a grownup now.” I remember that it was a summer day and a lot of Japanese troops came to the Shanbens’ house. I saw them picking out good-looking girls and mumbling something. Mrs. Shanben told me to change into a Japanese robe that had a bumpy sash at the back and to go to that large room. Before I could figure out what was going on, I was pushed over to the Japanese soldiers. I was frightened. A Japanese soldier pulled me over, ripped off my clothes, and threw me on the wide bed. I resisted with all my strength. My wrist was injured during the fight and the wound left a scar that is still visible now. The Japanese soldier pressed my belly with both of his knees and hit my head with the hilt of his sword while crushing me under his body. He raped me.

- Late Chinese comfort woman survivor Lei Guiying, interviewed in 2006.¹

The Imperial Japanese military constructed an institution that sexually enslaved approximately two hundred thousand women from Japan, Korea, China, Indonesia, Taiwan, and the Philippines from 1932 to 1945. This organization is known as the *jūgun ianfu* system—also known as the military “comfort women” system. This institution was theorized, constructed, and regulated by the Imperial Japanese military and sanctioned by the Imperial Japanese government. The establishment of the comfort women system was to allegedly control the spread of venereal disease among soldiers, promote a “healthy” Japanese body, and prevent rapes by Japanese soldiers on local women in Japanese-occupied territories.² However, with these being the claimed intentions for the institution,

¹ Peipei Qiu, Su Zhiliang, and Chen Lifei, *Chinese Comfort Women: Testimonies From Imperial Japan's Sex Slaves* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013), 86.

² Yoshimi Yoshiaki, *Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery in the Japanese Military During World War II*, trans. Suzanne O'Brien (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 54.

it led to a form of systematic rape. Women like Lei Guiying were deceived, coerced, kidnapped, sold, or conscripted into this system of government-sanctioned military sexual enslavement for the purpose of providing “comfort” for the Imperial Japanese troops and officers from 1932 to 1945.³ This study is about the experiences of those women.

The comfort women issue has gained social and political recognition over the last three decades. Prior to the social activism that progressed since the 1990s, popular culture representations of the comfort women and the comfort women system put forth a narrative that legitimated the system as a consensual institution of regulated sex work. These representations existed in various forms in Japanese culture as far back as the Early Modern period (1603-1867) with their “pleasure districts.”⁴ However, the conversation of the comfort women system gained traction in the 1990s following former Korean comfort woman Kim Hak-sun publicly testifying about her experience as a former comfort woman enslaved by the Imperial Japanese military.⁵ Kim’s testimony challenged the ruling narrative that comfort women were explicitly sex workers and paved the way for the Redress Movement, which demands reparations and government recognition to this day.

I argue that a comfort culture — one that ensured the availability of emotional, physical, and sexual comfort to Japanese men by exploiting and commodifying the woman's body — developed and manifested itself in various forms over time in Japanese

³ Yoshiaki, *Comfort Women*, 29.

⁴ Lesley Downer, *The Secret History of the Geisha: Women of the Pleasure Districts* (New York: Broadway Books, 2001), 36.

⁵ “How did the Comfort Women Issue come to light?” Digital Museum: The Comfort Women Issue and the Asian Women’s Fund, <https://www.awf.or.jp/e2/survey.html>

social and political institutions, ultimately enabling the creation, sanctioning, and regulation of the comfort women system in the 1930s and 1940s. In the Early Modern period, the Japanese government established regulated “safe spaces” for those in the entertainment industry. As patrons of this government-sanctioned system, Japanese men were able to express their sexuality in new ways that were deemed both legal and healthy. In the Modern period (1868-1926), Japan developed as an industrial, militaristic, and imperial power by exploiting the sexual economy provided by the unofficial institution known as the *karayukisan*⁶ system. This institution was a normalized form of international sexual labor that allowed the Imperial Japanese government to receive a rapid influx of economic revenue from patrons around the world through the profit of the commodification of the Japanese woman’s body. Further, the most violent and exploitative expression of the comfort culture manifested itself in the comfort women system active between 1932 and 1945, an amalgamation of the historical institutions — official and unofficial — that previously relied on the continuous exploitation of the female body in the forms of licensed sex work and sexual enslavement. This government-sanctioned form of sexual enslavement, the comfort women system, distinctly operated on an international scale and was regulated by the Japanese Imperial military. By demonstrating how the Japanese comfort culture between 1603 and 1926 set the framework for the establishment of the comfort women system, this thesis seeks to

⁶ Tomoko Yamazaki, *Sandakan Brothel No. 8: An Episode in the History of Lower-Class Japanese Women*, trans. Karen Colligan-Taylor (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2015), 36; the term *karayukisan* translates to English as “woman going to China/overseas.”

uncover the reality of that system as an institution of military sexual enslavement, pushing against the ruling narrative that frames it as a licensed sex work.

Continuities vs. Discontinuities

The institution of sexual enslavement, that is, the comfort women system, was allegedly intended to serve as a system that could control sexual health, sexual activity, and political reputation. However, these claims encompass the continuities of the Japanese government's political sponsorship of sex work, stigmatization of sex workers and sexual labor, and preserving their national entity. These continuous themes are present throughout this thesis, as they represent central threads that influence Japanese society's operation and conduct throughout the *durée* of this study. Further, they will pinpoint the discontinuities of national identity, nationalistic ideologies, imperial notions of race, and the transforming relationship of politically approved sex work.

The establishment of the comfort women system in 1932 was the byproduct of national ideologic beliefs that demanded the orderly sanctioning of productivity, in this study's case, the political sponsorship of sex work for Imperial Japanese military men. The construction of the comfort women system initially was to control the Japanese body, specifically the Japanese man. In 1932, the Imperial Japanese military was a powerful force that was motivated to implement their socio-political beliefs and indoctrinate the rest of Asia into their nationalistic ideology of *kokutai*.

The concept of *kokutai* translates to "national body," which embodies a sense of unity among Japanese citizens, connecting them to the emperor's sovereignty.⁷ Therefore, promoting *kokutai* was a political tactic to incorporate other Asian countries into the Japanese state's empire and lay foundational relations that benefitted the empire. The national body is comparable to Dr. Rana Mitter's research in his monograph *Forgotten Ally* (2014), in which he introduced his perception of this tactic as "pan-Asianism."⁸ The civil relations that the Japanese attempted to gain during their campaign was a form of caution that government officials typically anticipate during wartime, sexual violence. Japan's intentions of indoctrinating Asia into their socio-political ideological beliefs Imperial Japan's "pan-Asianism," as proposed by Mitter, forged the path that enabled the Imperial Japanese government to construct an institution of sexual slavery. This level of political influence was only possible due to the weaponization of their national ideology, *kokutai*, as they relied on their nationalistic principles to justify their mobilization of hundreds of thousands of Asian women from 1932 to 1945.

Military mobilization at the scale of the Imperial Japanese military in 1932 raised concern for the military officials. At this time, Japan established the puppet state of Manchukuo, previously known as Manchuria, and initiated war with the Chinese government by seizing the city of Shanghai. Following Japan's occupation of Shanghai, there was a rapid influx of Japanese military personnel in a condensed space that caused issues for the Imperial Japanese officials, the Foreign Ministry, and the citizens of

⁷ Robert King Hall, ed. *Kokutai no Hongi: Cardinal Principles of the National Entity of Japan*, trans. John Owen Gauntlett (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949), 2

⁸ Rana Mitter, *Forgotten Ally: China's World War II 1937-1945* (New York: Mariner Books, 2014), 54.

Shanghai.⁹ There was an overbearing population of Japanese military personnel and an insufficient number of licensed brothels in Shanghai that were legal or that Japanese soldiers were permitted to visit—allegedly for precautionary reasons, as some of the women contracted venereal disease.¹⁰ The lack of licensed sexual availability for the Japanese soldiers led to sexual atrocities against the women in Shanghai. In March 1932, Vice Chief of Staff of the Shanghai Expeditionary Force, Okamura Yasuji, relayed a request to the Nagasaki Prefecture's governor to provide women for his plan to establish Shanghai's “comfort stations.” Okamura's urgency to establish the comfort station in Shanghai was due to the rapid growth of rape incidents committed by Imperial Japanese military personnel against Chinese women, as well as controlling the motives of the Japanese soldiers.¹¹

The comfort women system was a demonstration of concentrated militarized masculinity that is significant to the concept of comfort culture. Robert Kramm discusses his assessment of the “militarized culture of masculinity” in postwar Japan. He compares the influence of “ideal masculinity” on military bases to the notion of masculinity in the sense of preservation.¹² Kramm’s analysis focuses on the concept of hegemonic masculinity that was entrenched in U.S.-occupied Japan, which threatened the Japanese’s masculinity in the form of inadequacy from 1945 to 1952.¹³ This thesis aligns with his

⁹ Yoshiaki, *Comfort Women*, 45.

¹⁰ Yoshiaki, *Comfort Women*, 45.

¹¹ Yoshiaki, *Comfort Women*, 45.

¹² Robert Kramm, *Sanitized Sex: Regulating Prostitution, Venereal Disease, and Intimacy in Occupied Japan* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 5.

¹³ Kramm, *Sanitized Sex*, 6-7.

assessment of militarized masculinity and the militarized culture of masculinity through the identification of the roots of the concept of comfort culture. However, my analysis focused on the culture that relied on nationalistic and philosophical ideologies in Japan before the Imperial era (1868-1945).

Institutional regulations around sex work in Japanese history are prevalent in the concept of comfort culture, as the existence of multiple forms of licensed sex work was pertinent to the function of Japanese society and the rise of imperialism in the Early Modern and Modern periods of Japan. The initial forms of regulated sex work in Japan previously introduced were the “pleasure districts” established in the Early Modern period. The aforementioned “pleasure districts” were government-sanctioned safe spaces that entertained men, particularly aristocrats and samurai, from 1603 to 1867. Dr. Lesley Downer argues that sexual pleasure was at the forefront of Japanese culture.¹⁴ Although not aligning with the discussion of comfort women, Downer’s *The Secret History of the Geisha* (2001) provides contextualization of Japan’s overarching culture in male sexuality and the government’s relationship with occupational sex work during the Early Modern period. This period is essential to the concept of comfort culture, as the philosophical ideologies are rooted in this version of Japanese society.

Early Modern Japan (1603-1867) was under a period of self-isolating foreign policy known as *sakoku*, which prohibited entrance and departure from the state of

¹⁴ Lesley Downer, *The Secret History of the Geisha: Women of the Pleasure Districts* (New York: Broadway Books, 2001), 36.

Japan.¹⁵ This period of Japan was officially under the rule of the imperial family but adhered to the national policies enacted by the shogunate. The significance of this period in Japan is the policies implemented by Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu, which demanded a “structurally pure” ideology that stems from Ieyasu’s radical outlook on Confucianism. His reign as shogun of Japan organized a social hierarchy that withstood his entire patrilineal line. Ieyasu’s social hierarchy stemmed from his radical understanding of Confucius’ social order written in his *Book of Rites*, which states father and son, older sibling and younger sibling, husband and wife, ruler and subject, friend, and friend.¹⁶ However, Ieyasu’s understanding of Confucius’ philosophy organized the hierarchy as emperor, shogun, aristocrats, samurai, peasants/farmers, artisans, and merchants. This system was organized according to what each class tangibly offered to provide to society’s function.¹⁷

The social structure of Early Modern Japan offers insight into the organization of Japanese society, which permeates its history into the creation of the comfort women system. This social structure's essential aspect derives from the Confucian concept of "filial piety," which Daniel Gardener defines as "obedience to the parental authority by respecting their wishes and to care for their well-being."¹⁸ In Tokugawa Japan, filial piety was applied primarily to Japanese subjects to obey the shogunate and the emperor

¹⁵ Karen Colligan-Taylor, “Translator’s Introduction,” in *Sandakan Brothel No. 8: an episode in the history of lower-class Japanese women*, ed. Tomoko Yamazaki, trans. Karen Colligan-Taylor (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2015), 11.

¹⁶ Daniel K. Gardener, *Confucianism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 26.

¹⁷ Downer, *Women of the Pleasure Quarters*, 34.

¹⁸ Gardener, *Confucius*, 26.

loyally. However, this concept is recognizable in lower-class communities, where young girls were filial daughters to their families, typically seen in indentured servitude. The form of indentured servitude in this period examined in this thesis presents itself as young girls being sold or adopted into housekeeping and an apprentice in a geisha or tea house.

The young girls who became indentured servants in geisha and tea houses typically entered the entertainment industry once they came of age. The training process the girls began early in their apprenticeship provided them with education on how to comfort a patron musically, converse correctly, and sometimes provide sexual services. Therefore, comfort culture is introduced to these young girls early, cementing their role in Japanese society as individuals meant to provide comfort—in various forms—to Japanese men. This concept continues into the Modern period (1868-1926), although it is an institutionally different system known as the *karayukisan*.

The system of the *karayukisan* manifested in Modern Japan, also known as the Meiji period, following the end of Japan's self-isolation period. The end of *sakoku* brought Japan a period of rapid political, social, economic, and national transformation. This discontinuity reconstructed Japan's national identity as it integrated with the industrialized age. Historian Tomoko Yamazaki argues in her monograph *Sandakan Brothel No. 8* (2015) that the *karayukisan* primarily contributed to Japan's success as it became an imperial power in the late nineteenth century.¹⁹ Imperial Japan benefited from sexual labor economically, as they had a constant influx of revenue with the hyper

¹⁹ Tomoko Yamazaki, *Sandakan Brothel No. 8: an episode in the history of lower-class Japanese women*, trans. Karen Colligan-Taylor (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2015), 36.

mobilization of Japanese women being sent abroad to work as sexual laborers. The mobility of this group of women demonstrates the exploitative nature of Imperial Japan while simultaneously socially denigrating the women when or if they returned to Japanese society.

The theme of politically sponsored sex work is recognizable in every period discussed; along with it is the continuous attitude that stigmatizes women who were—or assumed to have been—sex workers at any point. The *karayukisan* system demonstrated a hypermobile system normalized in Japanese society for over forty years. With this historical understanding of international sex work in Japan, the existence of the comfort women system from 1932 to 1945 did not raise concern for Japanese society. As Caroline Norma claims in her argument in *The Japanese Comfort Women and Sexual Slavery During China and Pacific Wars* (2017), the *karayukisan* system was the first form of comfort women, as they were to provide sexual comfort for Japanese men abroad to an extent that mobilized approximately twenty thousand women who were sent abroad as sexual laborers.²⁰ The discrepancy between the two institutions was the matter of recruitment and sponsorship, as the *karayukisan* were not an official form of sex work that the government actively organized and regulated but did aid the mobilization with ambiguous human and sex trafficking laws.²¹ At the same time, the comfort women system was an institution that actively enslaved Asian women through the funding and

²⁰ Caroline Norma, *Japanese Comfort Women and Sexual Slavery During the China and Pacific Wars* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017), 101-2.

²¹ James Francis Warren, *Ah Ku and Karayukisan: Prostitution in Singapore 1870-1940* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2003), 83.

assistance of the Foreign Ministry and Imperial Japanese government for the sole purpose of providing sexual comfort for their military personnel in wartime.

The Japanese government and military officially identified the comfort women system during the war as an institution of licensed sex work. In contrast, Japanese society regarded it as a form of volunteer labor. However, due to the nation's historical record of the *karayukisan*, the people of Japan assumed the system was just a varying form of licensed sex work that has existed for centuries. According to Dr. Yoshiaki Yoshiaki, the assumptions of the comfort women system detrimentally hindered their understanding of their nation's history.²² Following Japan's surrender in 1945, the Japanese government was able to systematically destroy official documents that proved their construction, funding, and regulation of the comfort women system, which left the world in a state of involuntary ignorance of the atrocities committed against approximately two hundred thousand women from 1932 to 1945.

The importance of memory in the comfort women issue is not only the historical erasure by the Japanese government but also the manipulation of history during the Allied occupation of Japan, censorship in the media, and eventually censorship in the education of their schools regarding their committed atrocities during their imperial period. The methodology that will be applied comes from Dr. Jeffrey Blustein's philosophical lens of memory, which discusses the importance of taking responsibility for "past wrongs committed by one's predecessors, where such acknowledgment and apology are sincere and not merely intended to mollify the victims or their

²² Yoshiaki, *Comfort Women*, 26.

descendants.”²³ Geoffrey Cubit’s method of deciphering between memory and remembering within the individual will apply to case studies, specifically testimonies from the victims who came forward with their stories in the 1990s.

Historians' methodological approaches to the comfort women discourse provide frameworks for identifying changes in Japan's patriarchal cultural attitudes toward sex, sex work, and gender roles. This thesis's significance is the centralization of the comfort women system, which provides insight into the developmental process. The application of the lens of comfort culture demonstrates the discontinuities that led to the creation of the system and the continuities that the Imperial Japanese military used to justify its establishment. The threading of comfort culture from the Tokugawa period to the creation of the comfort women system provides a foundational understanding of the methodological process of memory theory. The form of memory theory applied to this study stems from the standpoint of historicity, displaying the value of understanding the memory of the individual and the collective, which provides insight that demonstrates the importance of understanding the former comfort women’s experience, both in the system and life afterward.

Thesis Framework

This retrospective study centralizes the phenomenon of the comfort women system. Therefore, it is essential to understand the threading concepts that go back to the Tokugawa period (1603-1867) and follow the continuities that thread into the creation of the comfort women system. Chapter One identifies the origins of comfort culture that

²³ Jeffrey Blustein, *The Moral Demands of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 112.

manifests in Tokugawa society from 1603 to 1867. This period establishes the cultural influences and conduct created by neo-Confucian ideology mandated by Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu, which classified the foundational organization that was adhered to by Japanese citizens in the Early Modern period. Concepts like filial piety support the normalization of indentured servitude, thus enabling politically sponsored licensed sex work, which continues into the Modern period (1868-1926). Discontinuities present themselves, beginning with Japan's isolation period ending, which led to their industrialization era, influencing their ability to become an imperial power through the aid of the *karayukisan* system. The exploitation of the *karayukisan* system demonstrates the commodification that Japanese society enabled in their international mobilization of Japanese women as sexual laborers.

Chapter Two examines the socio-political influences that allowed the Imperial Japanese military to construct the comfort women system. Beginning with looking into the Imperial Japanese government's transforming attitudes towards politically approved sex work as Japan grew into a politically influential power in the early twentieth century. This issue of transforming attitudes relates to the discontinuities that demonstrate imperialism's effects on Japan's self-identification. This examination follows with an analysis of the construction process of the comfort women system from 1932 to 1945 by looking into recruitment and mobilization methods, statistics of the ethnicities of the enslaved comfort women, classifications of the comfort stations, and the violence of the Japanese military which they justify as a necessity to function. The formation of the

system demonstrates the ideology of comfort culture that the Japanese government and military attempted to incorporate into the system.

Chapter Three examines the social and historical effects of the comfort women system from 1945 to the present day. It is supported by testimonies given by former comfort women about the lives they endured following the war. This chapter studies the effects of comfort culture from the standpoint of the Japanese government's conduct of historically manipulating their participation in the comfort women system while also enabling the narrative that it was licensed sex work that became the hegemonic understanding of the institution. The importance of this chapter is the application of memory theory in the form of the historicization of the comfort women system and the women who survived the system. The Conclusion examines the conditions of the Redress Movement from the 1990s to the present day, emphasizing the importance of actively restoring historical memory regarding the comfort women system. This concluding chapter stresses the importance of continuing the conversation of the comfort women system and the survivors.

Conclusion

The discussion of the comfort women system has become more prevalent to modern historians in recent years. Still, this thesis is essential to continue the conversation as the leading activists for the social movement, the Redress Movement, are primarily women who survived the system. As the system was active from 1932 to 1945, many of the women were approximately thirteen to thirty years old when the Japanese military enslaved them. Therefore, the ones who survived and are still active in the

movement will unfortunately be gone as they grow older. Modern historians and activists need to take up the responsibility of continuing the conversation and keeping their words alive.

CHAPTER ONE:

COMMODIFYING COMFORT IN IMPERIAL JAPAN

In 1919, ten-year-old Yamakawa Osaki stood in front of her brother Yasukichi, who, on his knees, begged her to work abroad. At roughly twenty years old, Yasukichi had no rice paddy or field to his name and was considered an outcast to potential brides in their small community in Amakusa. With their sister Yoshi already in the Southern Seas as a *karayukisan*, Osaki was his last chance to strengthen his prospects in the marriage market and respectability as a man in Japanese society. The *karayukisan* are Japanese women sent abroad to work primarily as sex workers in China, Siberia, or the Southern Seas. A filial sister, Osaki was ready to do anything to help her brother become a successful young man in the eyes of their society. Osaki was sold by her brother to the local *zegen*, Yoshinaka Taro, for three hundred yen, a fee that would set her brother on the path of property ownership and marital prospects. *Zegen*, also known as professional procurers, were individuals who traveled and lingered around impoverished communities to gather women and girls to take abroad. Osaki would not witness her brother's success, as she was transported with two other girls, Ohana and Tsugiyo, to the Southern Seas to become *karayukisan*. The young girls worked in Taro's brothel in Sandakan as maids and eventually became full-time *karayukisan* at the age of thirteen. This role entailed seducing and performing sexual acts with patrons. Her earnings were divided between her contractual brothel and money sent back home to her brother in Amakusa. As a *karayukisan* in the Southern seas, a hotspot for international affairs, Osaki was forced to service a diverse group of patrons. Her preferred clients were the Borneo natives who, in

Osaki's experience, were the quickest to perform, pay, and leave the establishment without any issues.²⁴ As she got older, she came into employment as a *karayukisan* in brothel No. 8, where she would remain for the rest of her career as a sex worker in Sandakan.²⁵

The system of the *karayukisan* was unofficially implemented in Japan—and overseas—shortly after Japan opened its borders to the world in 1853. Women like Osaki were part of a system that benefited their families and conveniently affected Japan's economy in their rise to become an imperial power in the East. However, the commodification of sex work abroad was the byproduct of what occurred in Japan during the *sakoku*, a period of self-isolation, from 1603 to 1853. Therefore, the Japanese government had a history of economically and physically exploiting the sexual labor of Japanese women.

Japan has a unique connection with emotional, physical, and sexual comfort. Over the last millennium, Japan's regard for the occupation of sex work and its relationship with the government has transformed multiple times. Osaki's experience, as seen above, resembles a modern form of sex work that existed in Japan from 1890 to the early 1930s that represents the state's commodification of lower-class Japanese women's bodies to build and succeed imperially and economically. However, this rapaciousness does not

²⁴ Tomoko Yamazaki, *Sandakan Brothel No. 8: an episode in the history of lower-class Japanese women*, trans. Karen Colligan-Taylor (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2015), 87-8; According to Osaki in her interview with Tomoko, the native Borneo men were incredibly peaceful towards her and even taught her their language. She also states that they never became violent and were always hygienic, unlike her Japanese clients. Her eventual success in No. 3 was because she was willing to take natives, unlike the other *karayukisan* on the street of brothels, as they were seen as barbaric and uncivilized and were often chastised for having a dark complexion.

²⁵ Yamazaki, *Sandakan Brothel No. 8*, 79-137.

originate in modern Japan. Institutional sex work regulations in Japan were present microscopically in the Edo period (1603-1867) and transformed into this model during the Meiji Restoration (1868-1912). The Tokugawa shogunate, which reigned in the Edo period, enabled a socially normalized form of sex work, creating a form of comfort culture. This version of comfort culture granted government-sanctioned sexual pleasure, companionship, and entertainment to men of their warrior and commoner classes. Thus, the creation of these government-sanctioned safe spaces demonstrates the Japanese government's contemptuous attitude toward sexual labor and how this conduct transformed after the government was able to control the industry for the profit of the Japanese male body. Therefore, the discontinuity in politically sponsored sex work adds to the insight into how the Japanese government internally developed through the sexual labor of Japanese women, which led to the economic and sexual exploitation of Japanese women internationally in their imperial period (1868-1945).

In studying the relationship between the Japanese government and sex, it is essential to trace the roots of the ideologies that manifest the attitudes. To begin, we will trace back to the Tokugawa period (1603-1867) to contextualize these attitudes and socially hierarchical cultures that influenced the neo-nationalistic ambitions of Imperial Japan's regime in the Modern period. Therefore, the first examination will be of the social hierarchies implemented by the Tokugawa shogun, Tokugawa Ieyasu, who designated sex workers and women in the entertainment industry in Japan as the lowest social class but also classified as the essentialists that make their society function healthily and safely.

The Influence of the Tokugawa

For over two hundred and fifty years, the Japanese state was under the rule of the Tokugawa shogunate,²⁶ which became the longest period of internal peace in Japanese history (1603-1867).²⁷ Tokugawa Ieyasu was the first of the Tokugawa shogunate line and was an active shogun and ruler of Japan from 1603 to 1605 but was *de facto* till 1616. Ieyasu singlehandedly transformed Japanese society into his perfect image within those thirteen years. Ieyasu implemented social hierarchies from his radical understanding of the Chinese philosopher Confucius. The writings of Confucianism, the *Analects*, are ideas of how humans should live and relate to each other on earth that provide a “good government, proper social relations, and respectful treatment of one’s fellow human beings.”²⁸ However, Ieyasu’s depiction of these beliefs took a reforming approach to Japanese society, establishing a social hierarchy demanding productivity in which he deemed his vision as structurally pure.

Ieyasu’s structurally pure Japanese society demanded filial piety to a single authority, rejecting ideologies from the West that promoted individualistic beliefs and forming an intricate social hierarchy that established strict boundaries and order. Ieyasu ordered the hierarchies based on tangible production deemed necessary for the country's function, therefore creating the following classes. Under the shogunate and the emperor were aristocrats; these men were ordered to pledge fealty to the shogun, and those more

²⁶ William Elliot Griffis, *The Mikado’s Empire* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1895), 142.

²⁷ Tokugawa Ieyasu came into power after his victory of ending the civil wars (also known as the “warring states age,” bringing the regions of Japan together in solidarity.

²⁸ Daniel K. Gardener, *Confucianism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1.

trusted were stationed to govern as *daimyo* in provinces closer to the capital.²⁹ Before Ieyasu's reign as shogun, he was the *daimyo* of Edo (now known as Tokyo). Still, he was promoted to shogun in 1603 following his victory in the civil wars in 1600 after the Battle of Sekigahara.³⁰ Those *daimyo* who opposed him during the war were designated in the Western regions, like Kyushu and Shikoku, because of their less profitable landscape.³¹ The class under the aristocrats was the *samurai*, who functioned as the shogun's (and emperor's) army, police force, and public administrators. Under the *samurai* were the peasants, who produced the country's food supply and distributed it from their farms to the merchants in the cities; the largest commodity was rice.³² Then there were artisans, who were usually craftsmen and builders, and lastly were the merchants. They were essential for the distribution of goods. Although able to climb the social ladder by taking part of the profit from these goods, they were the richest individuals in Japan, known for giving out loans to *daimyo*, samurai, and occasionally the shogun.³³ The classes listed are deemed as "pure" based on Ieyasu's neo-Confucian ideology that praises harmony, respect, and authority of the people. Then, there were those who were cast out from his society to prevent pollution; these people were referred

²⁹ *Daimyo* are "feudal lords" or warlords, basically samurai who were promoted, that are considered the shogun's vassals, many of whom were allies to Tokugawa Ieyasu during the civil wars.

³⁰ The Battle of Sekigahara was the final conflict between Japan's Western and Eastern states, defending the Toyotomi line as a shogunate, as Ieyasu was making moves to gain full power and succeeded.

³¹ Yamazaki, *Sandakan Brothel No. 8*, 247.

³² Lesley Downer, *Women of the Pleasure Quarters: The Secret History of the Geisha* (New York: Broadway Books, 2001), 34.

³³ Downer, *Women of the Pleasure Quarters*, 34.

to as *hinin* (non-humans) or *kawaramono* (riverbed folk).³⁴ The individuals cast out from society were beggars and people in the entertainment industry, like sex workers.

The designation of these classes seems arbitrary, as every society in history has a social classification. However, in the case of the Tokugawa regime, this social hierarchy demands the overarching respect of anyone who has authority, particularly the shogun and the emperor. The impure classes, or those who are punished for their beliefs and occupations, are cast aside and disregarded as proper citizens of Japanese society. Like the *hinin* and the *kawaramono*, Christians in this century struck a specific chord that infuriated the shogun,³⁵ as they are not a polytheistic belief, they refused to adhere to these rules that derived from Ieyasu's neo-Confucian ideology, causing severe issues shortly after he implements his social order.

The Sakoku Period

The introduction of Western ideologies and religions, like Christianity, caused stressed international relations for the Japanese, specifically the shogun. Japanese ideology was an amalgamation of Buddhism, Confucianism, and their native traditions of Shintō. These three religions and philosophies had a harmonious connection and survived well amongst the others, as they are polytheistic. However, the implementation of the new shogunate brought many changes to social and political relations between the Japanese and the rest of the world. Confucianism was present in Japanese society for over

³⁴ Downer, *Women of the Pleasure Quarters*, 35.

³⁵ Karen Colligan-Taylor, "Translator's Introduction," in *Sandakan Brothel No. 8: an episode in the history of lower-class Japanese women*, ed. Tomoko Yamazaki, trans. Karen Colligan-Taylor (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2015), 13.

five hundred years. Still, when Tokugawa Ieyasu came to power in 1603, he was radically entangled with the ideology. He created a dogmatic doctrine that strictly organized the lives and beliefs of the Japanese people. This meant that relations with monotheists like the Dutch and Portuguese, who had been in Japan for the past few decades, started to have pressured relations with the Japanese government. Missionaries spent their time in Japan and succeeded in converting some of the Japanese to Christianity; roughly five hundred thousand Christians were recognized in Japan in 1615.³⁶ The majority of foreigners, like the Dutch, Portuguese, and Chinese, primarily resided around Nagasaki, sanctioning it as the central area for Japan's foreign trade.³⁷

Japan's stressed political relations with foreign countries lasted from Ieyasu's reign to his successor, Shogun Tokugawa Hidetada. Hidetada cemented his father's regime by suppressing Christian influence and implementing heavy taxation, which caused major issues for Japanese citizens residing in Nagasaki, Shimabara, and Amakusa areas. In 1638, citizens of these regions organized an uprising motivated by over-taxation and "misgovernment." However, it was essentially memorialized as a Christian revolt; this event is remembered as the Shimabara-Amakusa Rebellion. This revolt was quickly disrupted and eradicated by the order of shogun Hidetada, resulting in the death of twenty thousand peasants, bringing the influence of Christianity—albeit Western ideology—to an end in seventeenth-century Japan.³⁸ Hidetada's motivation of removing Western influence was fully established in his initiation of a self-isolating foreign policy known as

³⁶ Colligan-Taylor, "Translator's Introduction," 11.

³⁷ Amy Stanley, *Selling Women: Prostitution, Markets, and the Household in Early Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 76.

³⁸ Colligan-Taylor, "Translator's Introduction," 11.

sakoku. This policy established the prohibition of Japanese citizens' travel to and from Japan (punishable by death) and foreigners and their trade. However, the Dutch and Chinese were still permitted to have limited contact with Japan.³⁹ The implementation of this foreign policy eradicated the anxieties that foreign influence threatened, creating a period of internal peace for the shogunate.

Sanctioned Safe Spaces or Sanctioned Cages

Tokugawa's neo-Confucian ideal society instructed a new function for everyday life for all of Japan's citizens, pure and impure. Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu established his city, Edo, as the shogunate's headquarters and the capital of Japan in 1603. The city of Edo was essentially overrun with men, particularly samurai, and *daimyo*, which was due to Ieyasu's policy *sankin kotai* (alternate attendance).⁴⁰ Therefore, with the large population of men that resided in the city, the entertainment industry thrived with their patronage.

Ieyasu's policies, which demanded productivity, were the central purpose of his neo-Confucian society, making sexual, emotional, and physical entertainment in brothels and tea houses a gray area in the eyes of the shogunate. The entertainment industry provided outlets for the samurai and *daimyo* who resided in the city, which indirectly provided a function for Ieyasu's society. However, complications arose as these comforts were unorganized and unregulated. By 1612, there were concerns from the citizens,

³⁹ Colligan-Taylor, "Translator's Introduction," 11.

⁴⁰ Downer, *Women of the Pleasure Quarters*, 50; this policy demanded the presence of *daimyo* and samurai in the city for most of the year. Samurai were typically expected to reside full-time, as they were the central policing force of the city. The *daimyo* were expected to reside in the city with their families and return to their designated province to oversee production and collect taxes.

specifically brothel-keeper Jingemori Shogu. Shogu felt that Edo was unsafe, particularly for the local women and families, as they were being attacked by “prowling *ronin*.”⁴¹ This motivated him to propose the designation of certain areas as *Keisei-machi* (courtesan’s quarter), essentially providing sanctioned safe spaces that could be properly monitored to prevent “evil acts from prowling *ronin*.”⁴² *De facto* ruler Ieyasu dismissed this idea for five years, but Shogu was relentless with his proposal, preaching Ieyasu’s neo-Confucian ideals that supported his proposal. In 1617, Ieyasu finally agreed:

Virtuous men have said, both in poetry and classic works, that houses of debauch for women of pleasure and for streetwalkers, are the worm-eaten sports of cities and towns. But these are necessary evils, and if they be forcibly abolished, men of unrighteous principles will become like raveled thread.⁴³

The excerpt above is Ieyasu’s statement officially administering the construction and regulation of government-sanctioned pleasure quarters. His agreement to the implementation of this industry demonstrates the function of protecting his beliefs that promote the protection of the family and reducing the temptation of negative actions towards other human beings. However, government recognition of sex work typically resides with a belief that the accessibility of sex is necessary for the protection of married and virgin women, as well as children. Therefore, Ieyasu permitted the construction of pleasure quarters, which forever changed the relationship between the Japanese government and sex.

⁴¹ Stephen Longstreet and Ethel Longstreet, *Yoshiwara: Geishas, Courtesans, and the Pleasure Quarters of Old Tokyo* (Tokyo: Tuttle Publishing, 2009), 26; *ronin* are “lordless samurai,” basically those who do not adhere to the *bakufu*.

⁴² Longstreet and Longstreet, *Yoshiwara*, 24.

⁴³ Longstreet and Longstreet, *Yoshiwara*, 26.

Giving the Green Light for Red Light Districts

Tokugawa Japan produced new forms of classification and inspired cultural productions that defined the period altogether. The largest contributor to this era was the influence of the sex trade and entertainment industry in red-light districts like Yoshiwara. The red-light districts offered comforts in the forms of emotional, sexual, conversational, and musical entertainment; pleasure was essentially the goal. These pleasures relate to the patrons' experiences with the geisha or the courtesan. The term geisha directly translates to “art person,” as they are normally trained from a very young age to be musically inclined, whether it be singing, dancing, or musical instruments. They are taught the art of conversation and the skillset of alluding to erotic themes —sometimes following through, other times just a flirtation tactic to elevate the patron’s experience.⁴⁴ Following the shogun’s legalization and organization of the government-sanctioned pleasure quarter known as Yoshiwara, specific rules were implemented for women in the industry.

The classification of one’s identity in Tokugawa society is pertinent to its function, and these classifications determine the attitudes that will remain as Japan continues its path as an imperial power in the nineteenth century. Yoshiwara was a haven for Japanese men, offering them pleasures in whatever form they preferred. The time spent with a *geisha* typically meant musical entertainment, the enjoyment of conversation or a meal, and, on some occasions, physical satisfaction. Inside Yoshiwara, the *geisha* were expected to adhere to the rules established by the magistrates while they were within the walls of the city. *Geisha* had the autonomous decision to venture where they

⁴⁴ Downer, *Women of the Pleasure Quarters*, 43.

pleased, including entering and departing the walls of Yoshiwara. While inside, they were only permitted to wear “plain” kimonos and simple hairstyles to prevent any possible “poaching” of clientele from the full-time courtesans who reside in Yoshiwara.⁴⁵ The *geisha* held themselves morally and socially above the courtesans who lived within Yoshiwara as they attempted to assert characteristics of “respectability” and professionalism.⁴⁶ Although the *geisha* attempted to assert themselves as superior to the courtesans, their introduction into the lifestyle was similar to those caged inside the walls of Yoshiwara.

The women that entered the life of *geisha* and courtesan were often from indentured servitude/slavery, sold as young girls by their families. There were instances of coercion or abduction, but those methods were typically frowned upon within the industry, as brothel owners avoided any possibilities of legal repercussions.⁴⁷ The ways of becoming a *geisha* happened in three ways: the women were born into it and followed their mother’s footsteps and were trained from birth, sold into a contract as a young girl, or sometimes they chose the lifestyle as they admired the art.⁴⁸ The ways in which women became courtesans in Japan were similar. The most common way was being sold by their parents, being abandoned by their families and needing hospitality as well as a job, or being coerced or abducted from the countryside. The courtesans lived a more

⁴⁵ Lesley Downer, “The City Geisha and Their Role in Modern Japan: Anomaly or Artistes?,” in *The Courtesan’s Arts Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Martha Feldman and Bonnie Gordon (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 229.

⁴⁶ Downer, “The City Geisha and Their Role in Modern Japan,” 229; the women who adopted the term *geisha* primarily worked in tea houses

⁴⁷ Amy Stanley, “Enlightenment Geisha: The Sex Trade Education and Feminine Ideals in Early Meiji Japan,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 72, no. 3 (August 2013): 542.

⁴⁸ Downer, “The City Geisha and their Role in Modern Japan,” 232.

marginalized life inside the walls of Yoshiwara, and they were prohibited from ever leaving the premises. The courtesans were dressed in lavish kimonos with large bows on their fronts that represented an invitation for men to “be untied if a man was lucky and wealthy enough” and were considered the Japanese ideal of beauty.⁴⁹ However, even though the *geisha* and the courtesans viewed themselves as differing beings, they were viewed as the same. The shogunate held the same contemptuous attitude towards both parties and will continue to do so into the twentieth century. The Japanese government only views the female body as a profitable and productive object that offers solace for the Japanese man.

Inescapable Contracts

The normalization of comfort in Tokugawa, Japan, resides in the regulation that existed with the creation of the neo-Confucian ideology that demands filial piety from authority. The first establishment of Yoshiwara was in 1617 in the shogun’s city of Edo and was in full operation by 1626. The geishas and courtesans inhabited the city and were maintained by the *bakufu*’s policing system (the samurai). The *geisha* and courtesans typically had contracts that lasted only ten years, but it was very common for them to be extended if their debt was not repaid to the brothel or teahouse. These contracts are important documentation for the brothels. The contracts were consent forms given directly by her parents, as they are the only individuals able to give her up to servitude or

⁴⁹ Downer, “The City Geisha and their Role in Modern Japan,” 229.

make any decision if she is unable to.⁵⁰ Under the shogunate, the girls were legally only allowed to be under contract for ten years. any more is punishable to the brothel by the *bakufu*. However, ownership of service is often sold and traded between the brothels in the pleasure quarters; this process is referred to as *sumikae*. *Sumikae* is a legal form of human trafficking under the shogunate but legally must abide by the ten-year rule. Most times, if the law is broken and a girl is under contract for more than what they agreed upon, the parents would typically be the ones to submit a complaint to the magistrates (samurai), who then would take care of the issue with the brothel. Therefore, *sumikae* enables a legal form of sex trafficking for a prolonged period, exploiting the labor of a Japanese woman who has no ability to escape.⁵¹ This aspect of the sex trade reverberates into the organization of the *karayukisan* during the Meiji period, demonstrating the profitability of comfort in the eyes of the Japanese government and society.

The expectancy of comfort provided by those in the sex trade was not only present in Edo. Yoshiwara displayed the foundational regulations that existed for the sex industry in Japan. The influence of the sex trade in Japan provides more than just comfort for Japanese men; the provision of comfort is what the government relied on with their limited contact with the foreigners who still resided in the Nagasaki province.

⁵⁰ Stanley, *Selling Women*, 58; these contracts were vital because of the clauses they strictly state her not being a Christian (as it was outlawed in the *sakoku* period), the individuals claiming to be her parents are her biological parents or her designated guardians (they are the only ones who can make decisions regarding her person), and that they will cover whatever expenses she is unable to bring forward.

⁵¹ Stanley, *Selling Women*, 59.

The National Influence of Sex Work



Figure 1.1 - Two Dutchmen survey Nagasaki harbor from Dejima, attended by two *yūjo* and an Indonesian servant. Kawahara Keiga, *Ransen nyūkō no zu* (*Arrival of a Dutch Ship*), from *Ranken emaki* (*Scroll of the Dutch Factory*). Color on paper, 35.5 X 22.5 cm (mid-nineteenth century). Nagasaki Museum of History and Culture.

The Kyushu islands, a witness to some of Japan's most impactful periods, have a history marked by the resilience of its people. From the Shimabara-Amakusa Rebellion, where peasants were slaughtered, to the devastating bombing of Nagasaki in 1945, the people of this prefecture have endured numerous trials. The Islands, home to prominent port cities like Nagasaki, Dejima, and the Shimabara Peninsula, have played a crucial role in Japan's foreign relations.

Amidst the Tokugawa regime (1603-1868), Kyushu possessed cultural influence that resembled the new capital of Edo, and like

Edo's Yoshiwara, they had *yūkaku* (pleasure

quarters or red-light districts) infamous for their legal entertainment; however, Kyushu's cities were known for entertaining primarily foreigners. Dr. Amy Stanley explains that the concubines and sex workers in Nagasaki were trained and entertained patrons similarly to Yoshiwara but were also known to take part in different activities such as

playing pool, peering through telescopes (**Fig. 1.1**), and watching the boats in the harbor (**Fig 1.2**).⁵²

Single women in Japan who were under indentured contracts as *yūjo* (sex workers) were less

stigmatized than contemporarily

believed. Women of this era were

expected to provide for their families if

they were sent off to these pleasure districts, like Osaki's situation in 1919, because of

their lack of education as domestic maids, ability to conduct physical labor in the rice

fields and paddies, or ability to marry. The women of the early 1600s, although beginning

to be prohibited from traveling abroad to work as per the terms of *sakoku*, would be sold

into indentured servitude as young girls, who would often be servants to the brothel

owners and the *yūjo* and would eventually age to the point of becoming *yūjo*. This

normative attitude of sending off daughters to become sex workers derives from the

Tokugawa shogunate's societal structure that demands moral purity and safety among the

civilized. Therefore, the legalization of the "flesh trade," as Stanley describes it, calls for

creating a sanctioned safe space that supposedly prevents the temptation of evil acts.

Tokugawa Ieyasu declares the construction of government-sanctioned sex work to

maintain societal order.



Figure 1.2 - A Maruyama *yūjo* looks through a telescope at passing ships in Nagasaki Harbor "View of Maruyama in Nagasaki" (*Nagasaki Maruyama no kei*), from the series *One Hundred Famous Views in the Various Provinces* (*Shokoku meisho hyakkei*), woodblock print, vertical *ōban* (1859), Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

⁵² Stanley, *Selling Women*, 72.

Kyushu's *yūkaku*s held designated districts, as it was a popular trading hub for international visitors. Dejima was stressed as the shogun's foreign policies became stricter because of the continuous threat of Christian influence in Japan. Therefore, the island of Dejima was secluded to hold all the Dutch personnel, as well as all other Europeans and their slaves, prohibiting them from fraternizing with any Japanese citizens besides a select few *yūjo*, translators, guards, servants, and government officials.⁵³ In 1688, this situation spread into the heavily influenced Chinese district as *sakoku* was firmly implemented, and Japanese citizens were banned from interacting with outsiders. The Chinese population in Kyushu grew immensely, to the thousands, and were segregated from the Japanese population. Stanley deciphers the regulations they adhered to, they were not permitted to leave without a permit, their quarter was guarded, and Japanese women were not allowed to enter. However, like Dejima, selected *yūjo* were permitted to join because they were not “ordinary” Japanese women and were not threatened with being socially scorned for being involved with Chinese men; these women were known as *karayuki*. *Karayuki* has various translations, in terms of the pleasure districts of Kyushu during the Tokugawa period, they were “women that were going to the Chinese.”⁵⁴

⁵³ Stanley, *Selling Women*, 77.

⁵⁴ Stanley, *Selling Women*, 79.

The Karyayukisan of the Meiji Period

The *karayuki* of the Tokugawa period had historical impacts, like the *karayukisan* of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, their contribution to Japanese society was designated to controlling foreign affairs in the homeland. The *karayukisan* of the Meiji period was part of an unofficial system that benefitted the nation of Japan economically and socially, as the Japanese government did not formally execute the network. Still, they had no issue turning a blind eye to the occurrences as they were financially benefitting from their labor. Historian Tomoko Yamazaki deciphers the translation contemporarily referred to as *karayukisan* as a contraction of *karahitoyuki* and *karankuniyuki* (a person going to Kara [China] or abroad/overseas).⁵⁵ Historians like Dr. Caroline Norma and Dr. James Francis Warren agree on the origins of many of the women who become *karayukisan*, derived from the Kyushu Islands, specifically Amakusa, and the Shimabara Peninsula. Although, why were *karayukisan* primarily women from the Kyushu Islands? The peasant population was not only designated to this region of Japan, but they were also all over. However, the differentiation between the women of Kyushu and the women from the remaining regions of Japan depends on the opportunities that their land offers them.

The islands of Kyushu were particularly mountainous, especially on the coast of Amakusa, which was riddled with volcanoes, steep mountains, no rivers, and an unfortunate ocean current in the harbor. During the Tokugawa regime, Amakusa was the new home to individuals that the shogunate was exiling in their process of expunging

⁵⁵ Yamazaki, *Sandakan Brothel* No. 8, 40.

Western influence from the nation of Japan—Christianity. Before *sakoku* was fully implemented by the shogun in 1638, the population of Amakusa consisted of farmers who dealt a lousy hand agriculturally and economically. The soil was impossible to profit from, and it did not matter how many people migrated to Amakusa; no amount of labor would be able to be produced. As Amakusa is a volcanic area, the rice fields and paddies could not grow as they were constantly covered in volcanic ash, starving the locals and making them lose money. On top of their unfortunate situation, taxation from the shogunate was absurdly high. However, they could never produce a kind, leaving the *daimyo*—Suzuki Saburokuro Shigenari—to shamefully request a tax rate decrease. This request was denied, and, in his chagrin, he committed *seppuku*⁵⁶ as he knew that the impoverishment of his region was his doing.⁵⁷ After the Tokugawa period, the population of Amakusa barely found a way to survive. At the dawn of the Meiji Restoration, although they did not escape the impossible tax rate, they could finally grasp opportunities to leave the island and find productive work.

An Opportunity to Survive

With the beginning of the Meiji Restoration, families of the Kumamoto and Nagasaki Prefectures took the opportunity to send their viable children off to work in various parts of Japan and abroad. Many of the boys and men went to China to work in plantations, mostly coconut. Indentured servitude never disappeared in the Meiji period. The government made many attempts to abandon their traditional ways to resemble better

⁵⁶ *Seppuku* is a ritual disembowelment performed by samurai to take responsibility for their wrongdoings. The only way for them to keep their pride is to commit suicide and die an honorable death.

⁵⁷ Yamazaki, *Sandakan Brothel No. 8*, 182.

Western practices, such as the “Edict for the Liberation of Geisha and Prostitutes” in 1872. The edict was initially meant to relinquish all entertainers from their contracts with the brothels, teahouses, and any attached debts. The sex workers and *geisha* that were under servitude were relinquished, but with the society quickly transforming to mirror the globally accepted idea of “modernity,” those in the entertainment industry were left in the Edo period. Many of the women attempted independent work as sex workers, but this caused social issues among “regular” Japanese citizens, forcing the government to legalize licensed institutions that are forced to pay taxes.⁵⁸ However, indentured servitude of girls and women who became *karayukisan* was on different terms than the previous contract system that existed during the Tokugawa regime. Some rules and regulations during the regime went with indentured servants in the brothels and teahouses, such as husbands being unable to sell off their wives, parents being periodically involved in the transfer of girls, etc.⁵⁹ The *karayukisan* that were transported abroad had very little communication with their families, as they were mostly women from a poor and uneducated background, so they could not read or write letters, keep track of their financial situation with their master, very rarely get out of their contracts, and in Osaki’s case did not have a single day off:

My very worst experience was having to take thirty customers in one night...No matter how accustomed I had become to this work, once or twice a month I hated taking customers so much I thought I would rather die. There were times when I would break down and cry, wondering what sort of karma I had brought upon myself that forced me into this role. On days when I was feeling sorry for myself like that, I would have given anything to have a day off, but we were not given a single holiday.

⁵⁸ Stanley, “Enlightenment Geisha,” 542.

⁵⁹ Stanley, *Selling Women*, 9.

Couldn't we take day off for New Year's or festivals, you ask? Sandakan was under English rule, so on British holidays the English stores and plantations would take the day off. When others had holidays, our establishments would be even busier than ever. Because Sandakan was a port town, steamers on the sea route from the Philippines would often enter the harbor, and whenever they did we didn't get a wink of sleep. The boss wouldn't let us off even when we had our period. We simply stuffed paper way up inside and kept working.⁶⁰

Karayukisan were taken all over the Asian continent: China, Indonesia, Siberia, Australia, Manchuria, Korea, Borneo, Sumatra, Manila, the Philippines, Thailand, California, Africa, and Hawaii. In Osaki's case, as seen above, she was initially taken to Sandakan in North Borneo under British rule. Sandakan had nine Japanese-managed brothels, referred to as No. 1-9, not by names as typically seen for pleasure houses. Osaki began her life as a *karayukisan* in the *zegen's* brothel, No. 3. During her time at No. 3, there were four other girls: the two that came with her, Ohana and Tsugiyo, another girl from Oe (a village near Amakusa)—Ofumi---and another born in Shimabara, Oyae.⁶¹ Osaki first arrived in Sandakan as a ten-year-old who may have eaten once a week a spare sweet potato given to her by her aunt, who would visit her and her siblings after Osaki's father passed and her mother remarried and moved out. When the girls arrived at No. 3, they were employed as servants to management, Ofumi, and Oyae; they were able to spend most of their time out on the beach ogling the fish swimming along the ocean

⁶⁰ Yamazaki, *Sandakan Brothel No. 8*, 90.

⁶¹ Yamazaki, *Sandakan Brothel No. 8*, 81.

floor, collecting seashells, and eating fish, white, and red rice “morning, noon, and night.”⁶² As the girls turned thirteen, their time was up as servants, and they were forced into their expected roles as *karayukisan* (Fig. 1.3).

A question that constantly resurfaces in the historiography of the *karayukisan* is, why did they go? There are various forms of entering the lifestyle of being a *karayuki* that are discussed, and there is debate on the terms of which it is always a case of kidnapping or always consensual. Osaki’s confession is riddled with statements that her time as a



Figure 1.3 (from left to right) Osaki, Ohana, and Tsugiyo the night before they took their first customers as *karayukisan*. Accessed from *Sandakan Brothel No. 8* by Tomoko Yamazaki

karayukisan was to be a filial daughter and sister to her family; her case was a combination of coerced agreement and transaction, as it was for her friends Ohana and Tsugiyo. The most prominent stance on their procurement is the systematic patriarchal society that enabled the relatively seamless process of trafficking Japanese girls and women as sex workers abroad. In the Tokugawa period, fealty to the emperor, the shogun, the father, the son, and the brother is the typical hierarchy that is adhered to. No matter the scenario, women are at the bottom of the pyramid; even sons are above

⁶² Yamazaki, *Sandakan Brothel No. 8*, 83.

mothers. Women have a duty to their families; daughters have a duty to their fathers; sisters have a duty to their brothers.⁶³ However, the methods became more elaborate as we entered the twentieth century, as the trafficking of women and children is illegal in Japan according to the 1896 edict that prohibits the travel of women abroad to work as sex workers. However, *zegen*'s maneuvered through this new law with the loophole that Japanese women did not need passports to travel to the port cities in Korea and China, making the trafficking process simple.⁶⁴ This tactic was used again in the 1930s-40s as the Japanese military procured/worked with procurers to traffic Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Manchurian, Indonesian, Taiwanese, Thai, and Dutch women into their government-sanctioned sexual slavery institutions known as the comfort women system.

The Rise to Imperial Power in the Twentieth Century

The high demand for *karayukisan* in Asia spread, creating more opportunities for *zegen* to profit and for the Japanese government to turn its cheek at the excessive revenue being processed into their economic system. The establishment of brothels abroad that were under Japanese management maintained a continuous flow of foreign currency being sent back to Japan. As time passed for Osaki, she was sold to No. 4, then to a brothel on Tawau Island, and escaped back to Sandakan to work at brothel No. 8 under the management of Kinoshita Okuni, "Okuni of Sandakan." Okuni was the most essential woman in Sandakan, a former *karayukisan* who came from Amakusa and became a live-in mistress to an Englishman who eventually relieved her from her life of sex work when

⁶³ Colligan-Taylor, "Translator's Introduction," 14.

⁶⁴ James Francis Warren, *Ah Ku and Karayukisan: Prostitution in Singapore 1870-1940* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2003), 83.

he moved back to England. She used the money she saved from him to buy a grocery store and a brothel and became one of the most prominent mistresses in Sandakan.⁶⁵

Osaki flourished under the management of Okuni; she was kind and let the girls work as they pleased while also aiding those around her financially. Osaki was eventually hired as a live-in mistress by an Englishman called Mister Home. Home had a Chinese cook and houseboy who prepared all the meals and cleaned the house; Osaki essentially just existed in the house while collecting one thousand yen a month for six years. Mister Home had a married English woman as a lover, so Osaki only had to be with Home roughly four times the entirety of her employment:⁶⁶

My mother had gone to Uncle Tokumatsu's, and my sister Yoshi was in Singapore, so I decided to stay at my brother's place. Although I thought of it as the house that had been built with the money that Yoshi and I sent, my brother was no longer a bachelor. I couldn't very well boast that the house had been built with my money, and somehow the atmosphere was very uncomfortable... Since Yasukichi had received a lot of money from me, he didn't say anything but his wife, Kane---at that time she had not yet started dyeing her hair, and her eyes were still good---would manage to throw me piercing looks. And besides that, whenever I saw other women from the village who were about our age, they all had homes and husbands, and those that didn't were only women like me, who had come home from abroad.⁶⁷

With the revenue that women like Osaki are bringing in, Japanese citizens travel abroad to open shops, businesses, banks, and medical offices in areas with a high *karayukisan* population.⁶⁸ The Nagasaki post office reported that the *karayukisan* was responsible for sending back over two-hundred thousand yen a year by working in Southeast Asia.⁶⁹ An

⁶⁵ Yamazaki, *Sandakan Brothel No. 8*, 93.

⁶⁶ Yamazaki, *Sandakan Brothel No. 8*, 107.

⁶⁷ Yamazaki, *Sandakan Brothel No. 8*, 111.

⁶⁸ Warren, *Ah Ku and Karayukisan*, 62.

⁶⁹ Colligan-Taylor, "Translator's Introduction," 16.

influential statesman, Yukichi Fukuzawa, encouraged the “emigration” of women as sex workers because of their contribution to the rapid economic development in Japanese regions.⁷⁰ With their help, economic diversification gave the nation of Japan what it needed to follow through with its imperial ambitions.⁷¹ According to data collected by the Foreign Ministry from 1910, over twenty thousand Japanese women who traveled abroad reported their occupations as sex workers. However, historians like Warren and Yamazaki believe the numbers collected by the Ministry do not accurately represent the true number, as many of the women who traveled abroad to work may have felt the socially stigmatic shame of attaching themselves to the occupation of sex work, they could have opted out and reported a different occupation. The women who associated themselves with the occupation of sexual labor were present in Siberia (631), Manchuria (4,275), Kwantung (7,928), Mainland China (1,420), South Asia (3,745), North America (1,033), South America (34), Europe (29), and Oceania (2).⁷² However, Japanese citizens who were abroad began to feel uneasy about the possible portrayal that was being created about the nation of Japan as they are easily sending their women abroad to satisfy the needs of foreign men.⁷³

In the nineteenth century, the demand for *karayukisan* stemmed from European and Japanese colonies' need for sexual outlets, as there were not enough local women to accommodate the growing male population.⁷⁴ Japanese consuls became concerned about

⁷⁰ Colligan-Taylor, “Translator’s Introduction,” 16.

⁷¹ Warren, *Ah Ku and Karayukisan*, 62-63.

⁷² Colligan-Taylor, “Translator’s Introduction,” 19.

⁷³ Warren, *Ah Ku and Karayukisan*, 62.

⁷⁴ Colligan-Taylor, “Translator’s Introduction,” 13.

the image that was created about selling their women to satisfy foreign men, feeling this was marking them as a “national disgrace.” They urged the Japanese authorities abroad to send them home.⁷⁵ Most *karayukisan* who returned to Japan were abandoned at port cities; those who stayed in mainland China decided to reside in Manchuria, like Osaki.⁷⁶ As time went on and the unofficial system of Japanese-enabled sex trafficking continued into the thirties, Japan began its imperial march on the continent of Asia.

In 1929, the Chinese government was in the process of attempting to ban licensed sex work in Shanghai, posing an issue for the Japanese Imperial Navy in their campaign through China. As previously seen, Japan has turned a blind eye to the *karayukisan* situation that has been occurring for the last forty years, so to obtain sexual access in Shanghai, the military must abandon their usual *Kashizashiki* (house of assignation – also known as a licensed brothel). They incorporated a more traditional form of sex work prominent in the Tokugawa period: *ryōriten shakufu* (restaurant serving women).⁷⁷ However, this did not suffice following their attack on the Manchurian Railway in 1931; Japanese soldiers quickly came in droves in the process of transforming Manchuria into the puppet state of Manchukuo to supervise the region. With the influx of Japanese personnel in northern China, the Japanese soldiers began attacking and sexually assaulting local Chinese women, raising serious concern for the Foreign Ministry and the Chinese population. To diffuse the situation, the Vice Chief of Staff of the Shanghai Expeditionary Force, Okamura Yasuji, contacted the Governor of the Nagasaki

⁷⁵ Colligan-Taylor, “Translator’s Introduction,” 21.

⁷⁶ Tomoko, *Sandakan Brothel No. 8*, 130.

⁷⁷ Yoshiaki, *Comfort Women*, 43.

Prefecture to request a “military comfort women corps.”⁷⁸ The importance of this account depends on the knowledge that the Nagasaki Prefecture is infamous for its ability to readily provide *karayukisan* to be transported to China. This is supported by the Senior Staff Officer in the Shanghai Expeditionary Force, Okabe Naosaburo, who reported in his personal diary that soldiers were out of control and that a controlled solution to their “sexual problems” would be to construct facilities.⁷⁹

The international perception of Japan was a key point in the success of its imperial campaign across the Asian continent. Therefore, the Japanese military had to be particular with their solution to their soldiers’ problem. Historically, Japan has recognized that sex work is a “necessary evil” for a properly functioning society; therefore, to avoid public scrutiny as they did with the *karayukisan*, the women that have been brought over from Japan were the only women who were previously employed as sex workers and referring to them as the *jōshigun* (girl army). The modern issue regarding the comfort women system is the ongoing fight that the comfort women were victims of sexual slavery constructed and regulated by the Japanese army. However, denialists hold on to the idea that they are camp followers and *jōshigun*, as they were sex workers, aiding the military with their consent:

Coming to Manchuria, and especially to Chengde, I understood clearly how the “girl army” (*jōshigun*) was actually not a play on words, but was actually a part of the army, was really an “army.” I grasped the truth of the Jinzhou headquarters’ statement that “women are a necessity, so they are transported by airplane.” When the Japanese army advances, the officers’ primary concern is the transportation of the “girl army.” The reason

⁷⁸ Yoshiaki, *Comfort Women*, 45.

⁷⁹ Yoshiaki, *Comfort Women*, 45.

Japanese troops don't rape Chinese women is precisely because they have the "girl army." So they are not merely prostitutes!⁸⁰

The abovementioned account is a testimony given by Nakayama Tadanao, who traveled from Jinzhou to Chengde in 1933. Nakayama's statement displays the Japanese ideology that the *jōshigun* and the comfort women are indefinitely part of the army. They provide the soldiers with emotional and sexual comfort so that they can properly fight for their country and are organized and labeled as nurses.

As Japan became the central power in Asia, the Japanese military no longer "recruited" Japanese women or *karayukisan* from 1937 to 1945 in fear that if the soldiers recognized any of the women, they would falter and dishonor the nation. From 1937 to 1945, the Japanese military continued to procure women with the same methods and loopholes that *zegen* practiced during the prime period of procuring Japanese women as *karayukisan* during the nineteenth- and twentieth centuries. The unofficial system of the *karayukisan* systematically inspired and economically funded the Japanese Empire from the start and aided in its expansion across the Asian continent. The comfort women system that was created by the *karayukisan* organization relied on the exploitation of poor women, mainly from the Kyushu Islands, and their fealty to the emperor and their final duty as devoted daughters and sisters.

⁸⁰ Yoshiaki, *Comfort Women*, 48.

CHAPTER TWO:

FAILURE TO FOLLOW

Of the testimonials that former comfort women have published, the Filipina former comfort woman Maria Rosa Henson's story began long before she was forced into the comfort stations. Maria's mother, Julia, was sexually assaulted by her landlord in the 1920s, impregnating her with Maria. Julia lived to raise Maria independently, giving her all the love and support she could muster. Julia and Maria survived the early years of World War II together, evacuating from *barrio* to *barrio* in the Philippines with their relatives.⁸¹ In February 1942, Maria was out gathering firewood to prepare for dinner that night; unfortunately, Maria was attacked and sexually assaulted by three Japanese soldiers in the woods. Those three soldiers left her there, assuming she had died, but she was found by a local farmer who came to her aid. She returned to the *barrio* and informed her mother and her uncles of what happened to her; heartbroken, they tended to her in any way they could. To move on, she returned to her everyday routine, gathering wood for cooking, but always with her uncle's present. In March 1942, they were out gathering firewood once again, and one of the same Japanese soldiers who raped Maria stumbled upon them. He immediately grabbed Maria and sexually assaulted her right in front of her uncles; in fear that they would be killed, they could not intervene, only stand there frozen, crying at their inability to help their niece. At that moment, Maria believed she had inherited her mother's fate.

⁸¹ Maria Rosa Henson, *Comfort Woman: A Filipina's Story of Prostitution and Slavery Under the Japanese Military* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1999); a *barrio* is a village or town in the Philippines.

In her anger and hatred towards the Japanese military, Maria joined the local Hukbalahap (the Filipino people's army resisting Japanese invaders⁸²). Joining the Huks was Maria's way of taking back her power; she was assigned the job of obtaining food, clothes, and medicine for the guerilla soldiers, and she did them proudly. In April 1943, Maria left to collect provisions for the soldiers from Magalang with two guerilla soldiers by cart. Their mission was to pass through the Japanese military's checkpoint with multiple burlap sacks that contained artillery for their movement. They successfully passed through the checkpoint, but Maria was forced to stay behind. The Japanese soldiers led her to their newly established headquarters in an abandoned hospital; she was left in a room with six other women, which was always guarded by a soldier. The first day she was there, no one touched her, but she described the following day as "hell." Every day after that, from two o'clock in the afternoon to ten o'clock in the evening, she was raped by Japanese soldiers; she was eighteen years old at this time and was not able to escape until January 1944.⁸³

It is pertinent to acknowledge the range of situations that are recorded by the victims of the comfort women system as they demonstrate the severity of the atrocities committed by the Imperial Japanese military on Asian women. Women like Maria Henson represent the later years of the comfort women system that tend to be overlooked in the historiography of the comfort women issue. Their personal testimonies present the

⁸² Henson, *Comfort Woman*, 25.

⁸³ Henson, *Comfort Woman*, 24-48.

system in a way that negates one of the Japanese military's alleged purposes for creating the comfort women system in the first place: to prevent the rape of local women.

As seen in Chapter One, Imperial Japan regards sex in an exploitative and commodifying manner. Japan's relationship with sex primarily resides within the realm of necessity for society's function as a "necessary evil."⁸⁴ From 1603 to 1867, sex work in Japan became a government-sanctioned system of pleasure quarters' that was a form of organized prevention of rape against virgin and married Japanese women. From 1868 to the 1920s, Japan grew into an imperial power that thrived on economic revenue incoming from the sexual labor of the *karayukisan* and their work abroad. They indirectly funded the Japanese Empire in their incentive to obtain military, industrial, and economic influence to be recognized by the Western powers as the powerhouse of Asia. This chapter will inspect the function of the Imperial Japanese military and follow their establishment of the government-sanctioned institution of systematic rape that enslaved over two hundred thousand women from Japan, Korea, China, Indonesia, Taiwan, and the Philippines from 1932 to 1945, known as the *jūgun ianfu* (military comfort women system). This chapter will apply the ideological lens of "comfort culture," which is cemented by the neo-Confucian social functions during the Tokugawa period of government-sanctioned and regulated sexual pleasure, entertainment, and companionship offered to Japanese men.

⁸⁴ Stephen Longstreet and Ethel Longstreet, *Yoshiwara: Geishas, Courtesans, and the Pleasure Quarters of Old Tokyo* (Tokyo: Tuttle Publishing, 2009), 26.

After studying the organization of the *karayukisan* occurrence in the Meiji period, this chapter can understand the formulation, execution, and regulation of the comfort women system from 1932 to 1945. An important aspect of this chapter is pinpointing when the *karayukisan* organization transformed itself into the comfort women system; therefore, this study will begin in 1929, as the Japanese military's access to sexual pleasure is threatened by the Chinese government's ambition to ban sex work.

Initiating War with China

A consistent issue that the Japanese military was forced to deal with in their imperial period was the stress of upholding a certain image. In 1929, the Chinese government was in the process of attempting to ban licensed sex work in Shanghai.⁸⁵ Local and military brothels in China were essential to the Japanese military's function during their imperial campaign across China. Imperial Japan had intentions to keep the peace with the Chinese government during that time, which meant the Japanese military authorities felt that they needed to implement a loophole that allowed them to continue with their own form of licensed sex work: *ryōriten shakufu* (restaurant serving women).⁸⁶ The organization of this system reflects traditional occupations that existed in the red-light districts during the Tokugawa period; this created an environment that both satisfied the homesick feelings that the soldiers had away from Japan as well as controlled the interaction between sex workers and Japanese military personnel.

⁸⁵ Yoshiaki Yoshimi, *Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery in the Japanese Military During World War II*, trans. Suzanne O'Brien (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 43.

⁸⁶ Yoshiaki, *Comfort Women*, 43.

The Japanese military's control of who the soldiers have sexual relations with supports the Japanese ideology of maintaining a healthy body. As seen in Chapter One, the 1920s brought the organization of the *karayukisan* system to an end, as Japan felt that profiting off the sexual labor and selling of Japanese women abroad reflected badly on the image that they were creating for themselves as an empire. In 1931, the Japanese military had been self-sufficient in providing sexual labor for their military personnel. This became more difficult to maneuver as, on September 18, 1931, the Japanese military initiated war with China by bombing sections of the South Manchurian Railway.⁸⁷ In their motivation to gain control over northeastern China, the Japanese military stationed in Shanghai was ordered to assault the city of Shanghai—causing the First Shanghai Incident (1932) — averting possible attention “of the engineering of the” puppet state of Manchukuo in the remains of the city of Manchuria.⁸⁸ The First Shanghai Incident (1932) led to an influx of Japanese Military personnel to the area to supervise the region in an attempt to bring control of the aftermath of the incident. This increase of Japanese personnel developed concerns within the Chinese population as well with the Foreign Ministry due to the accounts of sexual assault by Japanese personnel against Chinese women; this concern led to the first iterations of the “comfort stations” (also referred to as *ianjo*) and the comfort women system that would remain in practice by the military until their surrender in 1945.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Yoshiaki, *Comfort Women*, 43.

⁸⁸ Yoshiaki, *Comfort Women*, 43.

⁸⁹ Yoshiaki, *Comfort Women*, 45.

In comparison to the city of Edo at the beginning of the Tokugawa shogunate, Shanghai was overrun with Japanese men; however, this time, the threat was much higher. In 1932, Vice Chief of Staff of the Shanghai Expeditionary Force, Okamura Yasuji, sent a request to the Nagasaki Prefecture's governor to provide women for his plan of establishing comfort stations in Shanghai. Yasuji's urgency to establish the comfort station in Shanghai was due to the growing number of offenses committed by Japanese personnel that were not at all discreet. Senior Staff Officer in the Shanghai Expeditionary Force, Okabe Naosaburō, reported in his personal diary:

Recently, soldiers have been prowling around everywhere looking for women, and I often heard obscene stories {about their behavior}. As long as as conditions are peaceful and the army is not engaged in fighting, these incidents are difficult to prevent. Rather, we should recognize that we can actively provide facilities. I have considered many policy options for resolving the troops' sexual problems and have set to work on realizing that goal. Lieutenant Colonel Nagami [Toshinori] will bear primary responsibility in this matter.⁹⁰

The significance of the fear in this diary entry relies on the realization of a Japanese military officer understanding the chaos that would ensue for them. At that point in 1932, Japan was on a warpath, and according to Cynthia Cockburn's study on militaristic masculinity, soldiers tend to follow a pattern during wartime regarding violence and rape against women. Cockburn claims that soldiers tend to turn towards violent actions, known as the "booty principle," humiliation of their targets, and a form of solidarity through male bonding.⁹¹ This pattern is evident in the diary entry above, as the "soldiers

⁹⁰ Yoshiaki, *Comfort Women*, 45.

⁹¹ Cynthia Cockburn, "The Continuum of Violence: A Gender Perspective on War and Peace," in Wenona Giles (ed.), *Sites of Violence: Gender and Conflict Zones* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 36.

have been prowling around everywhere looking for women,” they desire the conquering feeling as they force the Chinese women into a subordinate position. By this, they were able to demonstrate the weak points in the Chinese protection, emasculating them. The chaos and violence that Naosaburō is prepared for in this entry demonstrates the reality of how low regard the soldiers have for women as people, so he knew that the only solution that would hinder them was to suggest the creation of comfort stations, to control their urges to rape women.

The First Official “Comfort” Station

The importance of Japanese identity in this period stresses the importance of being physically and mentally healthy. The Japanese nationalist ideology of *kokutai* promotes the unity of the Japanese people through the divinity of the Imperial family. As the Introduction shows, *kokutai* translates as “national body” or “national community,” which promotes physical and moral purity. For the Japanese military to maintain their *kokutai*, the Vice Chief of Staff of the Shanghai Expeditionary Force, Okamura Yasuji, constructed the “Disease Prevention and Hygiene Facility,” the first officially confirmed comfort station, although under the guise of a sanitation center.⁹² This comfort station was located in Pingquan, established in March 1933, specifically for the 14th Mixed Brigade; it reportedly housed thirty-five Korean “serving women” and three Japanese “serving women.”⁹³ The importance of this brothel being established in Pingquan was due to the rising issue of sexually transmitted diseases being spread throughout the

⁹² Yoshiaki, *Comfort Women*, 47.

⁹³ Yoshiaki, *Comfort Women*, 47.

Japanese military. Before the establishment of the facility, there were four brothels in Pingquan that had been in business—preceding the ban of licensed brothels by the Chinese government—but it was reported that a majority of the twenty sex workers employed there were infected, leading to the Japanese military banning their personnel from visiting these brothels and their “necessity” to establish the “comfort stations.”⁹⁴ The “Disease Prevention and Hygiene Facility” best represents the most followed model during the first six years of the war. Yoshiaki states that the Brigade's medical officer regularly examined the thirty-five Korean “serving women” and three Japanese “serving women.”⁹⁵ However, as the war continued, the facilities became less discreet, and the spread of venereal disease was never hindered.

The initial creation of the comfort stations, and in this case, the “Disease Prevention and Hygiene Facility,” was for the purpose of stopping the spread of venereal disease; but, as seen in the diary entry of Officer Naosaburō, the primary function was to prevent the military from attacking local women. However, the ambition to prevent future rapes was not the issue; the main issue was that it was creating a negative narrative about the Japanese military. However, the Brigades' medical officers took measures to prevent the spread seriously. The 14th Mixed Brigade had a total of 7,764 members, and the medical officers administered two condoms to each member for every visit, approximately adding up to 15,528 condoms a day at least five times a week.⁹⁶ The

⁹⁴ Yoshiaki, *Comfort Women*, 47.

⁹⁵ Yoshiaki, *Comfort Women*, 47.

⁹⁶ Yuki Tanaka, *Japan's Comfort Women: Sexual slavery and prostitution during World War II and the US Occupation* (London: Routledge, 2010), 11.



Figure 2.1 – Condom given to Japanese soldiers at comfort stations. The text on the front “突撃 一番” translates to “Attack Champion.” The text on the back “國際護謀納” translates to “Provided by International Rubber,” which is a present-day Okamoto, オカモ工業, Japanese condom company. Photo credit: Pacific Atrocities Education <https://www.e4sjf.org/images.html>

soldiers were also instructed how to apply the condom (**Fig. 2.1**) and always to check the “serving woman’s” health certificate, as well as always to apply “Secret Star Cream”—disinfecting lubricant—and cleanse their genitals after each visit.⁹⁷ Although these measures were taken specifically for the “hygiene facility,” reality set in for the Ministry that these thirty-eight women were not able to handle that many men, let alone survive. Reluctantly, the Ministry lifted the ban on the soldiers from visiting the other four brothels in Pingquan but were relentless about medical examinations of the women already in employment there and constantly reiterated the severity of medical precautions that the soldiers had to take when they visited the city of Pingquan.⁹⁸

The creation of the first comfort station was allegedly a preventative measure taken for the sexual health of the Japanese military personnel and to prevent further rapes of Chinese women. However, following the creation of the “disease prevention” facility in Pingquan in March, the Director of the Nakayama Institute of Chinese Medicine,

⁹⁷ Yoshiaki, *Comfort Women*, 47.

⁹⁸ Yoshiaki, *Comfort Women*, 47.

Tadanao Nakayama, witnessed in June 1933, the women who were aiding the Japanese soldiers, claiming that they were much more than just “prostitutes:”

Coming to Manchuria, and especially to Chengde, I understood clearly how the “girl army” (*jōshigun*) was actually not a play on words, but was actually a part of the army, was really an “army.” I grasped the truth of the Jinzhou headquarters’ statement that “women are a necessity, so they are transported by airplane.” When the Japanese army advances, the officers’ primary concern is the transportation of the “girl army.” The reason Japanese troops don’t rape Chinese women is precisely because they have the “girl army.” So they are not merely prostitutes!⁹⁹

Nakayama’s witnessing of the mobilization of the *jōshigun* demonstrates the state of Japanese society’s understanding of the comfort women system that is being cemented in the cause of the Imperial Japanese military. The *jōshigun* represents the ideal Japanese woman, sacrificing herself for the good of their nation, providing a “healthy sexual outlet” for the soldiers so that they can properly function and fight for Japan; this “girl army” was not only sex workers in their perspective, but legitimate members of the military.

The comfort women system satisfied the Japanese military’s need to keep their personnel in control. By 1936, ten comfort stations had been established by the Japanese government. Due to the Chinese government’s restriction on licensed brothels, comfort stations were still recorded under different titles, such as “restaurants” and “hygiene facilities.” Yoshiaki discovered that of the ten stations, seven were strictly for military personnel use only to prevent the possible spread of sexually transmitted diseases and

⁹⁹ Soh, Sarah C. *The Comfort Women: Sexual Violence and the Postcolonial Memory in Korea and Japan* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 125.

remain in control of who knows/experiences what. It was recorded that one-hundred and two of the “serving women” in these “restaurants” were Japanese, and twenty-nine were Korean “serving women.” By 1937, the number of comfort stations and the pace of the war between Japan and China had been occurring at a steady pace, nothing that caught the attention of Western powers. However, during the summer of 1937, Japan experienced an extraneous and tedious battle in Shanghai that they had not planned for. It is believed among historians like Yoshiaki and Tanaka that this historical focus was the catalyst for the rapid spread of comfort stations throughout the rest of the war.

The “Comfort” Station Expansion

In Japan’s effort to maintain *kokutai* during its military campaign across China, the Japanese were motivated to indoctrinate their neighboring nations with their nationalistic ideology, promoting the unification of all the East. Imperial Japan had succeeded in colonizing the territories of Korea and Taiwan in the early twentieth century; in their sights on becoming the major power in the Eastern hemisphere, Japan pushed for the removal of “occidental” influence (Western influence).¹⁰⁰ On March 25, 1937, three hundred thousand copies of the *Kokutai no Hongi: Cardinal Principles of the National Entity of Japan* were published and distributed to all public and private schools in Japan from elementary levels to university levels.¹⁰¹ The document was official propaganda produced by the Japanese government to motivate the Emperor's subjects to unite to support Japan in their cause to eradicate the “Occidental” influence of

¹⁰⁰ Robert King Hall (ed.) *Kokutai No Hongi: Cardinal Principles of the National Entity of Japan*, trans. John Owen Gauntlett (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949), 82.

¹⁰¹ Hall (ed.), *Kokutai no Hongi*, 10.

individualism from their nation. It was an amalgamation of politics, religion, and mythological poetry that was meant to direct as a sort of manual.¹⁰²

Of the late years, through the influence of the Occidental individualistic ideology, a way of thinking which has for its basis the individual has become lively. Consequently, this and the true aim of our Way of loyalty which is “essentially” different from it are not necessarily [mutually] consistent. That is, those in our country who at the present time expound loyalty and patriotism are apt to lose [sight of] its true significance, being influenced by Occidental individualism and rationalism. We must sweep aside the corruption of the spirit and the clouding of knowledge that arises from setting up one’s “self” and from being taken up with one’s “self” and return to a pure and clear state of mind that belongs intrinsically to us as subjects, and thereby fathom the great principle of loyalty.¹⁰³

This form of divisive discourse was an encouragement from Japan to China as they attempted to “liberate” them from Western influence and domination. However, China was very transparent in its disdain for this attempt, as Dr. Rana Mitter referred to as “pan-Asianism.”¹⁰⁴ Therefore, because of China’s resistance to aligning with Japan and joining their empire, Japan fully implemented a full-frontal attack once again on Shanghai in 1937.

Wartime for the Japanese military was taxing and tedious, even with the ten comfort stations that were established in China. The Second Shanghai Incident in 1937 surprised the Japanese empire, they were not expecting the amount of pushback resistance from the Chinese military as they had witnessed. This battle caused stress on the Japanese military, as they never planned to spend the whole summer and most of the fall in Shanghai. Their victory in Hangzhou Bay cost them forty thousand casualties,

¹⁰² Hall (ed.), *Kokutai no Hongi*, v.

¹⁰³ Hall (ed.), *Kokutai no Hongi*, 82.

¹⁰⁴ Rana Mitter, *Forgotten Ally: China’s World War II 1937-1945* (New York: Mariner Books, 2014), 54.

restlessness, and rage that was unfortunately taken out on the capital of Nanjing. The Japanese military was on a warpath to the capital, and Chinese President Chiang Kai-shek knew it was inevitable that they would lose to the Japanese military again, causing him to issue an evacuation of the capital, Chiang and his wife, Song Mei-ling, included. The citizens of Nanjing received the notice of evacuation, but not all had the ability to uproot themselves. However, international residents who were living in Nanjing at the time provided aid to the citizens unable to evacuate; this aid was known as the Safety Zone.

The fall of Nanjing to the Japanese army occurred quickly; only a few days ago, General Tang Shengzhi of the Central Army knew his orders were basically a suicide mission. On December 13, 1937, the Japanese military erupted into chaos, drowning Chinese soldiers in the Yangtze River. The Japanese military committed acts of rape, arson, robbery, and murder in the city of Nanjing for six weeks straight. The Safety Zone was implemented by international residents John Rabe, a German businessman; Lewis Smythe, a professor at Nanjing University; Minnie Vautrin, director at the Ginling Women's College; and George Fitch, the head of the Nanjing YMCA. These individuals recorded their experiences, demonstrating the only evidence available displaying the atrocities that occurred for those six weeks. The Japanese military justified their violence against Chinese citizens by claiming they were rooting out potential Chinese military personnel who resisted Japanese "liberation." The accounts of sexual assault were astronomical; Japanese soldiers would invade homes and force the men to watch them as they raped their mothers, wives, and daughters.¹⁰⁵ Minnie Vautrin's colleague Cheng

¹⁰⁵ Mitter, *Forgotten Ally*, 135.

Ruifang transcribed a majority of Vautrin's interactions with Japanese soldiers and their rape victims. Vautrin attempted to aid the girls when she came across them and was motivated to report the Japanese soldiers to their superiors for their atrocious actions; Cheng constantly wrote in her diary that Vautrin would never understand how much the Japanese hated the Chinese; the more she reports, the more the rapes will occur.¹⁰⁶

Wartime brings forth difficult situations and decisions that individuals must deal with to survive and cope. Unfortunately, in this situation, Minnie Vautrin resorts to sex work as a "necessary evil." Cheng wrote in her diary that Vautrin agreed to a deal with the Japanese military; they were permitted by Vautrin to search for licensed sex workers in Nanjing and hold them in a controlled area to release their sexual needs "to protect the innocent and decent women."¹⁰⁷ The soldiers were able to locate twenty-one women. They were to be held inside of the university, but the soldiers did not demonstrate any compliance to the "deal" they made with Vautrin, as the rapes continued to occur throughout the city till January 1938 and accumulated to a total of over 20,000 cases.¹⁰⁸ The Rape of Nanjing revealed the reality of what the Imperial Japanese military was capable of; meanwhile, disappointed with the actions of their military personnel, Japanese military officials believed their best course of action was to fully enforce the comfort women system for all Imperial Japanese military units across Asia.

¹⁰⁶ Mitter, *Forgotten Ally*, 136.

¹⁰⁷ Mitter, *Forgotten Ally*, 137.

¹⁰⁸ Mitter, *Forgotten Ally*, 139.

Methods of Recruitment

By 1937, Imperial Japan ruled over the puppet states of Manchukuo (formerly Manchuria), Korea, and Taiwan, making recruitment less trivial in these regions of Asia. Previously seen in the “Disease Prevention” facility in 1933, many women who were recruited into the comfort women system were Japanese. However, like the situation that occurred in the 1920s with the *karayukisan*, the Japanese government felt that it would be inappropriate to continue bringing Japanese women over to China to work as sex workers, threatened by the reputation it could have given the empire. Following the Rape of Nanjing, the Japanese government and military agreed that recruitment would take place only in the colonies and occupied territories.¹⁰⁹ Assimilation policies were established in Japan’s colonies, especially Korea, forcing the citizens to integrate into Japan’s traditional belief system and nationalistic views. They were even forced to change their names to Japanese to create a sense of unity with their new empire.¹¹⁰ Therefore, recruiting women in Japanese territories enabled the Japanese military and third-party sellers to easily mobilize the comfort women system on an international level.

Imperial Japan approached the recruitment methodology similarly to the *zegen*, which recruited and bought young girls for indentured servitude in the red-light districts of the Tokugawa period and the *karayukisan* of the Meiji period. Like the former *karayukisan*, Osaki, in Chapter One, many of the women who were recruited in the early stages of the comfort women system (1932-1937) were typically women from

¹⁰⁹ Yoshiaki, *Comfort Women*, 155.

¹¹⁰ Soh, *The Comfort Women*, 37-8.

impoverished areas who were sold into servitude or *zegen* who procured them along the way. As the Empire of Japan expanded its territories, Japanese citizens were called to reside in these new colonies to enforce the integration process and establish relations with the locally colonized individuals. The colonizers gave the Japanese empire the opportunity to gain trust smoothly, creating opportunities to effectively inspire the local women to volunteer or aspire to work abroad, most commonly in factories in China; these methods fall under the categories of deceit and coercion.

The methods of deceit and coercion primarily applied to the colonies because of the building relationships between the Japanese government and military, as well as local governments and influential Korean citizens looking for financial benefits. In the 1930s, Korean women were commonly looking for jobs to help support their families; although not drastically different from the last century, this was an age of education available for men as well as women in Korea.¹¹¹ Therefore, opportunities for work being available in factories became the number one priority in many families' cases, leading to many Korean girls and women quickly being shipped to China and Manchuria to "factories." The ideas of these opportunities stem from the Japanese citizens that have started to reside in the smaller impoverished towns in Korea, spreading rumors about the promise of large amounts of money being offered to work for a certain amount of time. For women like Lu Manmei, a former Taiwanese comfort woman from Hsin-chu, she was offered a nursing position by a Japanese policeman as an opportunity to support her impoverished family. Unfortunately, she was forced onto a Japanese military boat

¹¹¹ Soh, *The Comfort Women*, 12.

heading to Hainan Dao and wasn't permitted to return, as they needed a pass from the military. She was forced to work as a comfort woman for a year and a half. She was only released as she was eight months pregnant, but her baby died thirty-eight days after they were born. When she returned to Hsin-chu, her family completely abandoned her, as she was known to have been a comfort woman.¹¹² Manmei was only one of the many women who were deceived into the comfort women system, as it was the most common form of recruitment at the beginning of its regulation in 1937.

The Japanese government and military experienced some benefits with the cooperation of their colonial subjects. As Japan's territories expanded in 1938 and the necessity of procuring comfort women for the stations was in a rapid influx, transportation aid was necessary. The transportation of women was not easy. The cooperation of local police, military police, and local governments was vital. On February 23, 1938, the Home Ministry issued the order "Matters Regarding the Treatment of Women Sailing to China." This order was specifically for women going abroad for the "shameful calling," and their only allowed destinations were northern or central China.¹¹³ It was necessary that the women from Korea and Taiwan had identification papers and permits to travel abroad that declared they were over twenty-one.¹¹⁴ The Japanese government, although it benefitted from the cooperation of various Koreans in the recruitment process of comfort women, preferred their own military with

¹¹² Margaret Mitsutani, "Fifty Years of Silence—Three Taiwanese Women," *University of Hawaii Press* 13, no. 1 (2001): 178-179.

¹¹³ Yoshiaki, *Comfort Women*, 63; the "shameful calling" was another phrase used to describe sexual labor.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. 63; although there was a declared age limit, identification papers were often forged by the local police so that they would still make a profit off the women.

the recruitment as they could be far more discreet. Procurers who were not affiliated with the Japanese government or military were required to have permits issued by either the military or consulates.¹¹⁵ A vital factor in the operation of procuring women depended on the connection between the Japanese military police and the local police. According to the 1938 document “Concerning the Recruitment of Women for Military Comfort Stations,” the notice declares the importance of following specific guidelines to recruit comfort women. The Army Ministry of Japan sent this notice to the Japanese Army Chiefs of Staff for the Northern China Army and Central China Expeditionary Army to declare that from now on (March 4, 1938), the Armies in the field should control

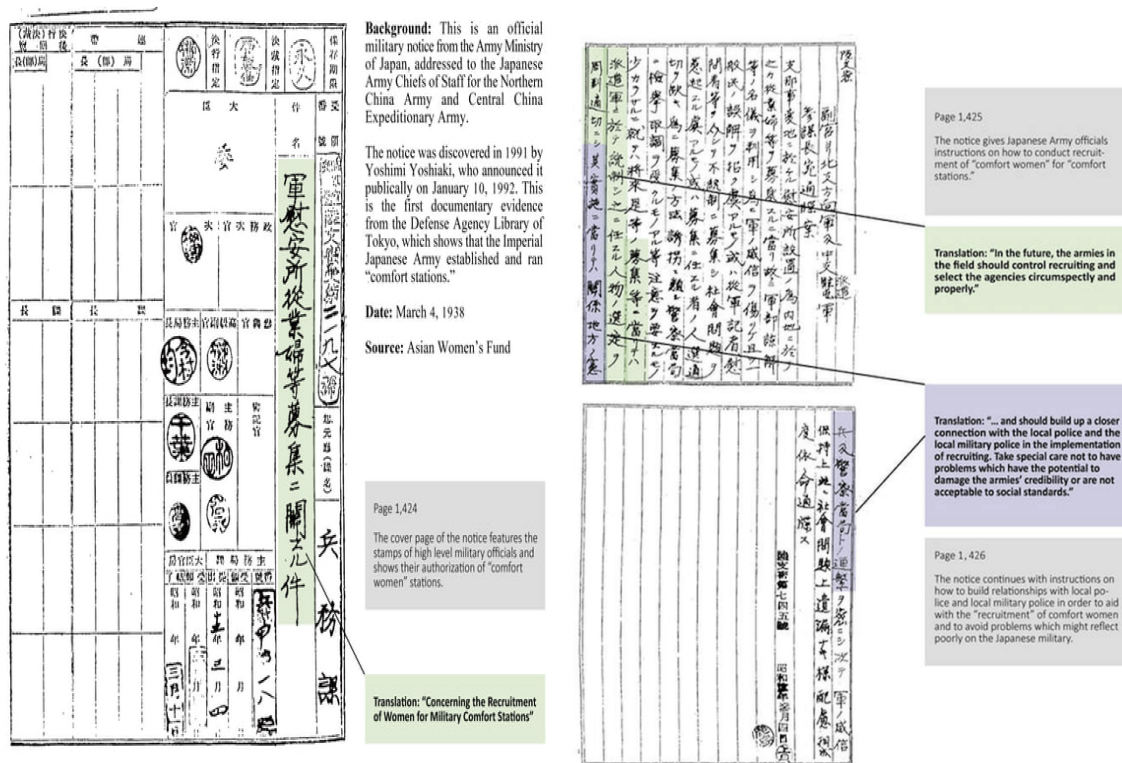


Figure 2.2 – “Concerning the Recruitment of Women for Military Comfort Stations,” March 4, 1938, No. 10, Japanese Self-Defense Agency Archives, Defense Agency Library of Tokyo, Asian Women’s Fund. <https://www.e4sjf.org/concerning-the-recruitment-of-women-for-military-comfort-stations.html>

¹¹⁵ Yoshiaki, *Comfort Women*, 65.

recruiting and select agencies circumspectly and properly.” It also includes instructions to keep close relations with local police to prevent any damage to the “armies credibility” (Fig 2.2). This document offers credibility to the claim of the Ministry of War’s participation and cooperation in the regulation of the comfort women system by the Japanese military. This document demonstrates the delegated order of command, as the emperor of Japan had full power over the expeditionary forces and relayed orders under the advice of the chief of the general staff. The Chief of the General Staff holds authority over the military troops, and the war minister influences the military government.¹¹⁶

The recruitment methods practiced by the Japanese government and military followed the enforcement of only the military being involved in the recruitment, which was conscription. However, this method is often dismissed due to the lack of physical evidence outside of testimonies from former Korean “comfort woman,” Hwang Keum-ju. According to her statement, she was a *Chōngsindae* who was drafted by the Japanese military in 1941 for the *Kunro Jungshindae* (Voluntarily Committing Body Corps for Labor), which was an official—and unavoidable—labor draft; it was referred to as “virgin work recruitment” among Koreans.¹¹⁷ Although, because of the lack of other testimonies supporting the claim of *Kunro Jungshindae*, the conscription method is not always discussed in the historiography.

Ultimately, the method of recruiting the women into the comfort women system was not so different from the methods practiced by *zegen* over the centuries. The primary

¹¹⁶ Yoshiaki, *Comfort Women*, 61.

¹¹⁷ Dai Sil Kim-Gibson, *Silence Broken: Korean Comfort Women* (Iowa: Mid-Prairie Books, 1999) 18, the term “virgin” was used mainly for unmarried girls or women, not just a woman who is not sexually inactive. Hwang’s testimony is further explored in Chapter Three.

difference would be the transparency of the *zegen*, as their intentions to purchase young girls were typical in the case of indentured servitude. In comparison to the methods of the Japanese military, who resorted to deception of employment as a factory worker or a nurse. However, depending on the recruitment method, we can see what classification was given to whom based on the comfort station in which they are placed.

The Variations of “Comfort” Stations

A pattern that continues to return throughout this study is hierarchical organization; however, in terms of the comfort women system, we can identify a new variation. Previously, the hierarchies presented primarily focused on only Japanese society, like the neo-Confucian social hierarchy constructed by Tokugawa Ieyasu in the Edo period. In this case, the hierarchy presents itself in organizing the women's placement in the comfort stations from 1932 to 1945. During wartime, there were no designated categories in which the comfort stations were organized specifically. However, following the resurgence of the comfort women issue in the field of history, Soh recognizes that there were various versions of comfort stations that functioned a particular way, based on testimonies given by former comfort women in their testimonies.¹¹⁸

The Japanese military regulated three comfort station variations: concessionary, paramilitary, and criminal facilities.¹¹⁹ The Japanese government's reasoning for creating these facilities was aimed to control the spread of sexually transmitted diseases among

¹¹⁸ Soh, *The Comfort Women*, 117.

¹¹⁹ Soh, *The Comfort Women*, 117.

the soldiers, as well as a financial tactic to cut down on the costs of medicine and medical equipment, as it was believed that the military oversight of soldiers' sexual activity would benefit from this. However, the primary concern for creating these comfort stations was



Figure 2.3 – Japanese soldiers waiting in line at a “comfort” station. Digital Museum: The Comfort Women Issue and the Asian Women’s Fund. <https://www.awf.or.jp/e1/facts-12.html>

ensuring soldiers' comfort throughout the war. Provision of Concessionary facilities, such as for-profit “houses of entertainment or “houses of prostitution,” were run by Japanese and Korean civilians who worked in cooperation with the Japanese military.

“Houses of entertainment” were the comfort stations or *ryōtei* (restaurants), like those that

existed in the Tokugawa period in the “pleasure quarters.” *Ryotei* facilities were typically only available to Japanese officers, where the women were to provide food and drinks, but primarily sexual labor. These facilities were typically more expensive than the “houses of prostitution.” The earliest iterations of *ryōtei* were established after the Shanghai incident and before the Rape of Nanjing; in the mid-1930s. These stations were under the guise of typical business names; some *ryōtei* were in the port city in northern Korea, Chongjin, and were named the Silver Moon Loft and the Abundant Sea Loft.¹²⁰

¹²⁰ Soh, *The Comfort Women*, 119; “Silver Moon Loft” is the English translation of the business, but the Japanese title is *Gingetsurō* and the Korean title is *Unwollu*. Similarly, “Abundant Sea Loft” is *Hokairo* in Japanese and *P’unghaeru* in Korean. Soh explains that many of the women, including the Japanese survivor Shirota Suzuko (pseudonym) had been taken to these forms of facilities with normal business names in Taiwan, Saipan, Truk, and Palau.

The “houses of prostitution” were designated for ranked soldiers as they were, accordingly, less expensive than *ryōtei*; unlike *ryōtei*, these strictly sold sexual services. These facilities were owned and managed by civilians but were regulated by the Japanese military.¹²¹ The main difference between “houses of entertainment” and “houses of prostitution” was their security precautions (**Fig 2.3**). Military police were required to keep and submit daily records of who visited the facilities and by whom they were “entertained”; they were also required to note the medical officer’s examinations of the women to ensure physical health was viable for the soldiers.¹²² The general personnel that visited the “houses of prostitution” were “noncommissioned officers and enlisted men but reserved overnight services as a privilege exclusive to officers.”¹²³ The most accurate representation of this form of comfort station is based on Dutch-Australian former comfort woman, Jan Ruff-O’Herne. Jan was abducted, along with her family, to concentration camps in 1942 in Java. In 1944, Jan and ten other girls were forced to leave the camp and live in a colonial home-turned-comfort station called “The House of the Seven Seas” in Semarang. She was stationed in her own room with a bed, washbasin, towels, and a wardrobe.¹²⁴ The Japanese soldiers attempted to force them to sign some form; however, she and the other girls refused. She states that the Japanese could buy tickets for the girls they wished to be with that night, they were given new Japanese names, and they were their prisoners with no chance of escaping.¹²⁵

¹²¹ Soh, *The Comfort Women*, 121.

¹²² Soh, *The Comfort Women*, 121.

¹²³ Soh, *The Comfort Women*, 122.

¹²⁴ Jan Ruff-O’Herne, *50 Years of Silence: Comfort Woman of Indonesia* (Singapore: Toppan Co., 1996), 72-3.

¹²⁵ O’Herne, *50 Years of Silence*, 77-9.

The second variation of comfort stations was classified as paramilitary, which were not intended to be a for-profit station, as they were strictly run by the Japanese military. However, a ticketing system was involved with the soldier's entrance into the facility and interaction with the comfort women.¹²⁶ Soh declares that there were two versions of the paramilitary facilities; as the war continued, the nature and function of the station transitioned with it. The first version that existed was the "maiden's auxiliary," the women in this facility were an integral part of the function of the camp and the military in its entirety, as they were responsible for more than sexual services and offering comfort to the soldiers. These were the facilities that were first created after the Manchurian Incident (1931) but became more rapidly constructed following the Rape of Nanjing (1937-8).¹²⁷ The "maiden's auxiliary" facilities were stationed in a remote area on the frontline, as the women were assigned duties that were categorized as "feminine" duties that fit their gender roles. The women that were designated to these stations were the *karayukisan* and *jōshigun* ("girl army"). These women were recognized as a necessity for the military's function, as they were to provide a "healthy sexual outlet" as the women were regularly medically examined by Brigade medical officers.¹²⁸ In 1938, the rapid construction of para-military brothels became essential to the military's campaign, bringing us to the "quasi-brothel" category. These facilities were like the "maiden's auxiliary," where there was a ticketing system of allotted times for officers to allow their soldiers to visit the stations. Unlike the "maiden's auxiliary," these stations were not

¹²⁶ Soh, *The Comfort Women*, 118.

¹²⁷ Soh, *The Comfort Women*, 125.

¹²⁸ Soh, *The Comfort Women*, 125.

located on the frontlines but close enough to be accessed easily by the soldiers; the key distinction is that soldiers from multiple camps around the region were able to visit these due to their strategic construction sites.¹²⁹

The last of the variations include the criminal facilities, which were constructed towards the end of the war. These facilities were makeshift stations that were quickly established as they were primarily made by soldiers, away from the military camps, to harbor local women they assaulted. These were barely official stations, there were no medical officials to inspect the women, and there were no resources offered for their survival and function; they were strictly created to ensure that the locals would not be aware of the soldiers' crimes; these were typically referred to as "rape camps."¹³⁰

Statistics

The discussion of determining the numbers is an ongoing conversation within the historiography. The situation is difficult due to the extermination of evidence that provides statistics. The numbers that will be displayed below are based on calculations made by historians like Kim Il-myon and Yoshimi Yoshiaki. The group responsible for this debacle is the Japanese government, as when they were forced to surrender on August 15, 1945, they were determined to avoid prosecution for the scheming, construction, and regulation of the comfort women system. The government was scheduled to destroy all the evidence linking them to their war crimes and succeeded with most of the official documents. However, some were recovered by the Allied forces when

¹²⁹ Soh, *The Comfort Women*, 127.

¹³⁰ Soh, *The Comfort Women*, 130.

they entered Japan in September 1945, securing them in the Self-Defense Agency's National Institute for Defense Studies Library in Japan for over fifty years.¹³¹

Due to the lack of physical evidence regarding the comfort system, no exact number of women is recorded to offer confirmation.¹³² In 1976, researcher Kim Il-myon published his historical account of the “comfort women,” the recruitment styles, their lives in the camps, and the atrocities they experienced. Kim was the first to estimate how many women were in the comfort system at approximately 200,000. This estimate has been the staple assumption within the historiography. However, historians like Yoshiaki Yoshiaki, Hata Ikuhiko, and Su Zhiliang believe that the estimation of 200,000 is considerably high based on the calculations made through the approximate number of military personnel per comfort woman and the turnover rate of comfort women in the brothels. Estimates made by each historian are within the range of 50,000-200,000 women from 1939-1945. Yoshiaki believes that 50,000 is the lowest the number can go because it was impossible to have no further recruitment throughout the war, considering the treatment many of them endured from rape, miscarriage, physical abuse, malnutrition, and insufficient resources.¹³³ However, the women primarily originated from Korea, Taiwan, China, and Japan. As the war proceeded and the stations expanded across north, central, and southern China, women were transported from around the Asian continent. Yoshiaki calculates possible numbers of women based on the 1939, 1942, and 1943

¹³¹ Suzanne O'Brien, “Translator's Introduction,” in *Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery in the Japanese Military During World War II*, trans. Suzanne O'Brien (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 7.

¹³² Yoshiaki, *Comfort Women*, 91.

¹³³ Yoshiaki, *Comfort Women*, 91.

proposals made to request ratios of women per soldier.¹³⁴ The October 21, 1942, proposal “Matter Concerning the Impressment of Coolies” to the Asia Development Army in central China from the Coal Control Association’s Eastern Department Chief requests for twenty to thirty women to be brought in as comfort women for every thousand soldiers.¹³⁵

The lack of physical evidence creates an issue when determining the statistics of the women obtained, the amount of comfort stations built, and their locations. However, in 1938, there were approximately 700,000 Japanese soldiers stationed in China. According to the Foreign Ministry’s documentation of the consulate of Nanjing, between 1938 and 1939, the assumed figures of the women in various stations in China (excluding those that are not on the base) are shown in Figure 2 below.¹³⁶

Table 1.1		
Location	# of comfort stations	# of Women
Shanghai	n/a	300 (army included, navy excluded)
Hangchow	4	36
Jinjiang	24	143 Korean 107 Japanese
Wuhu	6	22 Korean 48 Japanese
Wuhan	20	395 (not all were considered traditional comfort women)
Nanchang	11	100 Korean 11 Japanese
Zhenjiang	8	n/a
Yangzhou	1	n/a
Danyang	1	n/a
Statistics collected by the consulate based on Japanese subjects in 1939		

¹³⁴ Yoshiaki, *Comfort Women*, 55.

¹³⁵ Yoshiaki, *Comfort Women*, 55.

¹³⁶ Yoshiaki, *Comfort Women*, 53-4.

By the conclusion of the Asia-Pacific War in 1945, approximately 130 comfort stations were located in China, Hong Kong, French Indochina, the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, British Borneo, the Dutch East Indies, Burma, Thailand, New Guinea, the Japanese Okinawan Archipelago, the Bonin Islands, Hokkaido, the Kurile Islands, Sakhalin, the Truk Islands, Koror Island, Taiwan, Saipan, American-occupied Guam, and the Indian Nicobar Islands.¹³⁷

The active comfort women system from 1932 to 1945 was the production of Japanese nationalist ideology formulated by the neo-Confucian ideology that permeated from the Tokugawa period into the Meiji period. Japan's historical relationship with comfort is centered at the Japanese government's justification for constructing, regulating, and destroying the comfort women system. Deciphering their reasoning for creating the system highlights the cultural influences that derive from the philosophical demand for comfort for Japanese men. The construction of the system—although disguised as an organization to prevent rape and reduce medical expenses—is essentially a poor attempt at self-control. Tokugawa Ieyasu's social structure was inspired by the Confucian ideals that promote the harmony and functionality of human beings; however, it is evident that Japanese men, especially in the military, are fundamentally conditioned to believe that they are entitled to emotional, mental, and sexual comfort whenever they please.

¹³⁷ Yoshiaki, *Comfort Women*, 91.

The Japanese government's destruction of evidence that confirmed their participation and organization in an institution of systematic rape was disrespectful and irresponsible. Although the historical record was reputation damaging, they essentially removed a piece of their history that is vital for future generations to recognize and learn from. It is the responsibility of humans to recognize their actions and their history; it is part of the fundamentals of growing as individuals. Postwar Japan had a responsibility to take account for their actions; while they destroyed the official documentation referring to the comfort women system, they also exterminated the *Kokutai no Hongi*. Albeit the document was officially a radical piece of propaganda promoting nationalistic ideologies that declared the Japanese Imperial family as divine, making the nation directly divine, the document held historical precedence; it was a source that was an amalgamation of their history and beliefs as a nation. Fortunately, the copy that was referenced in this study was discovered in an abandoned schoolroom in Marília, São Paulo, in 1940. The room was in a public building, forgotten by the Brazilian Government; quite literally, it was a hole in the wall.¹³⁸

This chapter conveys the severity of the situation that was the comfort women system from 1932 to 1945. Chapter Three will explore the effects of historical erasure on Japanese society, the victims of the comfort system, and former Japanese soldiers. It is important to remember.

¹³⁸ Hall (ed.), *Kokutai no Hongi*, 4.

CHAPTER THREE:

DAMNATIO MEMORIAE

Growing up in a family with a reputation for being educated, Hwang Keum-ju felt pressure to protect her village's perception of her family. Keum-ju's parents were arranged to be married when her father was still in her grandmother's womb, and at twelve years old, he was married to Keum-ju's seventeen-year-old mother; Keum-ju was born shortly after that. As they were engaged early, her father was expected to uphold specific standards to support his future family. He was sent for a proper high school education in Japan, which was rare in her village in Korea. He was forced to work odd jobs to support himself financially abroad, but ultimately, his degree became his most prized possession to himself and their family, which was his mortal downfall. He finally returned to Korea and his family, but this was before he had the funds to provide his wife and child with their own house. He returned with a venereal disease and fell fatally ill and did not possess the financial ability to cure it. Due to her family's "asshole splitting poverty,"¹³⁹ Keum-ju took it upon herself to find work to help her father, so she decided to take his prized diploma to prove to Mr. Choi, a successful businessman from Seoul who was in town looking for a housekeeper and prove to him that her educated father deserved help and that she was the girl for the job; she swore to "not return home" until she made something of herself.¹⁴⁰ However, back home, the missing diploma wreaked

¹³⁹ Dai Sil Kim-Gibson, *Silence Broken: Korean Comfort Women* (Iowa: Mid-Prairie Books, 1999), 15.

¹⁴⁰ Kim-Gibson, *Silence Broken*, 16.

havoc as family members searched high and low for the paper, leaving her father an emotional wreck, and out of sheer heartbreak and shame, her grandmother hung herself.¹⁴¹

Hwang Keum-ju worked for Mr. Choi for many years. Unfortunately, shortly after being employed by him to aid her father financially with medication to cure his venereal disease, her father passed away. However, a father-daughter bond she never expected manifested between Mr. Choi and herself. Keum-ju was initially employed at Mr. Choi's concubine's household in Seoul; however, due to emotionally and physically abusive circumstances, Mr. Choi moved her to his wife's household in Hamhung. Keum-ju grew up with Mr. Choi's two sons and two daughters. Mrs. Choi raised her as an additional child while employed as their housekeeper; she later enrolled Keum-ju in night school when she turned seventeen, learning how to knit and sew, as well as Japanese and math. However, in February 1941, at approximately eighteen years old, the Choi family received drafting notices from the *Kunro Jungshindae* (Voluntarily Committing Body Corps for Labor)—often referred to as “virgin work recruitment” in Korea—for their daughter Choi Keum-ja. Hwang Keum-ju never felt she fully repaid the Choi's for watching over her over the years. She didn't want her “sister” to lose the opportunity to attend university in Japan, so she felt that it was her duty to accept the enlistment in Keum-ja's place. Unbeknownst to her, Hwang Keum-ju was soon to become an *ianfu* (comfort woman) for the Japanese Imperial Military.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Kim-Gibson, *Silence Broken*, 16.

¹⁴² Kim-Gibson, *Silence Broken*, 18.

Personal histories, like those of Hwang Keum-ju, are essential for understanding the phenomenon of the military comfort women system regulated by the Japanese military from 1932 to 1945. The conscription of Korean women during the central parts of the war reflects the Japanese government and military's ambition to



Figure 3.1 – Korean comfort women who survived and were protected in Lameng, Yunnan September 3, 1945. The US National Archives.

exploit their female colonial subjects. As was discussed in Chapter Two, many of the women who were victims of the Japanese military's comfort women originated from Korea (**Fig. 3.1**), and several also came from China, Taiwan, the Philippines, and even Japan. However, with Japan's surrender in 1945 to the Allied Powers, these women were abandoned by the Japanese to fend for themselves socially, financially, physically, and historically.

Japan's defeat brought forth fear of condemnation from the victors of the war, leading to the Japanese government exterminating any evidence they could find linking them to the comfort women system. For approximately fifty years, the Japanese government avoided punishment for their war crimes. With the destruction of physical evidence, the social stigma against women who were alleged sex workers took care of the possibility of the women coming forward for decades. This chapter examines the Japanese military's demand for comfort from Asian women during the Asia-Pacific War and World War II and their lack of responsibility towards their nation's history that to

this day demonstrates their racial hierarchical ideologies, stigmatic oppression against sex workers, and the classist patriarchal culture that allowed the then Japanese government—as well as the Korean government—to exploit and destroy the lives of thousands of Asian women socially, economically, historically, and memorially. These matters are still prevalent today, with the Japanese government’s constant erasure of comfort women’s representation in textbooks and the ongoing activism by international women’s groups to advocate for historical recognition made plain.



Figure 3.2 – “Hwang Keum-ju speaking in the talk “The Story of a Korean Comfort Woman” in the Fong Auditorium of Boylston Hall.” Alexander J. Blenkinsapp, Digital image, The Harvard Crimson, November 8, 2001, <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2001/11/8/comfort-woman-tells-audience-of-horrors/>

The Japanese government and military’s destruction of official documents that verify their participation in the scheming, construction, and regulation of the Japanese military’s comfort women system is a pertinent event that benefitted the Japanese in moving forward as a nation without reparations. With the end of the war, the women who had survived

until August 15, 1945, were abruptly abandoned by the Japanese Military, as the military forces were required to return to the homeland to prepare for the oncoming American occupation, which occurred on September 15, 1945. Women like Hwang Keum-ju (**Fig 3.2**) were left to fend for themselves, find their way home, and back to their lives and families. However, this was not always feasible. Keum-ju’s father died shortly after she arrived in Hamhung to work for the Choi family, and the medication for his venereal

disease was unsuccessful. As she stated in her oral testimony with historian Dai Sil Kim-Gibson, she refused to return home until she made something of herself. A promise Keum-ju made as a teenager. In 1945, when Keum-ju was approximately twenty-two years old, she was sexually assaulted, physically, and emotionally abused by the Japanese Military for almost four years straight. She did not see it possible for her to return home, not even to her mother:

No matter how hard I try, it is impossible to describe what Japan did to me, to hundreds and thousands of young women. It is even more difficult to describe how I feel. Japan tore my human dignity into shreds and through no fault of mine, Japan inflicted pain and shame on me. Nothing they can do now can make this up.¹⁴³

Keum-ju's pain and shame are feelings that many women described in their testimonies. These women, whether Korean, Taiwanese, Filipina, Indonesian, or Japanese, were victims of sexual slavery but were terrified of being condemned by their families, societies, or governments if they ever publicly came forward with their testimonies; because of the Japanese military and government's narrative that they concocted about the "comfort women." The atrocities that the comfort women were forced to endure were not only physical; terminology that was used by the Japanese personnel also indicated the regard which they held the women, and were, unfortunately, documents within the evidence that were destroyed by the Japanese government and military in 1945. However, in December 1991, Kim Hak-sun publicly broadcasted herself as a former comfort woman who survived the institution, inspiring many with her story, including historian

¹⁴³ Kim-Gibson, *Silence Broken*, 29-30.

Dr. Yoshimi Yoshiaki who would use it to refute the history that the Japanese government subjugated.¹⁴⁴

Etymology

In March 1991, Yoshiaki had already been in the archives of the Self-Defense Agency's National Institute for Defense Studies Library in Japan, which held documents hidden from the world for the last five decades that survived the Japanese government's scheduled document destruction.¹⁴⁵ He remembered glancing over documents from the years before 1943 during his own research, so Yoshiaki returned to the library and found six documents that validated Kim Hak-sun's public testimony and proved the Japanese government and military's participation in procuring comfort women for the Japanese Military from 1931 to 1942. He quickly made these documents known to the public by publishing them in the newspaper, the *Asahi Shimbun*. Within those documents, as well as diaries that Yoshiaki uncovered by several Japanese Military personnel, he uncovered terminology that was used to refer to the women through the duration of the Japanese occupation of their colonies.¹⁴⁶

The following terms demonstrate language that Japanese Military personnel weaponized to establish sexist, inter-ethnic hierarchical racism and stigmatic attitudes towards the military comfort women. The term recognized most often is "*ianfu*," which is Japanese for "comfort woman," and it was typically used within the Japanese military at

¹⁴⁴ Yoshimi Yoshiaki, *Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery in the Japanese Military During World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 34.

¹⁴⁵ Yoshiaki, *Comfort Women*, 7.

¹⁴⁶ Yoshiaki, *Comfort Women*, 7.

the officer rank.¹⁴⁷ Also within the documents uncovered by Yoshiaki, other euphemisms that allude to the many roles that they assigned the women throughout the various versions of the comfort stations¹⁴⁸ discussed in Chapter Two include: *shakufu* (alcohol serving women), *shogi* (licensed “prostitutes”), *jōshigun* (girls military, *kōshō benjo* or *kyōdo benjo* (public toilets), *pi* (vagina)¹⁴⁹, *onna* (a woman or women), *kanojo* (she/her), *shugyofu* (women of indecent occupation).¹⁵⁰ The usage of these terms customarily came from the soldiers of the lower ranks. The euphemism *pi* has many variations within itself, as soldiers used multiple slang terms depending on the comfort woman they were interacting with. The term *pi* refers primarily to the Chinese comfort women in the stations. Still, as more Korean women were trafficked into the comfort system in China, the soldiers began to refer to them as “*Chōsen pi*” (Korean *pi*) or “*’sen pi*.”¹⁵¹ Unfortunately, the terminology described above was used primarily to diffuse the extremities of the military “comfort women,” labeling the system as licensed sex work rather than what should have been termed sexual slavery.

Following Japan’s defeat in 1945, the rest of the twentieth century was a period that belonged to national reconstruction politically and economically, as well as refining their social identity. Chapters One and Two discussed the Japanese ideology of *kokutai*, which Japan propagated throughout its imperial campaign across Asia during the late

¹⁴⁷ Sarah C. Soh, *The Comfort Women: Sexual Violence and Postcolonial Memory in Korea and Japan* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 39.

¹⁴⁸ Refer to Chapter Two for the breakdown of stations.

¹⁴⁹ Soh, *The Comfort Women*, 39; The most accurate translation of *pi* is “vagina,” but was normally used in the derogatory connotation of “cunt.”

¹⁵⁰ Ako Inuzuka, *Non-Western Colonization, Orientalism, and the Comfort Women: The Collective Memory of Sexual Slavery Under the Japanese Imperial Military* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2021), 22.

¹⁵¹ Soh, *The Comfort Women*, 39.

Meiji, Taisho, and Shōwa periods. *Kokutai*, before and during the war, represented the Japanese “national body,” which extended to the colonies Korea and Taiwan. This *kokutai* promoted unity among the citizens of the Empire and represented Japan’s ambitions to bring liberty across the countries of Asia from Western influence.¹⁵² This was further seen in the publication of the *Kokutai no hongi* (Cardinal Principles of the National Entity of Japan), which deciphered the philosophical understanding of Japan and the organic unity between the emperor and his subjects.¹⁵³ This “national essence” is thoroughly explained in the text and supports Japan’s cause throughout the war in their efforts to spread their imperial ideological values across Asia.

During World War II, propaganda was often spread through art, such as *Rosie the Riveter* in America. In Japan, propaganda art pieces were more indirect and less obvious to the casual onlooker; indirect was their method. Artists like Yasuda Yukihiro produced two related modern art pieces, *The Arrival of Yoshitsune/Camp at Kiseigawa* (1940/1)



Figure 3.3 – *The Arrival of Yoshitsune* (*Yoshitsune sanchaku*) (left)/*Camp at Kiseigawa* (*Kiseigawa no jin*) (right), Yasuda Yukihiro, a pair of six-fold screens, ink and color on paper. 166.8cm. x 370.8cm (each panel). The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo.

(Fig 3.3). The piece below depicts scenes from the *Azuma Kagami*—the Japanese

¹⁵² Rana Mitter, *Forgotten Ally: China’s World War II 1937-1945* (New York: Mariner Books, 2014), 54.

¹⁵³ Asato Ikeda. “The Japanese Art of Fascist Modernism: Yasuda Yukihiro’s *The Arrival of Yoshitsune/Camp at Kiseigawa* (1940/1).” *Modernism is Modernity*, vol 1, cycle 2 (2016) <https://modernismmodernity.org/articles/japanese-art-fascist-modernism#footnote-1>

historical chronicle considered an alleged official compilation of events during Minamoto no Yoritomo's founding as shogunate. These two scenes demonstrate the tension between the brothers, Minamoto no Yoshitsune and Shogun Minamoto no Yoritomo, as they exchange glances upon Yoritomo's summoning of an army. Another influential art piece, painted by Umemura Shōen, was *Lady Kusunoku* (1944) (**Fig 3.4**), which illustrates the wife of thirteenth-century imperial warrior Kusunoki Masashige, a known imperial loyalist. These pieces were produced during World War II, demonstrating traditional Japanese artwork typically forgone since the Tokugawa period (1603-1867). Art historian Asato Ikeda explains in her article "The Japanese Art of Fascist Modernism" that ever since the Meiji period, "Westernization projects of Enlightenment and Civilization



Figure 3.4 – *Lady Kusunoku*, Uemura Shōen, 1944, ink and color on paper. Asato Ikeda, "The Japanese Art of Fascist Modernism: Yasuda Yukihiko's *The Arrival of Yoshitsune/Camp at Kisegawa*," *Modernism is Modernity*, vol 1, cycle 2, 2016. <https://modernismmodernity.org/articles/japanese-art-fascist-modernism#footnote-1>

(*Bunmei kaika*)" manifested two versions of Japanese paintings: *nihonga* and *yōga*. *Nihonga* paintings are traditional Japanese-style works using ink or color on paper or silk; *yōga* paintings are Western-style paintings that are oil on canvas. Ikeda argues that Japanese paintings produced during the war are purposefully illustrated in traditional

Japanese-style paintings to reject the traditions of the Western world, and this is seen

through the vast amounts of negative space and heavy centrality of historical icons in the artworks above.¹⁵⁴

The importance of uniting the Asian continent under Japan's rule through the *kokutai* ideology reverted to its former version—which reflects social practices during the Tokugawa period—following their defeat in World War II. The narrative that the Japanese government had propagated about their government “liberating the countries of Asia” from Western influence heavily supported their national ideology of *kokutai*.¹⁵⁵ However, when Japan surrendered, the Allied Forces were meant to enter the country soon after that. In preparation for the arrival of the American military, the Japanese government returned to their former model of government-sanctioned sex work organization for soldiers that existed during the Tokugawa period (1603-1867). Although this system is referred to as the “pleasure districts,” this system would be known as the *Onna no Bōhatei* (The Female Floodwall).¹⁵⁶

Exploiting the Stigmatized

The Japanese government's action to initiate the *Onna no Bōhatei* system is an organization that focuses on protecting married and virgin Japanese women from the possibility of sexual assault from American troops once they land in the country. According to historian Dr. Robert Kramm's translation of Emperor Hirohito's announcement following their surrender, this system was theorized by the Japanese

¹⁵⁴ Asato Ikeda. “The Japanese Art of Fascist Modernism: Yasuda Yukihiro's *The Arrival of Yoshitsune/Camp at Kisegawa (1940/1)*.” *Modernism is Modernity*, vol 1, cycle 2 (2016) <https://modernismmodernity.org/articles/japanese-art-fascist-modernism#footnote-1>

¹⁵⁵ Mitter, *Forgotten Ally*, 54.

¹⁵⁶ Robert Kramm, “Haunted by Defeat: Imperial Sexualities, Prostitution, and the Emergence of Postwar Japan,” *Journal of World History* 28, no. 3/4 (Dec. 2017): 587.

government to promote the ideology of *kokutai*, which states that the government must protect “the sacredness of the imperial institution, the divinity of Japan’s soil, and the unity of the Japanese people.”¹⁵⁷ For this system to function in a manner that would not raise alarm to the Japanese citizens in their recruitment of women who are willing to give their bodies as a sacrifice to help their fellow citizens, they reiterate the role that Japanese women are meant to follow to support the *kokutai*.

As Japanese women have historically been expected to support the emperor, they are expected to provide a proper education of hygienic and nationalistic productivity to their children. Therefore, women who are not married and have been/are sex workers have been offered employable positions to work as sex workers for the state to protect their nation’s people; their acceptance of this satisfies the idea of Japan keeping a healthy and organic national body, as seen in Hirohito’s speech:

At this time, we are imposed...with the difficult task to comfort the occupation forces as part of the urgent national facilities for postwar management...[T]hrough the human sacrifice of several thousand ‘Okichis of the Shōwa period’ we build a floodwall against the raging waves, helping to defend and nurture the purity of our race, thereby becoming an invisible base for the postwar social order.¹⁵⁸

As seen in Chapter One, the stigmatization of women within the occupation of sex work or sexual labor was active in Japanese society since the transition into the Meiji Restoration. Therefore, their society’s contemptuous attitude towards those women benefitted the Japanese government in their effort to provide a sexual service barricade

¹⁵⁷ Kramm, “Haunted by Defeat,” 596.

¹⁵⁸ Kramm, “Haunted by Defeat,” 603; Okichi was a prominent geisha in the shogunate period that was ordered to provide comfort (primarily sexual services) to the U.S. General Consulate Townsend Harris in the 1850s while he was in Japan. She was “sacrificed” in the eyes of the *Bakufu* in the sense that she prevented the general from fornicating with the “decent” women of Japan, preventing any possible “contamination” of the nation’s bloodline.

only fueled their initiative. Japanese politicians, bureaucrats, policemen, and influential individuals in the "entertainment industry organized and regulated the system." This system was a form of control of the female body that represents a combination of both the "pleasure quarters" of the nineteenth century and the comfort stations from 1932 to 1945.¹⁵⁹

The Japanese government justified the regulation of licensed sex work within Japan for centuries, therefore enabling the idea that keeping a hygienic functioning country relied on the labor of thousands of Asian women. As discussed in Chapter Two, the transition went from providing Japanese *karayukisan* (women working overseas), then *jōshigun* (girl army), and finally, military comfort women. The state witnessed several forms of recruitment into a governmentally tacit form of sexual "labor" that protected them. However, the comfort women were, in fact, sexually enslaved to the Japanese Military, whether Japanese society and government were willing to remember that or not. Therefore, the history of sexual labor—whether indentured, consensual, or coerced—never entirely left the memory of Japanese, as well as Asian, society.

In retrospect, the memory of sexual labor in Japanese society was prevalent in the function of Japan in many periods. Still, the representation of the conditions has never been properly relevant in Japanese society's memory. However, the fault not only lies on the shoulders of the Japanese, but the responsibility also lies with the parties involved with the censorship acts enforced in occupied Japan from 1945 to 1951 by the American military. These acts caused harmful damage to the future – for both the censored and the

¹⁵⁹ Kramm, "Haunted by Defeat," 589.

censoring. A few of the banned topics that caused the most damage to the remembrance of the comfort women stemmed from:

1. Criticism of the Tokyo Military Trial
2. Criticism of the treatment of Japanese people in Manchuria
3. Relationships between Allied soldiers and Japanese women¹⁶⁰

In this sense, the bans enacted were for the purpose of removing possible animosity among the Japanese citizens against the occupying American military. Unfortunately, their censorship removed the possibility of the Japanese, and even the Americans, to discuss what was committed against Asian citizens from 1932 to 1945 by the Japanese military, more specifically, the Asian women. However, with the American military occupying Japan, the Japanese government was inhibited from promoting “divinity” with the Japanese Imperial family, directly removing the nation of Japan and its people from their cultural ideology of *kokutai*.

Occupied Japan held a particular relationship with the memory of the comfort women, censored or not. The social understanding of the comfort system reflected Japanese society's cultural memory of sex workers. Sex workers, from their knowledge, were for the prospect of productivity and the protection of their people, leaving little concern for the sex workers themselves. This ignorant attitude resonated with the case of the comfort women and the system as well. Geoffrey Cubitt states, “cultural resources that we have access to as members of particular groups or permit us to articulate our

¹⁶⁰ Inuzuka, *Non-Western Colonization, Orientalism, and the Comfort Women*, 37-8.

memories in forms that are comprehensible to others who have a similar cultural endowment. Much of our remembering is, indeed, obviously socially motivated — prompted by social occasions, geared to social exchanges.”¹⁶¹ Therefore, the comprehensible—and palatable—history that Asian societies understood and understand is the “cultural endowment” of which they shared historically. Therefore, their shared lack of historical recognition of their principles is what enabled the occurrence of the comfort women system and the history that is removed from their societies’ memory.

The Need to Remember

Following the war and American occupation of Japan (1945-1952), licensed sex work still existed but was not a top priority for the well-being of the Japanese government and society. Life went on for those who had a brief scare with the Western



Figure 3.5 – Kim Bok-dong in April 2014 touches the Statue of Peace, a memorial to victims of Japan’s wartime sexual slavery in Gyeonggi-do Province. Photograph. Park Gil-ja and Kim Min-ji “Former sex slave and human rights activist Kim Bok-dong dies at 93,” *Korea.net* January (2019), <https://www.korea.net/NewsFocus/Society/view?articleId=167640>

powers; however, those around the rest of Asia who survived the comfort system were stagnant. Many of the former comfort women were caught in their trauma, forced to return to families who were unaware of what their daughters went through. Many of the women tried to get married to protect themselves

socially if they were ever revealed to have been comfort women. Others, like Keum-ju, felt they could not return home, mostly ashamed of what they endured, but also because

¹⁶¹ Geoffrey Cubitt, *History and Memory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 118.

they could not find viable transportation. Korean survivor Kim Bok-dong's mother believed fourteen-year-old Bok-dong was being sent to China to a factory that was constructing Japanese military uniforms, unaware of where her daughter was truly going (Fig. 3.5). On Bok-dong's return eight years later, she refused to get married, and she stated the following in an interview with an Asia-based media company journalist:

She pushed me to be honest with her, so I confessed that, given all the abuse done to my body, I didn't want to screw up another man's life. It should just be my problem. So I told her I couldn't get married. Once she found out, my mother also couldn't talk about it to anyone, and became very distressed. Eventually, she suffered a heart attack and passed away as a result.¹⁶²

Refusal of marriage was not uncommon within the testimonies of survivors. However, Bok-dong's is especially interesting because she states that it was to remove the possibility of ruining a man's life by being married to a woman who had been an alleged sexual laborer. This shame that she believed that she would bring upon a possible husband stems from the neo-patriarchal society that stigmatized women who were sexual laborers as impure was enforced by Imperial Japan, as well as her Korean government.¹⁶³ Her fear also fueled her decision to remain silent for decades. Unfortunately, the Japanese government benefitted from Bok-dong's—and hundreds of other survivors—silence as they were able to control the historical narrative of their atrocities—or lack thereof—following the war.

¹⁶² Asian Boss, "Life as a 'Comfort Woman': Story of Kim Bok-Dong | Stay Curious #9." *Youtube*, October 2018, www.youtube.com/watch?v=qsT97ax_Xb0.

¹⁶³ Soh, *The Comfort Women*, 37-8.

The historical narrative produced by the Japanese postwar was supported by the influence of *kokutai* and the nation's classist patriarchal culture. This narrative manifested a form of collective memory that reverberated into the following generations. Collective memory refers to the shared recollection of events. Thus, the recollection of the comfort women and the system was based on the memory works published postwar. The first memory works published were as early as 1946, as seen in Tamura Taijirō's *Nikutai no Akuma* "Devil of Flesh," a romance novel between a Chinese woman POW and a Japanese soldier. In 1947, Taijirō published *Shunpuden* (*A Prostitute's Story*), a novel based on the "*ianfu*" stationed on the Manchurian front but was a romanticized telling of their roles in the Japanese military, promoting the narrative that the comfort women were consensual military sex workers; his novel was later turned into two movies, "Escape at Dawn" (**Fig. 3.7**) in 1950¹⁶⁴ and a romantic war drama "Story of a Prostitute" (**Fig. 3.6**) in 1965.¹⁶⁵ An important statement in Dr. Inuzuka's analysis of the movie portrayals of "Story of a Prostitute" is the emphasis on the "otherness" of the comfort woman. In the 1950 portrayal, the comfort woman is "explicitly" Korean, which is articulated in Taijirō's description of her "foreignness." However, in the 1965 version—the same year of the Korea-Japan Treaty on Basic Relations—the comfort woman is no

¹⁶⁴ Inuzuka, *Non-Western Colonization, Orientalism, and the Comfort*, 36.

¹⁶⁵ Yoshiaki, *Comfort Women*, 33; The film was based on a sex worker working at a brothel in Manchuria during the war and her story of growing to hate the officer who took a liking to her but falling in love with the officer's aide.

longer explicitly Korean, just vaguely identified as East Asian;¹⁶⁶ that same year, he published *Nikutai no Mon* “*Gate of Flesh*.”

Taijirō was a popular author and a former Japanese soldier who served during the war. His books were inspirational for the genre that was quickly arising postwar called “literature of the flesh,” which embraced more “primitive” urges which he claimed to have always been present in Japanese society, underneath the “extreme stoicism and



Figure 3.6 – *Story of a Prostitute* (1965)
Original movie poster



Figure 3.7 – *Escape at Dawn* (1950) Original movie poster

spiritualism” which were “forced upon people before and during the war.¹⁶⁷ This genre's popularity that Taijirō contributed to demonstrates the unfortunate reality that existed due to the Japanese government’s manipulation of nation-forming history that they concocted

¹⁶⁶ The 1965 Treaty of Basic Relations between Korea and Japan was the official policy recognizing the Republic of Korea as the only government in Korea, however maintaining civil relations with each other.

¹⁶⁷ Inuzuka, *Non-Western Colonization, Orientalism, and the Comfort Women*, 36.

to avoid the consequences of their war crimes. The “literature of the flesh” works that are analyzed as pertinent “artifacts”¹⁶⁸ of the “comfort women’s” history; this form of collective memory demonstrates the cultural history that influences an imperial ideology, placing Japan socially and characteristically above the rest of Asian societies.

The Downfall of the Collective

In 1971, the first autobiography that describes the personal experience of a comfort woman was published by a Japanese woman under the pseudonym Shiota Suzuko. Shiota spent most of her young adult and adult life in the sex industry/sexual slavery industry.¹⁶⁹ From the age of seventeen and many years following the war’s end, Shiota was without options for survival. In March 1946, the US Navy picked her up by a Landing Ship Tank from Palau and brought her to Kyushu. She confesses that she fell into a methamphetamine addiction, moving from brothel to brothel, selling herself to survive; she traveled to work in Fukuoka, Nagasaki, Kumamoto, Kobe, and Yoshihara. In approximately 1955, Shiota attempted suicide but survived; she was caught in a constant state of despair and eventually returned home to visit her mother’s grave, only to learn about the death of her younger brother and the suicide of her younger sister. Witnessing this made her realize that she wanted to leave the sex industry entirely, and she was able to be admitted to a rehabilitation facility for women who were recently out of the red-light districts. There, she was baptized and got a hysterectomy. She eventually found her way into the Izumi-ryō house—the house of protection of women—which became a

¹⁶⁸ Inuzuka, *Non-Western Colonization, Orientalism, and the Comfort Women*, 37.

¹⁶⁹ “Shiota Suzuko (pseudonym), the only Japanese survivor who spoke out,” Summary of her autobiography *Mary’s Hymn*. Translated by Keigo Nishio. *Women’s Human Rights Institute of Korea*, reprinted with permission from Kanita Women’s Village and WAM.

village that housed other surviving “*ianfu*,” Kanita Women’s Village.¹⁷⁰ Dr. Marita

Sturken claims that history functions best when victims are absent:

When personal memories are deployed in the context of marking the anniversary of historical events, they are presented as either the embodied evidence of history or as evidence of history’s failure...They represent a very particular form of embodied memory. History functions much more smoothly in the absence of survivors, and survivors are often dissenting voices to history’s narratives, but history-making also accords them with a very particular authority as an authentic experience.¹⁷¹

Sturken recognizes the power that lies within the individual's history, and their memory represents the severity of their situation and the authenticity of dismantling the narrative. The silence of the survivors of the comfort women system stems from their fear of social stigma and ridicule. Therefore, their silence reveals the gaps in nation-forming historiography and demonstrates the distinction between collective and collected memory.

In the summer of 1971, shortly after Shirota Suzuko publicized her autobiography *Mary’s Hymn*, Japanese historian Kazuko Hirota met with another Japanese survivor, Kikumaru-san. Her article articulating her time as an “*ianfu*” greatly juxtaposes the claimed experience that Shirota published. Shirota’s testimony described the *ian shisetsu* as “hell for women,” but Kikumaru-san’s embodied the Japanese mindset. She claimed to have been considered an “elite” “*ianfu*” on Truk Island, stationed in a *shisetsu* reserved for only Japanese military officers. During the war, Kikumaru-san only felt pride in her

¹⁷⁰ “Shirota Suzuko (pseudonym), the only Japanese survivor who spoke out,” Summary of her autobiography *Mary’s Hymn*. Translated by Keigo Nishio. *Women’s Human Rights Institute of Korea*, reprinted with permission from Kanita Women’s Village and WAM.

¹⁷¹ Marita Sturken, “Absent Images of Memory: Remembering and Reenacting the Japanese Internment,” in *Perilous Memories: The Asia-Pacific War(s)*, ed. T. Fujitani, George White, and Lisa Yoneyama (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 33-4.

work as a sex worker for the Japanese military because she genuinely believed in her gendered duty to follow their wartime slogan “*Okuni no tameni*” (For the good of the country).¹⁷² Kikumaru-san believed she was fulfilling her duty as a “filial daughter” to the emperor by providing an experience that would guarantee the health of the *kokutai*. However, when Japan surrendered in 1945, she felt betrayed and disgusted with her country, even though she did her duty as a Japanese woman—this was especially so as she was also trained as a *geisha*. When the article on her experience as an “*ianfu*” was released in the summer of 1971, Kikumaru-san was ridiculed by her community for her openness on her failure as a “comfort woman.” She was subjected to heavy social stigma and “humiliating” criticism to the point that in April 1972, Kikumaru-san committed suicide.¹⁷³

Japanese influence over the memory of comfort women began to waiver in the late 1970s, as biographies were published more frequently by Japanese and Korean survivors. However, because the narratives were focused on only Japanese and Korean women, the conversation of the “*ianfu*” subsided politically and socially. Following the end of World War II, societies in both Japan and Korea were individuals who experienced the war front or participated in the war period in some aspect and felt no need to bring up issues or events that occurred during colonial rule. Korean citizens attempted to move on as quickly as possible from the memory of being colonized by Imperial Japan for the last fifty years, and the Japanese government was doing what it

¹⁷² Soh, *The Comfort Women*, 148.

¹⁷³ Soh, *The Comfort Women*, 148.

could to make the world forget its actions during the war.¹⁷⁴ As seen in Chapter Two, Korean citizens played a large part in the “recruitment” process of *ianfu* before and during the war, whether it be coercive maneuvers performed by Korean couples on the border of China, Korean women owning and running an *ian shisetsu*, or parents selling their daughters to relieve debt; the historical manipulation benefitted their government just as much as it did the Japanese came postwar time.

For thirty years, the collective memory of the comfort women was primarily the content created by Tamura Taijirō in his “Literature of the Flesh.” As the younger generation became adults in the 1970s and 1980s, the narrative about the comfort women began to change. They grew up hearing war stories from their fathers and grandfathers; many became scholars and journalists, leading to their own research questions. In 1967, a Japanese reporter, Kako Senda, was exposed to the reality of the comfort women system while collecting photographs for his research in the *Nihon no Senreki (Japan’s War Chronicle)*. Confusion was his first emotion, whereas this time, the only work in their memory was Taijiro’s “literature” that depicted the comfort women as military sex workers who willingly traveled with the Japanese military during the wartime period. However, the photographs that Kako uncovered depicted women who appeared to be wearing Japanese women’s clothing but were “carrying trunks on top of their heads,”¹⁷⁵ which was what Kako recognized as an action typically done by Korean women, as well

¹⁷⁴ Kan Kimura. *The Burden of the Past: Problems of Historical Perception in Japan-Korea Relations*. Trans. Marie Speed (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019), 30.

¹⁷⁵ Soh, *The Comfort Women*, 149.

as Chinese women wearing Japanese hairstyles and *kimonos*.¹⁷⁶ This discovery piqued Kako's interest and drove him to research the comfort women system.

The social interest in the comfort women issue in the 1970s manifested in Japan following Kako Senda's publication of the "trailblazing" monograph *Jūgun Ianfu* (*Military Comfort Women*) in 1973.¹⁷⁷ Kako's monograph was seven chapters that focused primarily on the Korean women held in the comfort stations, recruitment methods conducted by the military, and forms of "dishonorable deaths" given to the women who died while in the stations; therefore, Kako's findings are the first formal publication that demonstrated factual understanding of the comfort women system. The monograph was incredibly popular and was well-received, especially by Korean citizens. In 1974, Kako's monograph was turned into the film *Yōja Chōngsindae* (*Women's Volunteer Corps*) in Japan and was shown in Korea under the title *Chonggun Wianbu* (*Military Comfort Women*).¹⁷⁸

The unfortunate consequence of these memory works was the fame that came from the topic, leading to misinformation and misrepresentation of the comfort women. According to Soh, Korean ethnonationalists caused many issues with their 1980s translations of books published by historians like Senda Kako in the 1970s. The most prominent case she studied was the controversial translation of "Koreans" in the 1981 translated version of the 1976 edition of Kim Il-myon's *Tennō no Guntai to Chōsenjin*

¹⁷⁶ Soh, *The Comfort Women*, 149.

¹⁷⁷ Soh, *The Comfort Women*, 149.

¹⁷⁸ Soh, *The Comfort Women*, 161.

Ianfu (*The Emperor's Army and the Korean Comfort Women*).¹⁷⁹ The translator, Yim Chong-guk, switched out the term *Chōsenjin* (Koreans) to *hangukin* (people of the Republic of Korea), which was a term that was not created until after Korea's liberation from Imperial Japan and raised concerns to historians, like Soh, in the misrepresentation it causes; Yim's translation disregards the women that were taken from North Korea by using the term that refers to only South Koreans.¹⁸⁰ There is a positive and a negative to this publication's recognition; the positive brought forward a conversation that the "post-liberation" generation needed to discuss, as they were children of those who either supported the comfort women system or were enslaved by it. The negative was that it spread misinformed facts about the comfort women system, used incorrect terminology that was not used during the system's active years, and completely removed the Korean government and society's participation in the neo-patriarchal institution of systematic rape.

The Death That Brought the Reckoning

As can be seen, there is a complexity in identifying those responsible for the comfort women and their part in historical memory. The group that is primarily at large in the blame lies with the Japanese government, specifically Emperor Hirohito; from 1945 to 1989, Hirohito was basically just a political figurehead.¹⁸¹ Postwar, Emperor Hirohito was forced to agree to their terms and the American's formulation of Japan's

¹⁷⁹ Soh, *The Comfort Women*, 161.

¹⁸⁰ Soh, *The Comfort Women*, 161.

¹⁸¹ Inuzuka, *Non-Western Colonization, Orientalism, and the Comfort*, 37-8.

new constitution. The American occupation disengaged the Japanese Imperial family's divinity and instituted democratic policies that removed the cultural and social influence of the imperial line. However, the sentiment within the Japanese society of the imperial line did not fall away quickly, as loyalists to Hirohito still connected Hirohito with their cultural past; he became extremely ill in 1988 and passed in 1989.

Until Hirohito's passing, the memory of the comfort women was still regarded as a positive recollection for many of the Japanese soldiers, as seen in Tamura Taijirō's 'non-fiction' depiction of the comfort women in his "literature of the flesh." In the 1980s, there were autobiographies and articles published regarding women as victims of sexual violence, like the former Japanese comfort woman Shirota Suzuko; however, the women were still consistently recognized as sex workers in unfortunate conditions. During his research period, Senda Kako interviewed multiple former Japanese soldiers who shared fond memories that demonstrated a romanticized memory of their interactions with the comfort women at their camps:

It seems that soldiers began to feel as if the comfort women were their wives and soldiers did not desire them in a sexual way after they had lived together for some time...Soldiers took good care of the comfort women. In response, on their days off, the comfort women visited soldiers with gifts, did laundry for soldiers, sat by soldiers who were cleaning machine guns, or gathered flowers. It was a peaceful time hearing birds sing in the sky...Of course, soldiers were better at doing laundry than those women in prostitution. Nonetheless, we were happy with their offer.¹⁸²

¹⁸² Inuzuka, *Non-Western Colonization, Orientalism, and the Comfort Women*, 72.

These depictions of the comfort women are a common sentiment given by former Japanese soldiers; however, following the death of Hirohito in 1989, they would quickly change.

On December 6th, 1991, Kim Hak-sun (**Fig. 3.8**), a former Korean “comfort woman,” publicly testified in the “Korean class-action suit against the Japanese government” in Tokyo with two other members of the South Korean Association of the Pacific War Victims and Bereaved Families, who were also former comfort women. However, they are not mentioned in the accounts in the historiography.¹⁸³ Women inspired by Kim followed her footsteps and came forward with their stories as former comfort women, like Chapter Two’s story portraying the life of former Filipina comfort woman Maria Rosa Henson, as well as former Korean comfort woman Hwang Keum-ju, from the start of this chapter. However, as the stories of these women were coming forward consistently and in a very public manner, socio-political issues arose, splitting societies in Japan, Korea, and China.

Educational War

Following Kim Hak-sun's testimonial, there was a quick divide among Asian citizens, primarily in Japan and South Korea. The social



Figure 3.8 – Kim Hak-sun testifying about her experience as a former comfort woman in Tokyo on December 6, 1991. Accessed by <https://www.awf.or.jp/e2/survey.html>

¹⁸³ Soh, *Comfort Women*, 43.

activism of the Redress Movement pushed textbook publishers to incorporate the history of these women in Japanese middle school and high school textbooks. They typically contained brief statements, not usually more than a few sentences, discussing the mobilization of Korean and Chinese laborers—sometimes referring to them as *jūgun ianfu* (military comfort women)—during the war period.¹⁸⁴ Soh’s translated analysis of the various textbooks that referenced the comfort women had an intriguing range of describing them, like the publisher Tokyo Shoseki’s excerpt, “There were also many women who were forcibly sent to the battlefield as military comfort women.”¹⁸⁵ Other textbook publishers like Nihon Shoseki, Shimizu Shoin, and Ōsaka Shoseki typically referred to the women as “laborers,” “ianfu,” or “comfort women.”¹⁸⁶ In 1996, Nakamura Akira, the head of the Showasha Research Institute (SRI), established a conservative movement that continuously sent requests to the education councils to remove the excerpts of the comfort women from the textbooks, as he believed that this form of “self-critical” history is damaging to the future generations.¹⁸⁷ Unfortunately, the precedent of this movement resonated with the Liberal Democratic Party’s (LDP) initiative to move away from their Imperial past, authorizing the textbook reformation of the SRI.

The textbook reformation initiative caused an immense amount of harm to the comfort women Redress Movement as denialists began unifying in the 1990s. However, in 1995, Yoshimi Yoshiaki published his analytical monograph, *Comfort Women*, which

¹⁸⁴ Soh, *The Comfort Women*, 169.

¹⁸⁵ Soh, *The Comfort Women*, 169.

¹⁸⁶ Soh, *The Comfort Women*, 169.

¹⁸⁷ Yangmo Ku, “Japanese History Textbook Controversies, 1995-2010: Transnational Activism versus Neo-nationalist Movement,” *Pacific Focus* 29, no. 2 (August 2014): 265.

discusses the chronological timeline, construction, and regulation of the comfort women system, which is verified by the existence of the aforementioned documents he discovered in the depths of the Self-Defense Agency's National Institute for Defense Studies Library in Japan. Yoshiaki's monograph was vital for the continuation of the Redress Movement, as well as contributing to Japanese recognition of the comfort women system as an institution of systematic rape. Yoshiaki's contribution to the conversation of comfort women as sexual slaves demonstrates the importance of historical recognition, especially in the case of Yoshiaki being a Japanese man. Jeffrey Blustein's argument is that taking historical responsibility is morally and socially imperative for the function of society in the sense of progress:

Moral theorizing about memory, in particular about the responsibilities associated with it, should take the well-known susceptibilities of memory into account and should have something to say about how to constructively respond to them. Not to do so, to neglect these facts, is to engage in a kind of idealization that invites the charge of naivete or irrelevance, a charge whose point is that memory, ironically, has not been taken seriously as a personal or social imperative after all. An account that fails to confront the problem of memory manipulation might even be accused of abetting the forces of social control. For these and other reasons, a morality of memory must be realistic, and it should take up, as matters of moral import, a number of questions to which these facts give rise.¹⁸⁸

The importance of remembering is pertinent for the comfort women issue in modern historiography, which can only be revitalized by recognizing the histories of all the women who were victims of the comfort women system. Therefore, Blustien's argument gives insight to the effects of ignorance that manifests from memory manipulation.

¹⁸⁸ Blustein, *The Moral Demands of Memory*, 33.

Fortunately enough, the revisionist educators pushing for the neo-nationalist textbook reformation only took hold of a small percentage of schools; the majority still incorporated information about the comfort women system.¹⁸⁹

There is a stark contrast between the representation of comfort women in Korean middle school and high school textbooks and the Japanese. Mentioning the comfort women have been present in their education system since their liberation as a colony. The earliest excerpt referencing the comfort women in a textbook was in 1952, published by Sin Sōk-ho's history textbook. However, the terminology used in this textbook was *Chōngsindae*, which refers to only the Korean women who were enslaved, rather than *Wianbu*—wianbu is the Korean translation of ianfu, which means comfort women and refers to all of the women of Asian ethnicities, rather than just Korean.¹⁹⁰

Controversially, the Korean society represented in the textbooks published in Korea contained no reference to their participation in the conscription of their women and transactional actions of selling Korean women to the Japanese military from 1932 to 1945. The textbooks solely demonize the Japanese military, which is entirely valid, but completely disregards the reality of the Koreans having a part in the construction and regulation of the comfort system.¹⁹¹ The importance of pointing this fact out directly relates to the importance that Blustein argues about recognizing one's history. The

¹⁸⁹ Soh, *The Comfort Women*, 171.

¹⁹⁰ Soh, *The Comfort Women*, 171.

¹⁹¹ Soh, *The Comfort Women*, 171.

Korean's disregard for their participation in this history is harmful to the memorialization of comfort women in general, not just the Korean women who were enslaved.

The memorialization of the comfort women as historical figures relies on their preference for how they would like to be remembered. As seen in previous chapters, there are various experiences that the women experienced, often varying because of their ethnic background. The women at the start of the system were typically Japanese *karayukisan*, who were women typically sold from the Kyushu Islands in Japan and normally from impoverished backgrounds, who were meant to send their profits back to their families in the homeland. Their ideology is based on what they were raised on as Japanese citizens, which promotes their productivity as women as providers of comfort for Japanese men, keeping the *kokutai* balanced and healthy. As Imperial Japan colonized Korean women, they were either indoctrinated by this ideology, coerced, or deceived into the position as comfort women. Chinese, Taiwanese, and Indonesian women were victims of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Filipinas like Maria Henson were typically victims towards the later years of the war, inhabited in the more unorganized and violent stations. Ultimately, they were all victims of the same system, but because of the time range of the war, they each endured different experiences.

The majority of the former comfort women who came forward with their testimonies in the 1990s and early 2000s referred to themselves as comfort women because this was all that society understood at the time; sexual slavery was not a term that was palatable to Japanese and Korean citizens, and comfort woman was a form of

identity that explained their experiences. This is a complicated topic in historiography as many Korean survivors prefer to be referred to as *halmoni* (grandmother) rather than *Chōngsindae* (Korean comfort woman). Some Japanese women, like Kikumaru-san, were proud of their position as comfort women but were ridiculed and criticized for their lifestyle as sex workers. There are mixed responses in interviews as to what they prefer to be recognized as because their past has scarred many, others proudly take the name, and others abhor it based on their hatred towards the Japanese military and what they did to them. Ultimately, the comfort women issue has gained more historical recognition every day. Unfortunately, many of the women who came forward to share their lives are not here today to see how far the movement has come, but there is still a fight to be won against those who exploited thousands of women for the sake of comforting the Japanese military.

CONCLUSION

This retrospective study into the roots of the ideologies that created the comfort women system demonstrated the complications that come with studying a history of sexual enslavement and indentured servitude. Various factors enabled the construction of the institution, which became more evident in the inspection of traditional Japanese cultural practices that preceded the imperial mindset that manifested in Modern Japan (1868-1945). Sociopolitical structures such as enforcing filial piety in the Confucian society and governmental stigmatization against sexual laborers, while also benefiting from their labors, existed for centuries in Japan and uncovered an aggregation of conditions women endured from a social standpoint.

The significance of recognizing the survivors of the comfort women system dismantles the imperial oppression that they have endured over the last eighty years. The pressure of making the Japanese government comprehend that their historical nationalistic identity does not justify their actions during their imperial period from 1868 to 1945. As seen in this study, Japanese masculinity—even more so, Japanese military masculinity—enabled centuries and generations of Japanese men to be conditioned that they are fully entitled to emotional and sexual comfort. The permeation of the Tokugawa period's neo-Confucian ideology through four centuries produced a harmful mindset that misconstrued their relationship with sex or comfort. Therefore, by centering the comfort women system in this study, it is evident that the ideological lens of “comfort culture” deciphered the depths of which historical Japan disregards the historical precedence surrounding the comfort women issue.

The historical erasure of the comfort women system enacted by the Japanese government after their defeat in 1945 created a historical narrative that hindered the grieving process of the formerly enslaved women of the comfort women system from 1932 to 1945. The government's ability to disregard their historical participation in the enslavement of approximately two hundred thousand women subjected many to involuntary ignorance. The importance of a nation remembering its history lies in the hope that the events will never reoccur. The surviving former comfort women fight today to be wholly recognized by their abusers, both personally and historically.

The social activist movement, the Redress Movement, which has been active since the 1990s, demonstrates the importance of remembering the history of the former comfort women and

recognizing them as individuals, not only as victims but as survivors of an institution that held them in no regard. As the survivors came forward in support and community with former Korean comfort woman Kim Hak-sun, a visible spark of hope and belonging emanated



Figure 4.1 - Yong Soo-lee giving her testimony to the US House of Representatives' Foreign Relations Committee about her experience as a former comfort woman. 2007. Source: Association for Asian Studies, Education About Asia: Online Archives <https://www.asianstudies.org/publications/eaa/archives/teaching-about-the-comfort-women-during-world-war-ii-and-the-use-of-personal-stories-of-the-victims/>

from them. Many of the women lived in isolation following the war—whether of their own volition or forced to by society. The survivors of the comfort women system have

been able to fight for their power in a public setting, refusing to remain in the shadows any longer.

In 1965, South Korea and Japan signed the Treaty on Basic Relations, and this treaty would establish formal diplomatic and trade relations. At this time, South Korea was still in its transitional period after being colonized by Japan for an extended period. Due to their complicated history, the treaty stated that if South Korean military Dictator Park Chung-kee agreed to the terms, the Japanese government would pay a \$300 million grant, as well as provide a \$200 million loan for property damages and exploitation of the Korean people when they were under Japanese rule.¹⁹² According to Alexis Dudden, the U.S. government formulated this treaty during its involvement with Vietnam because it was attempting to shift the financial burden, as the United States supported the South Korean government following its separation from the northern province in 1948.¹⁹³ However, because of this shift, any historical discrepancies between the two countries were politically forgiven.¹⁹⁴ The Treaty of Basic Relations Between Japan and South Korea mandated a formal removal of their shared history. However, the treaty's construction was ambiguous regarding the subject matter. Therefore, with the formal version of historical forgiveness declaring a definitive end to the political hostility between the countries, the comfort women issue was avoided until 1990.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹² Pyong-gap Min, *Korean "Comfort Women": Military Brothels, Brutality, and the Redress Movement* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2021), xi.

¹⁹³ Alexis Dudden, "America's Dirty Secret in East Asia: Japan and South Korea are at odds today because Washington has been playing favorites for decades," *New York Times*, September 23, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/23/opinion/america-japan-south-korea-dispute.html>

¹⁹⁴ Treaty on Basic Relations Between Japan and the Republic of Korea, Jun 1965. United Nations Treaty Collection, <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%20583/volume-583-I-8471-English.pdf>

¹⁹⁵ Dudden, "America's Dirty Secret in East Asia."

Emperor Hirohito's death opened the floodgates to historical, political, social, and economic dilemmas for the Japanese military. While relations between Japan and Korea remained formally neutral for the following forty years, the 1980s began stirring up political frustrations among the generation of South Koreans who were children or grandchildren of the women who survived the comfort women system from 1932 to 1945. Simultaneously, the rise of the Liberal Democratic Party and "the end of the postwar generation" signified the fall of Japan as an international power.¹⁹⁶ Therefore, the Japanese government was in hot water when the rise of the issue of comfort women surfaced in popular conversation following Kim Hak-sun's testimony in 1991. As seen in Chapter Three, the Japanese government initially denied any claims of their relation to the comfort women system. That claim quickly changed following Yoshiaki's publication of the surviving government documents, proving not only their knowledge of the system but also their participation in the construction, funding, regulation, and mobilization of sexually enslaved women.

The Redress Movement has had the same requests for the Japanese government since its creation in the 1990s. The Japanese government acknowledges the fact that the military forced Korean women to accompany them as "comfort women," the Japanese government issues a formal apology for their actions, the Japanese government takes responsibility for every act of brutality they practiced, and compensation for the women and their families, and to ensure that there will not be a repeat of their history—

¹⁹⁶ Suzanne O'Brien, "Translator's Introduction," in *Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery in the Japanese Military During World War II*, ed. Yoshimi Yoshiaki, trans. Suzanne O'Brien (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 2.

demanding they include their history in Japanese textbooks.¹⁹⁷ Unfortunately, the only request that has been acknowledged by the Japanese government is an apology towards the women; it was entirely superficial and did not acknowledge any of their actions during the system's activity in a remorseful fashion.

As many of the survivors contest, the principle of the Redress Movement is for a formal apology and proper recognition of Japan's actions during the war. Thus, the comfort women issue continues, as the Japanese government continues to avoid these demands to this day. According to historian Min Pyong-gap, the Japanese government avoids these ethical demands by attempting to compensate by having Japanese citizens donate money to the Asian Women's Fund, which would then send the money to the Korean (2 million yen), Taiwanese (2 million yen), and Filipino government (1.2 million yen)¹⁹⁸ rather than the Japanese government directly compensating the women themselves.¹⁹⁹ In comparison, the U.S. government enacted the Civil Liberties Act of 1987, declaring the identification of each victim that was classified and relocated to camps that were recorded during wartime to have any involvement in receiving compensation of \$20,000 per person, aiding any direct and indirect ailments that the individual suffered during the wartime period.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁷ Yoshiaki, *Comfort Women*, 34.

¹⁹⁸ "How did the Comfort Women Issue come to light?" Digital Museum The Comfort Women Issue and the Asian Women's Fund, <https://www.awf.or.jp/e2/survey.html>; 2 million yen converts roughly to \$12,500 and 1.2 million yen converts to \$7,500.

¹⁹⁹ Min, *Korean "Comfort Women"*, 263.

²⁰⁰ Congress.gov, "H.R.442 - 100th Congress (1987-1988): Civil Liberties Act of 1987," August 10, 1988, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/100th-congress/house-bill/442>

The blatant disregard that the Japanese government has for the women who survived the comfort women system highlights the themes that have been examined thus far in this thesis. With the government disrespecting the principles that would validate the existence and their responsibilities as an oppressive empire in the twentieth century, it is evident that the ideologies that continued from the Tokugawa period reverberated into the Shōwa period and the political takeover of the LDP.

The political, historical, and memorial erasure that the Japanese government enacted about the former comfort women, the system, and their involvement proves the significance of the Redress Movement. In 2015, the Japanese and Korean governments agreed to accept the Japanese government's apologies on behalf of the survivors.²⁰¹ This, however, was not brought to the survivors' attention before the Korean government agreed to move past this issue. There has not been a resolution between the survivors and the Japanese government, but if the social activists in the Redress Movement continue to fight, there is still hope for justice. Without the social activism in the 1990s, there would not be a conversation today on the scale that it currently exists. The importance of this movement exemplifies the principles that the Japanese government left unacknowledged for the women to heal and appropriately recognized for their place in history. The movement is especially pertinent due to the rate of the women who survived passing on, as it is now eighty years since the end of World War II. For example, former Korean

²⁰¹ Yuji Hosaka, "Why Did the 2015 Japan-Korea 'Comfort Women' Agreement Fall Apart? The agreement was flawed from the beginning and continued denialism from the Japanese government undermined its spirit," *The Diplomat*, November 18, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/11/why-did-the-2015-japan-korea-comfort-women-agreement-fall-apart/>

comfort woman Hwang Keum-ju, with her passionate and raw testimony about the conditions of her life after returning from China, was able to make her voice heard before passing away in 2013. Most of the survivors are in their nineties, leaving little time for them to be compensated and receive the justice they deserve. Therefore, the conversation is not, and will not, be disrupted, as these women are pertinent for historical memory and social justice.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Secondary Sources

- Blustein, Jeffrey. *The Moral Demands of Memory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- Cockburn, Cynthia. "Continuum of Violence," in Winona Giles and Jennifer Hyndman's *Sites of Violence: Gender and Conflict Zones*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.
- Cubitt, George. *History and Memory*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007.
- Digital Museum: The Comfort Women Issue and the Asian Women's Fund. "How did the Comfort Women Issue come to light?" Accessed May 24, 2024. <https://www.awf.or.jp/e2/survey.html>
- Downer, Lesley. "The City of Geisha and their Role in Modern Japan: Anomaly or Artistes?" in Feldman, Martha., and Bonnie Gordon. *The Courtesan's Arts Cross-Cultural Perspectives*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Downer, Lesley. *Women of the Pleasure Quarters: The Secret History of the Geisha*. New York: Broadway Books, 2002.
- Gardener, Daniel K. *Confucianism: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Griffis, William Elliot. *The Mikado's Empire*. 8th ed., with Supplementary chapters, Including the late war with China. Delaware: Scholarly Resources, 1973.
- Hosaka, Yuji. "Why Did the 2015 Japan-Korea 'Comfort Women' Agreement Fall Apart? The agreement was flawed from the beginning and continued denialism from the Japanese government undermined its spirit." *The Diplomat*, November 18, 2021. <https://thediplomat.com/2021/11/why-did-the-2015-japan-korea-comfort-women-agreement-fall-apart/>
- Inuzuka, Ako. *Non-Western Colonization, Orientalism, and the 'Comfort Women': The Collective Memory of Sexual Slavery*. Maryland: The Rowan & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2021.
- The Military Intelligence Service Language School (MISLS) of the U.S. Army, "Japanese Words of Military Value," August 1943. Collection of documents related to Japanese military 'comfort women.' The Seoul Archives. Seoul, South Korea. <https://archives.seoul.go.kr/item/88>

- Kramm, Robert. "Haunted by Defeat: Imperial Sexualities, Prostitution, and the Emergence of Postwar Japan," *Journal of World History*, vol. 28, no ¾ (December 2017).
- Longstreet, Stephen, and Ethel Longstreet. *Yoshiwara: Geishas, Courtesans, and the Pleasure Quarters of Old Tokyo*. Tokyo: Tuttle Publishing, 2009.
- Mitter, Rana. *Forgotten Ally: China's World War II 1937-1945*. New York: Mariner Books, 2014.
- Qiu, Peipei, Su Zhiliang, and Chen Lifei. *Chinese Comfort Women: Testimonies From Imperial Japan's Sex Slaves*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013.
- Soh, Sarah C. *The Comfort Women: Sexual Violence and Postcolonial Memory in Korea and Japan*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008.
- Stanley, Amy. "Enlightenment Geisha: The Sex Trade, Education, and Feminine Ideals in Early Meiji Japan." *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 72, no. 3 (August 2013), 539-562.
- Stanley, Amy. *Selling Women: Prostitution, Markets, and the Household in Early Modern Japan*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.
- Sturken, Marita. "Absent Images of Memory: Remembering and Reenacting the Japanese Internment," in Fujitani, T., George White, and Lisa Yoneyama's *Perilous Memories: The Asia-Pacific War(s)*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001.
- Tanaka, Yuki. *Japan's Comfort Women: Sexual slavery and prostitution during World War II and the US Occupation*. Translated by Karen Colligan-Taylor. London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2010.
- Warren, James Francis. *Ah Ku and Karayukisan: Prostitution in Singapore 1870-1940*. Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2003.
- Yoshiaki, Yoshimi. *Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery in the Japanese Military During World War II*. Translated by Suzanne O'Brien. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000.

Primary Sources

Asian Boss. "Life as a 'Comfort Woman': Story of Kim Bok-Dong | Stay Curious #9." *Youtube*, October 2018, www.youtube.com/watch?v=qsT97ax_Xb0.

Hall, Robert King, ed. *Kokutai no Hongi: Cardinal Principles of the National Entity of Japan*. Translated by John Owen Gauntlett. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949.

Henson, Maria Rosa. *Comfort Woman: A Filipina's Story of Prostitution and Slavery under the Japanese Military*. 2nd ed. Maryland: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 1999.

Kim-Gibson, Dai Sil. *Silence Broken: Korean Comfort Women*. Iowa: Mid-Prairie Books, 1999.

Mitsutani, Margaret. "Fifty Years of Silence: Three Taiwanese Women." *Manoa* 13.1, (2001) 176-179.

"Shirota Suzuko (pseudonym), the only Japanese survivor who spoke out," Summary of her autobiography *Mary's Hymn*. Translated by Keigo Nishio. *Women's Human Rights Institute of Korea*, reprinted with permission from Kanita Women's Village and WAM.

Ruff-O'Herne, Jan. *50 Years of Silence: Comfort Woman of Indonesia*. Singapore: Toppan Co., 1996.

Tomoko, Yamazaki. *Sandakan Brothel No. 8: an episode in the history of lower-class Japanese women*. New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2015.