

# NO ORGANIZED OR FORCED RECRUITMENT: MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT COMFORT WOMEN AND THE JAPANESE MILITARY

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## **Revival of the comfort women circus**

The March 6 and 7, 2007 editions of *Akahata* (Red Flag), the JCP (Japanese Communist Party) house organ, included several articles under the screaming headline “The World Condemns Prime Minister Abe’s Statement on Comfort Women.” Among them were “Admit the Truth: Chinese Foreign Minister Demands ‘Appropriate Action,’” “*New York Times* Editorial Exposes Japan’s Misrepresentation of the Facts,” and “Six Korean Newspapers Carry Editorials Critical of Japan.” Accompanying them was JCP Secretariat Head Ichida Tadayoshi’s denunciation of Prime Minister Abe entitled “Coercion Proven.”

In anticipation of Mr. Abe’s visit to the U.S. in late April, members of the U.S. House of Representatives have submitted a resolution (H. Res. 121) censuring Japan in connection with the comfort women. Given the current political climate, that legislation is likely to pass.

Since mid-February, there has been a frenzy of newspaper coverage of the issue, both in Japan and overseas. We singled out *Akahata*, the most abundant source, but other leading domestic newspapers are not far behind.

The *Yomiuri* and *Sankei* newspapers have not devoted a great deal of space to the comfort women. However, on March 8, the *Mainichi Shimbun* published an editorial entitled “Kono Statement Must Stand.” On March 6, *Asahi Shimbun* ran an editorial entitled “Refrain from Comments That Invite Misunderstandings,” whose content was similar to that of the *Mainichi* piece. But another editorial in the March 10 edition of the *Asahi Shimbun* actually echoed North Korean national broadcasts, implying that the alleged sexual enslavement of women by the Japanese and the abduction of Japanese nationals by North Koreans essentially cancel each other out: “Japan has been trying to win international support to its criticism of North Korea’s abductions of Japanese citizens as a serious human rights violation. But Japan’s appeal cannot arouse the sympathy of the international community if it closes its eyes to its own human rights abuses.”

Nevertheless, the *Mainichi* seems to be hoping that the H. Res. 121 will be rejected. However, the newspaper did little more than offer a rather lukewarm comment to the effect that the Japanese have been issuing apologies over the years in connection with the comfort women, and that the government should offer a thorough explanation of its position. Perhaps the newspaper’s staff is incapable of generating ideas that would serve to prevent the passage of the resolution. At this rate, we are reverting to the days of the ABCD (American, British, Chinese, Dutch) Encirclement against Japan prior to the outbreak of war in 1941 between Japan and the U.S.

The U.S. House of Representatives has no legally binding authority over Japan. Therefore, here at home some believe the best way to deal with such charges is to ignore them, while others are in favor of issuing apology upon apology. But because the issue has escalated so dramatically, neither of these tactics is likely to be effective. I would like to propose a strategy that promises expeditious results. But first, an analysis of the situation at home and abroad will be necessary.

The comfort women issue is a political problem raised by forces (both domestic and foreign) with multiple, diverse agendas. If we were to describe it in Clausewitz's terms, we would call it the "continuation of politics by other means." For that very reason, the absence of bloodshed notwithstanding, the facts have been shoved aside. Instead, what we have is political power games that employ just about every known devious tactic, from cajoling and coercion to deception and trickery.

The comfort women issue is like a volcano. Serious eruptions occurred between 1991 and mid-1993. They seemed to subside after the Kono Statement (1993) and an infusion of "atonement money" by the Asian Women's Fund. But the dormant volcano spewed magma once again in 2000, when the Women's International War Crimes Tribunal, which pronounced Emperor Showa guilty, took place; and in 2005, a year marked by the mud-slinging contest between media giants NHK and *Asahi Shimbun* over the content of a television program covering the tribunal. The eruptions have continued intermittently since then.

The most recent one was H. Res. 121. The volcanic fumes began rising in California and Washington, D.C. several years ago. In fact, H. Res. 121 is the fifth (some say eighth) of its kind to see the light of day. All such resolutions had been rejected, but the one submitted in April 2006 (introduced by Rep. Lane Evans of Illinois) even passed the Committee on International Relations. However, Congress adjourned before it ever got to a plenary session. Rumor has it that lobbyists hired by the Japanese Embassy, alarmed when the resolution passed the House Committee on International Relations, deserve credit for the resolution's fate.

Rep. Mike Honda (a third-generation Japanese American), took up the cause after Rep. Evans retired. Honda submitted another resolution with essentially the same content to the House Committee on Foreign Relations on January 31, 2007. On February 15, the House Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, and the Global Environment held a hearing at which three former comfort women were present.

The Japanese Embassy must have smelled danger in Rep. Honda's enthusiasm. In a letter to the House of Representatives, Ambassador Kato Ryoza voiced his objections to the resolution. The letter states that Prime Minister Abe has affirmed that the Japanese government will stand by the Kono Statement, and asks congresspersons to acknowledge the numerous apologies made by Japan's prime ministers. Given its humble tone, which made it seem more like an entreaty than a protest, it had little effect. The ranks of supporters of the resolution swelled from an initial six congresspersons to 25 in late February, 42 (32 Democrats, 10 Republicans) in mid-March, and 77 as of April 3.

Some of the additional support can be attributed to the midterm election that took place last autumn, which resulted in the assignment of Democrat liberals and human rights activists as heads of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and its subcommittees. It is entirely possible that the resolution will pass this time. What sort of person is Mike Honda, its chief standard-bearer? What are his objectives? Due to his abrupt entrance onto the stage, I knew very little about him. I decided to embark on an Internet search. It seems that many others had the same idea, judging from the number of discussions I encountered among people wondering, "Who is Honda?"

What really stands out is the incongruity of it all: Why is this Japanese-American congressman spearheading an anti-Japanese campaign? Some of the explanations (really conjectures) broached in cyberspace are: "He's just pretending to be Japanese American," "I think he's of Korean descent," "He's an ethnic Chinese from Vietnam" and "He's a shadowy figure of unknown origin." But I kept searching, confident that in a nation that more than any other champions the disclosure of information, there could be no congressman without a background. I found Honda's own website, which tells us that he is indeed Japanese American. Biographical information and career history are provided in a section entitled "About Mike."

### **Who is Mike Honda?**

Honda was born in June 1941 in Walnut Grove, near San Francisco, California. His parents ran a grocery store there. When war broke out between Japan and the United States six months later, the family was shipped off to an internment camp in Colorado. His family returned to California in 1953, becoming strawberry sharecroppers in San Jose. Mike graduated from a local high school and San Jose State University, where he began preparations for a teaching career, earning a master's degree in Education in 1974. He interrupted his undergraduate studies to serve in the Peace Corps for two years in El Salvador. Honda's career in education included service as a school principal and school board member. In 1996, he was elected to the California State Assembly, where he was instrumental in getting the Hayden Act passed in 1999.

The Hayden Act is a California state law that enables anyone to sue a Japanese corporation doing business in the U.S. for "war crimes." It is an evil law, whose passage resulted in litigation seeking -120 trillion (US \$1 trillion) in damages. Legal battles were fought all the way up to the U.S. Supreme Court, which ruled the Hayden Act unconstitutional. The war crimes cited included the torture of prisoners of war, the alleged Nanking Massacre, and the enslavement of the comfort women. For Honda, elected to the House of Representatives in 2000, H. Res. 121 may very well represent goals that he has been yearning to achieve for some time.

Mike Honda may also have been influenced by the situation in his electoral district (the 15th congressional district of California), which embraces Silicon Valley and its hub, San Jose. Many of its residents are of Hispanic, Chinese, Korean or Vietnamese extraction. It has the highest concentration of Asians of any congressional district in the U.S. (29%).

Here it's important to consider the anti-Japanese psychology of Japanese Americans. An American scholar of European descent once asked me the following question: "Every Asian

American gets angry when the nation of his forebears is insulted. Except for the Japanese Americans. They don't seem to mind at all; they even get involved in anti-Japanese activities. Why?"

I was at a loss for an answer, and simply dodged the question, saying, "There are plenty of Japanese in Japan who participate in such activities." But some scholars have noted that recently the Japanese-American identity is disappearing, swallowed up by the broader "Asian-American" category. And perhaps it is that category of voters that provides Rep. Honda with his support base.

Since Honda is a politician, a good many of his utterances are, of course, words he thinks people want to hear. For instance, on his website he mentions that the attainment of justice will be beneficial to Japan; that while the Asian community in California is growing, memories of the war are an obstacle to a true sense of unity within it; and that to foster a peaceful international community, his generation must achieve a reconciliation that resolves the problems of the past. But the message these words convey is that Honda is in fact bashing Japan to get his Asian-American voter base united behind him.

And his actions have not gone without notice, judging from the following citation from *Chosun Ilbo* (Korean Daily News), one of South Korea's leading dailies: "Extremely popular in China, [Honda] and his activities have won the support and cooperation of many Korean residents of the U.S."

One of the chief supporters of H. Res. 121, who has worked with Rep. Honda to move it forward is a Korean woman named Soh Ok-cha. Dr. Soh, president of the Washington, D.C.-based Washington Coalition for Comfort Women Issues, gave her support to 15 former comfort women who instituted suit in the Washington, D.C. District Court.

An examination of the records of the aforementioned February 15 hearing reveals that though the testimony of the three former comfort women may have been the highlight, Soh may have turned in the best performance of the day (her closing oration). It is my guess that she was the author of the resolution text (see below), given its content.

#### H. Res. 121

Whereas the "comfort women" system of forced military prostitution by the Government of Japan, considered unprecedented in its cruelty and magnitude, included gang rape, forced abortions, humiliation, and sexual violence resulting in mutilation, death, or eventual suicide in one of the largest cases of human trafficking in the 20th century;

Whereas some new textbooks used in Japanese schools seek to downplay the "comfort women" tragedy and other Japanese war crimes during World War II;

Whereas Japanese public and private officials have recently expressed a desire to dilute or rescind the 1993 statement by Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono on the "comfort women", which expressed the Government's sincere apologies and remorse for their

ordeal;

(...)

Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That it is the sense of the House of Representatives that the Government of Japan

(1) should formally acknowledge, apologize, and accept historical responsibility in a clear and unequivocal manner for its Imperial Armed Force's coercion of young women into sexual slavery, known to the world as "comfort women", during its colonial and wartime occupation of Asia and the Pacific Islands from the 1930s through the duration of World War II;

(2) should have this official apology given as a public statement presented by the Prime Minister of Japan in his official capacity;

(3) should clearly and publicly refute any claims that the sexual enslavement and trafficking of the "comfort women" for the Japanese Imperial Armed Forces never occurred; and

(4) should educate current and future generations about this horrible crime while following the recommendations of the international community with respect to the "comfort women".

Reading the text of the resolution, I felt the same nauseating sensation that comes over me whenever I hear state-owned North Korean television announcers snarl invective at Japan. Perhaps (2) is innuendo directed toward the Japanese Embassy because of its emphasis on apologies offered by past prime ministers. In any case, the authors of the resolution insist that the apology be "presented by the Prime Minister of Japan in his official capacity." However, even if such an apology were forthcoming, we can only expect such demands to escalate. Witness comments made by Eni Faleomavaega (delegate to the U.S. House of Representatives from American Samoa) to the effect that previous apologies made by the government of Japan are "not enough" and "the emperor could now go one step further and offer a more forceful apology for all crimes committed in his family's name" in an editorial in the *Los Angeles Times*.<sup>1</sup>

The language in (3) implies that the Japanese government is in the same revisionist category as the Holocaust deniers, and suggests that Japan follow the German example (in Germany it is legally possible to punish Holocaust deniers). Apparently those who wish to dilute the Kono Statement would also be punishable.

(4) seems to allude to the complaint about Japanese textbooks in the Preamble, and might be interpreted as meaning that mention of the comfort women in textbooks should be mandatory.

**Lee Yong-soo's "disappearance"**

In any case, the demands stated in H. Res. 121 make it the epitome of foreign interference in another nation's domestic affairs. The aforementioned Rep. Faleomavaega (Democrat), chairman of the Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, and the Global Environment, told *Akahata* reporter Kamazuka (with reference to Prime Minister Abe's having said that there is no evidence proving that the comfort women were coerced into prostitution by Japanese authorities) that he had read the Kono Statement carefully. He wondered whether Mr. Abe distrusted the research done by the Japanese government, which became the basis of the statement. Faleomavaega added that the meaning of the resolution could be found in the testimony of the former comfort women at the February 15 hearing.<sup>2</sup>

It would seem, then, that the Kono Statement and the testimony of the former comfort women at the hearing form the basis of H. Res. 121. Leaving the problems posed by the former aside for the moment, let us analyze the latter.

According to House records, the hearing took place on February 15, 2007 in Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building, under the auspices of the Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, and the Global Environment. The theme was "Protecting the Human Rights of Comfort Women."

First came greetings from the Subcommittee chair, followed by Panel I, a speech by Rep. Honda. Panel II consisted of the testimony of former comfort women Lee Yong-soo, Kim Koon-ja and Jan Ruff O'Herne (a woman of Dutch extraction, now residing in Australia). Panel III consisted of statements from Mindy Kotler, director of Asia Policy Point, and Soh Ok-cha.

According to her statement, Ms. O'Herne was taken forcibly from a Japanese internment camp in Semarang, Java in 1944 by Japanese soldiers to a "comfort station." Two months later, she was freed when the brothel came to the attention of a high-ranking officer, who shut it down. In connection with this incident, 11 persons were tried after the war ended in a Dutch military court, and sentences were handed down (one person was executed). Therefore, legally at least, it was settled more than 60 years ago. Moreover, the very fact that the brothel in question was closed as soon as its existence came to light is proof that Japanese military authorities did not tolerate such unlawful behavior.

The other two witnesses are Korean women. Here we will focus on the testimony of Lee Yong-soo, who lives in Seoul at Nanum House, a home for former comfort women. Ms. Lee has visited Japan several times to tell her story. Here are some excerpts from her testimony at the hearing.

I was born in 1928 in the Korean city of Taegu. My family was poor and nine of us lived in a single, small house: my parents, my grandmother, my five brothers, and myself. I only had one year of formal education and spent most of my childhood caring for my younger brothers and doing household chores so my father and mother could work outside our home to support the family.

At the age of 13, I also began working in a factory and tried to return to school, but the heavy burden of work prevented me from focusing on my studies.

(...)

In the autumn of 1944, when I was *16 years old*, my friend, Kim Punsun, and I were collecting shellfish at the riverside when we noticed an elderly man and a Japanese man looking down at us from the hillside. The older man pointed at us with his finger, and the Japanese man started to walk towards us. The older man disappeared, and the Japanese beckoned to us to follow him. I was scared and ran away, not caring about what happened to my friend. A few days later, Punsun knocked on my window early in the morning, and whispered to me to follow her quietly. I tip-toed out of the house after her. I lift [sic] *without telling my mother*. I was wearing a dark skirt, a long cotton blouse buttoned up at the front and slippers on my feet. I followed my friend until we met the same man who had tried to approach us on the riverbank. He looked as if he was in his late thirties and he wore a sort of *People's Army uniform* with a combat cap. Altogether, there were five girls with him, including myself. [Italics supplied.]

(...)

The young women are then taken by train to Dalian via Pyongyang. Lee Yong-soo weeps and begs her captors to let her go home, but they refuse.

We boarded a ship [at Dalian] and were told that a convoy of eleven boats would be sailing together. They were big ships. We were taken into the last one ... New Year's Day 1945 was spent on board. The ships stopped in Shanghai, and some of the sailors landed for a short break on shore.

(...)

Her ship is hit by a bomb, but manages to keep going. Amid the chaos that ensues, Lee Yong-soo is *raped by a Japanese soldier*. This is her first sexual experience. The ship does not sink as many had feared it would, and eventually arrives in Taiwan.

The man who had accompanied us from Taegu turned out to be the proprietor of the comfort station we were taken to [in Sinzhu]. We called him Oyaji.

The proprietor (who has a Japanese wife) often beats Lee Yong-soo, who is given the name Toshiko. She services four or five men a day, and eventually contracts a venereal disease. A suicide pilot (and client) befriends her.

He gave me his photo and the toiletries he had been using. He had come to me twice before and said he had got venereal disease from me. He said he would take the disease to his grave as my present to him.

The war ends and Lee returns to Korea with three other young women. She can *never bring herself to tell her parents* where she has been or what she has been doing.

I worked in a drinking house which also sold fishballs, and I ran a small shop on the beach in Ulsan. For some time I ran a small market stall selling string. Then I worked as a saleswoman for an insurance company.

Since Lee Yong-soo was brought to the hearing to testify, I was certain I was going to be reading a tale of relentless suffering. I was amazed to discover that her story is not one of unmitigated sorrow. But my genuine reaction was: this is a melodrama of the sort that a television network would pounce upon. Her testimony and that of the other former comfort women call to mind other heartwarming stories, which are not uncommon, like *Nomugi Pass*, a film about the trials and tribulations of a poor young girl working in a silk factory in the early 20th century (with a happy ending).

Former comfort woman Mun Ok-chu (now deceased) published her vicissitude-filled story. Active in Burma, she was known for her cleverness, sunny disposition and solicitude. She was immensely popular among the Japanese soldiers, from the rank-and-file soldiers to generals. In less than three years, she managed to save up ¥26,000,<sup>3</sup> and sent ¥5,000 home to her family. At that time, the average salary of a Japanese Army sergeant was ¥30 per month.

How about the other woman, Kim Koon-ja? According to her testimony, her foster father (a Korean police officer) told her to go out and earn some money at the age of 16. Kim met a Korean man who told her he had a good job for her. She was then taken away in a freight car. Ms. Kim was either deceived by a broker or told to go with him by the foster father (perhaps sold to him to pay off a loan). What is noteworthy is that no Japanese was involved in Kim's case.

Since there is no evidence of kidnapping by a government authority, we must assume that the young women were deceived by Koreans — their compatriots. The fact that no Japanese living on the Korean peninsula had sufficient command of the Korean language to deceive a Korean woman lends even more credence to this assumption.

I have read dozens of testimonies of former comfort women. Most of them are quite similar to those offered by Lee Yong-soo and Kim Koon-ja. However, perhaps because their support groups have emended the testimonies, one often encounters several different versions of the same woman's story. Someone may have realized that it would be inadvisable to have discrepancies in the portions of testimonies related to the circumstances of the kidnappings. For whatever reason, the subjects of sentences in descriptions of kidnappings in the section of the report issued by the Women's International War Crimes Tribunal entitled "Biographies of Participating Victims"(2000) have been removed. But there are several versions of the circumstances of Lee Yong-soo's kidnapping (see Table 1).

I will leave discrepancies in the name of the man who kidnapped her, the clothes he was wearing, and her age at the time aside for now. We must still determine whether she left her home voluntarily ((1) and (6)), or was kidnapped. In any case, she was deceived. If I were asked which of these diametrically opposite circumstances is closer to the truth, I would be inclined to answer that she left home voluntarily. The circumstances in (6) are substantially the same as those in (1) (testimony given shortly after Lee began telling her story), with the exception that the reference



to the red dress and leather shoes is missing.

There are two reasons for my conviction that Lee said she was kidnapped to make her story more appealing to support groups and the media: (1) there are too many inconsistencies, and (2) the stories she tells only six days after a hearing at the Upper House of Japan's Diet, and again two weeks later at the FCCJ, are diametrically opposite on that point.

Was she coerced into adjusting her testimony? It is more likely that when she met with members of Japan's Upper House who are attempting to pass legislation relating to the comfort women (Fukushima Mizuho, Okazaki Tomiko, Tsuchiya Koken, Madoka Yoriko and others), she changed her story so they wouldn't lose face.

This former comfort woman seems to believe that the Japanese government denies the very existence of comfort women and comfort stations. Therefore, she perceives their mission to be serving as a living witness, and doesn't much care whether her omission of her captors' names or tales of being raped on a sinking ship make her accounts less credible.

There are apparently 114 surviving comfort women in South Korea alone. Therefore, I find it impossible to understand why Rep. Honda and the other congresspersons attempting to pass H. Res. 121 have chosen women who do not fit into the category of "sex slaves" to testify at their hearing. Moreover, by choosing these women, they court the risk of objections from those who claim the comfort stations were no different from the brothels established for the U.S. military during the Korean and Vietnam wars.

Preconceived notions resembling religious fervor are terrifying. The number of people who believe that Lee and Kim were kidnapped is probably astronomical. Even J. Thomas Schieffer, U.S. ambassador to Japan, referred to them as "credible witnesses" in a *New York Times* article.<sup>4</sup>

### **Learning from Susan Brownmiller**

Let us now turn our attention to sexual activity in battle zones where forces other than Japanese troops fought. For details, I refer readers to my book *The Comfort Women and Sex in the Battle Zone*.<sup>5</sup> Here I will focus on the sexual behavior of American military personnel during the U.S. occupation of Japan, and during the Korean and Vietnam wars.

There is no dearth of reference material describing the American military's use of Japanese women as comfort women during the Occupation: *Gifts from the Vanquished* by Masayo Duus,<sup>6</sup> *Comfort Stations of the Occupation Forces* by Inoue Setsuko,<sup>7</sup> and police records kept by every prefecture in Japan, to name just a few sources. Suffice it to say that the RAA (Recreation and Amusement Association), under whose auspices prostitution facilities intended to protect young women from good families from rape were established, was organized (by the Home Ministry) only three days after the Pacific War ended. The association's Japanese name, which translates as "Special Comfort Facility Association," is less euphemistic.

The first RAA brothel opened on August 27, 1945 in Komachien, Omori, Tokyo. More than 1,000 Japanese women responded to advertisements in *Asahi Shimbun* and other newspapers that read as follows: “Urgent notice: Seeking special female workers, good pay; clothing, food and housing provided; salary advances possible.” At first the women were required to service a minimum of 15 to a maximum of 60 American GIs per day. But when applications reached a peak (70,000 women), quotas were reduced. The women considered most successful rose to “only” status, meaning that they serviced only one GI.

The RAA brothels notwithstanding, rapes of Japanese women by American troops were interminable. But Japanese newspapers, forbidden to print anything about crimes committed by GIs, vented their frustration with descriptions like “the perpetrator was a tall man.”

When the Korean War broke out in 1950, the bulk of the troops stationed in Japan were mobilized to the Korean peninsula. Three years later, there was a ceasefire. But ever since then, American troops have been stationed in South Korea, and the South Korean government has been obliging them with prostitutes who congregate near American bases. The women are compelled to undergo medical checks and must carry a card that states they are free of venereal disease. Some of the American commanders in chief have curbed prostitution, but in at least one case, a mutual aid society (an union-like organization formed by the prostitutes) went on strike, forcing the U.S. military to back down.

According to South Korean government reports, there were 330,000 prostitutes in that nation in 2002. Income from prostitution totaled US \$20 billion, or 4.1% of GDP.<sup>8</sup> The contribution of the U.S. military to this still flourishing “industry” has certainly not been a trivial one.

The South Korean military has its own prostitutes, of course. Women’s studies scholar Kim Ki-ok presented a report at an international symposium held at Ritsumeikan University (Kyoto) in February 2002. According to Yamashita Eiai, a member of the university’s faculty, Kim’s report had a considerable impact on Japanese feminists involved with the comfort women problem.<sup>9</sup>

In 1996, Kim tracked down houses of prostitution operated by the South Korean military. However, she did not disclose her discovery at that time, fearing exploitation by Japanese rightists. Her report states that according to *History of the Korean War behind the Front Line*, compiled by South Korean Army Headquarters in 1956, military units were provided with stationary brothels that housed special prostitutes, who were referred to as “Type 5 supplies.” Until March 1954, 89 comfort women worked in four of these brothels, servicing 245,160 soldiers per year.

Other Koreans have written exposés of South Korea. Yi Myong-suk pointed out that Korean soldiers, who were so fearless during the Vietnam War, earned an unenviable reputation in Vietnam as murderers of Vietnamese civilians and procurers of women. South Korea has yet to atone for its sins in Vietnam.<sup>10</sup> Dealing with the 5,000-30,000 (depending on which report one reads) half-Korean, half-Vietnamese children left behind by its soldiers, has reportedly been a major headache for the South Korean government.

But the major players in the Vietnam War were the American troops. Sexual services offered by Vietnamese women were immensely popular in Saigon (today Ho Chi Minh City). Only the rare American account of the war or U.S. newspaper article offers anything but superficial coverage of this topic.

Fortunately for us, in her book *Against Our Will*, Susan Brownmiller describes what she learned in an interview with journalist Peter Arnett (winner of a Pulitzer Prize) about a brothel used by the 1st Division, 3rd Brigade, stationed in Lai Khe, Vietnam.

By 1966, official military brothels had been established within each division's camp. Each one was a two-building "recreation area" where 60 Vietnamese women lived and worked. The prostitutes decorated their cubicles with nude photographs from *Playboy* magazine and had silicone injected into their breasts to make the American soldiers feel more at home. Sex in the brothels was "quick, straight and routine." The women serviced eight to 10 men per day at 500 piastres (about US \$2.00) a trick. They received 200 piastres, the remainder going into the proprietors' coffers.

The women were recruited by province chiefs. Some of the money found its way to the mayor of Lai Khe. This system made it possible for the Americans to receive sex services at what they called "Disneylands" without dirtying their hands in the business aspect of the enterprise. Brigade commanders supervised the brothels; both Army Chief of Staff Gen. William C. Westmoreland and the Pentagon gave tacit approval to them.

The prostitutes underwent weekly medical examinations by Army medics. Signs hung in front of the brothels claiming they were safe, but according to 1969 statistics, 200 of every 1,000 soldiers contracted venereal disease.<sup>11</sup>

The information in *Against Our Will* is important because its descriptions of the brothels in Vietnam mirror those patronized by Japanese soldiers. Therefore, reading it is more likely to convince the American congresspersons that they are wrong better than anything I could write. However, the women who serviced Japanese military personnel were better paid (by more than 50%). And silicone injections were not available to them. Toward the end of the Vietnam War, there were 300,000-500,000 prostitutes, according to Cynthia Enloe.<sup>12</sup>

It occurred to me that having compared the various sources, it might be useful to distribute a few pages from Brownmiller's book to the supporters of H. Res. 121. Then we can question Mike Honda and his colleagues about the wisdom of their resolution and ask them to withdraw it. Or we could have them replace "the Japanese government" with the "Japanese and U.S. governments."

Yes, I'm aware that my plan doesn't stand much chance of success. But this is not about success or failure. I will be happy if it serves only to break postwar Japanese of the habit, acquired over decades, of apologizing or shrugging when criticized, and instills in them the nerve to issue a rejoinder to an unjust accusation.

## Revising the Kono Statement

Efforts made to combat Honda and his cronies will provide little more than symptomatic relief. For the long term, we will need to retract or revise the Kono statement. Movements to do just that have been active since soon after the statement was issued. Recently, the Subcommittee on the Comfort Women Problem of the Diet Representatives' Association for the Consideration of Japan's Future and History Education (chairman, Nakayama Nariaki), a group of conservative LDP (Liberal Democratic Party) legislators, began reexamining the Kono Statement at the request of the Prime Minister's Office. By March 1 they had formulated a plan. But there was so much contention between the proactive and passive factions in the committee that its members were able to do no more than promise Prime Minister Abe on March 8 that they would continue their research and analysis.

A promise is a promise. However, committee members have not been given access to records of interviews with 16 former comfort women conducted by a government investigative team (appointed by the Cabinet Councillors' Office on External Affairs). We can certainly empathize with the anger of one member, who commented that "they sent us up to the second floor, then took the ladder away."

But judging from Mr. Abe's vacillation, observed from the very moment he took office, the subcommittee may have been given an impossible assignment. Suppose we review what the prime minister and his aides have said about the Kono Statement: On October 5, 2006, at a Lower House Budget Committee meeting, Abe said the following to Kan Naoto, acting president of the Democratic Party of Japan: "The government, and I include myself, stands by [the Kono Statement]. (...) This will not change during my administration." When Kan pressed Abe, asking him, "In 1997, didn't you respond to a question by saying you were having second thoughts about the Kono Statement?" Abe replied, "the debate has shifted from whether there was coercion in the strict sense (we don't believe there was) to whether there was coercion in the broader sense." Most of the newspapers didn't print this part of Abe's reply, perhaps because it was unclear, carrying only the first part about standing by the statement.

On October 27, at a meeting of the Diet Foreign Affairs Committee, Shimomura Hakubun (deputy chief Cabinet secretary) reiterated the gist of Abe's comments, adding, "The Kono Statement was issued in accordance with a Cabinet decision." The prime minister confirmed this, making it clear that amending the statement would not be a simple matter. The Kono Statement was not, in fact, backed by a Cabinet decision. However, the belief that it was and the weight of Kono's position (speaker of the Lower House) may have caused Abe to waver.

The debate heated up once again when H. Res. 121 came to the fore in mid-February of this year. At a Budget Committee meeting on February 19, Rep. Inada Tomomi (LDP) asked whether the administration intended to retract the Kono Statement. Shiozaki Yasuhisa, chief Cabinet secretary, responded, "the government's position is that we will stand by the Kono Statement."<sup>13</sup>

The prime minister did not mention standing by the Kono Statement at a press conference on March 1. What he did say was that “there is no evidence to prove there was coercion,” and that further discussions should be premised on a change in the definition of “coercion” from the narrow sense to the broad sense.

The reaction from the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and most other leading American newspapers was swift. Their March 2 editions reported that Abe had categorically rejected the Kono Statement, and labeled him an ultranationalist and revisionist. *Sankei Shimbun*'s analysis of the situation was: “[The prime minister] is worried about the Kono Statement's being used as an excuse for an anti-Japanese campaign. He seems to feel that work on revising the statement should begin.” Therefore, it is not surprising that the foreign press misunderstood Abe. Apparently, his obfuscation strategy is coming back to haunt him.

Perhaps the prime minister panicked in the face of the harsh international reaction. But in any case, when questioned in the Diet on March 6, he said, “Basically, we will stand by the Kono Statement.” But perhaps because he was attempting to clarify the difference between “coercion in the strict sense” and “coercion in the broad sense,” he cited examples: “Coercion in the strict sense means that Japanese military authorities broke into their homes and took them away. Coercion in the broad sense means that brokers (middlemen) deceived or sometimes threatened the women.” His attempt to clarify backfired.

I myself was not sure what Mr. Abe really meant to say, but I was afraid that his remarks would invite misunderstanding or perversion. And sure enough, a look at the resulting commentary in the press told me that my fears had been realized.

*Mainichi Shimbun* came out with the following: “By setting distinctions between two meanings of coercion (the strict sense and the broad sense) as the word is used to refer to the comfort women, [the prime minister] has opted for a strategy of maintaining consistency between his recent remarks and those made in the past. However, the nuances of his speech were lost on the foreign press. By being vague, he created the impression that he was denying *any* connection between Japanese military personnel and the comfort women.”<sup>14</sup>

And in a *Newsweek* article, MIT Prof. Richard J. Samuels wrote that Prime Minister Abe's handling of the comfort women problem seems incomprehensible to Americans. If the Japanese believe that the Kono Statement is based on a mistaken perception of history, why don't they officially retract it? They cannot expect Americans to understand when the Japanese government attempts to explain the strict sense and the broader sense of the word “coercion.”<sup>15</sup>

Since they know that whatever they say will come under attack, why do our government officials resort to abstruse semantics? Wouldn't a better media strategy be to simply say that no Japanese authorities ever coerced women into prostitution? Most ironic is the fact that Abe's semantic dichotomy has made bedfellows of Kono Yohei (whom Mike Honda described as having “issued an encouraging statement regarding Japan's comfort women,”<sup>16</sup> and *Asahi Shimbun* praised for his gracious attitude) and Yoshimi Yoshiaki (a Chuo University professor whose claim to fame is having dropped a bombshell in 1991, claiming that the military had been involved in recruiting

comfort women).

By way of explanation, according to *Asahi Shimbun*, in a 1997 interview, Kono Yohei said there were no documents showing the government took measures to recruit the women with violence. But it was clear there were numerous cases of coercion [here in the broader sense], defined as their being recruited against their will.<sup>17</sup> It is safe to assume that Kono had already completed his own revision of the statement.

Yoshimi started out as a supporter of the recruitment-by-coercion theory. However, by the mid-1990s, he had made the transition to the coercion-in-the-broader-sense argument, declaring that the comfort women's freedom was restricted in the brothels.

If one gives any thought to the coercion-in-the-broader-sense argument, one comes to the realization that it is totally futile. Suppose we categorize young women whose parents sold them to brokers as victims of coercion. Aren't professional baseball players who are paid advances and then traded to another team whether they like it or not also victims of coercion?

To avoid muddying the waters further, I will now proceed to present my suggestions for the modification of the Kono Statement. I will limit myself to altering, from a pragmatic perspective, the portion that involves coercion in the strict sense. Other portions of the statement need revision as well, but I will not address them at this time.

Here is that portion of the statement that I wish to revise as it stands now.

The then Japanese military was, directly or indirectly, involved in the establishment and management of the comfort stations and the transfer of comfort women. The recruitment of the comfort women was conducted mainly by private recruiters *who acted in response to the request of the military*. The Government study has revealed that in many cases they were recruited against their own will, through coaxing, *coercion*, etc., and that, at times, administrative/military personnel *directly took part in the recruitments*.<sup>18</sup> [Italics supplied.]

First, I would excise *who acted in response to the request of the military*. Then I would change *coercion* to *intimidation*. Finally, I would replace *directly took part in the recruitments* with *failed to exercise proper control over the recruitments*. I wish to excise *who acted in response to the request of the military* because the relationship between the military and the brokers should be construed not as one-way, but reciprocal, like all business relationships.

Take the newspaper advertisements reproduced as per attached Figure 1, for instance. We can be sure that the recruiters in both cases were private individuals or businesses, and that the place of employment referred to was military comfort stations. But we cannot assume that the advertisements were placed *in response to the request of the military*. Even if they were, it is highly unlikely that the military would have covered salary advances. One could speculate that salary advances were sales pitches invented by the brokers, but speculation is, after all, pointless.

What surprised me is that such advertisements even appeared in the *Keijo Nippo*, a newspaper on a par with the *Washington Post*, and the largest Korean daily during that era. Once they did, however, the advertisers probably needed to do little more but sit and wait, since many young women must have been tempted by wages three times the starting salaries commanded by graduates of Keijo Imperial University. And what better evidence is there for the case against coercion than these advertisements, which prove that there was no need to resort to risky tactics like kidnapping?

My reason for changing *coercion* to *intimidation* is this: brokers (recruiters) may have told the young women they were obligated to go with them because their parents had received advance payment, which they would have to work off. In that case, *intimidation* is the appropriate word.

The phrase *directly took part in the recruitments* is, of course, at the crux of the debate on the comfort women problem. Countless scholars and journalists spent more than a decade frantically searching for evidence that military authorities were indeed directly involved in the procurement of comfort women. They did not find a shred of proof that would justify the admission that military authorities *directly took part in the recruitments*. Therefore, we should state, and assertively so, that Japanese military authorities were not directly involved in the procurement of comfort women. But since I anticipate vehement protests against the removal of this phrase, I have suggested replacing it with *neglected to exercise proper control over the recruitments*. An appropriate analogy would be blaming the police for not preventing every single crime.

On March 16 and 17, Japan's dailies reported that the government would stand by the Kono Statement, but that the Statement would not be reclassified as a Cabinet decision. They cited a Cabinet statement delivered on March 16: "The government found no evidence in documents examined prior to the issuance of the [Kono] Statement that proves there was coercive recruitment by any military or government authority."<sup>19</sup>

I am presuming that this is the Japanese government's final position statement on the comfort women issue. Unfortunately, it is rife with the usual circumlocutions, and therefore unlikely to put this issue to rest. Perhaps the administration has decided that nothing can be done to stop H. Res. 121, and is simply attempting to delay its passage until after Prime Minister Abe's visit to the U.S. in late April.

In any case, what needs to be done, and without delay, is the following: Disseminate all convincing data concerning basic facts that have been misrepresented or misunderstood. Need I add that said data should be translated into English?

Foreign historians and legal scholars have an abysmally poor grasp of the facts relating to the comfort women issue. For instance, George Washington University Professor Dinah L. Shelton, wrote the following in the *Los Angeles Times*: "[M]ost historians estimate the number [of comfort women] at between 100,000 and 200,000. Most were Korean and Chinese, though they also included other Asians and Europeans from Japanese-occupied areas. Many were kidnapped and raped, others were tricked or defrauded; some were sold by their families."<sup>20</sup>

I would revise Shelton's error-riddled pronouncements as follows: "There were at most 20,000 comfort women. None of them was forcibly recruited. Forty percent of them were from Japan, the most heavily represented nation. Many were sold to brokers by their parents. Some responded willingly to brokers' offers; others were deceived." I would add that, on the average, living conditions in the comfort stations were practically identical to those in brothels set up for American troops during the Vietnam War.<sup>21</sup>

In closing, I encourage human rights activists in Japan and all over the world to invest their energy in the eradication of *contemporary* sex crimes. According to the *China Daily*, over a six-month period, more than 110,000 victims of kidnapping or human trafficking (most of them forced into prostitution) were rescued in China alone.<sup>22</sup>

## Addendum

On April 3, 2007, the U.S. Congressional Research Service published a 23-page memorandum entitled "Japanese Military's 'Comfort Women' System." The author is Larry Nicksch, who writes on p. 21 that "[t]he military may not have directly carried out the majority of recruitment, especially in Korea.

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1. *Los Angeles Times*, 07 March 2007.
  2. *Akahata* (Red Flag), 09 March 2007.
  3. Savings records kept by the Shimonoseki Post Office confirm this figure.
  4. *New York Times*, 16 March 2007.
  5. Hata Ikuhiko, *Ianfu to senjo no sei* (The comfort women and sex in the battle zone) (Tokyo: Shinchosha, 1999).
  6. Masayo Duus, *Haisha no okurimono* (Gifts from the vanquished) (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1995).
  7. Inoue Setsuko, *Senryogun ianjo* (Comfort stations of the Occupation forces) (Tokyo: Shinhyoron, 1995).
  8. *Tokyo Shimbun*, 07 February 2003.
  9. *Shukan Kinyobi* (Friday weekly magazine), 09 August 2002.
  10. *Sekai*, April 1997.
  11. Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1975), pp. 94-95.
  12. Cynthia Enloe, *Does Khaki Become You? The Militarization of Women's Lives* (London: Pluto Press, 1983), pp. 33-34.
  13. *Sankei Shimbun*, February 20, 2007 edition.
  14. *Mainichi Shimbun*, 06 March 2007.
  15. *Newsweek Japan*, 21 March 2007.
  16. Mike Honda, "Rep. Honda Statement for the Congressional Record Regarding Comfort Women Resolution": 31 January 2007  
<[http://www.house.gov/apps/list/press/ca15\\_honda/COMFORTWOMEN.html](http://www.house.gov/apps/list/press/ca15_honda/COMFORTWOMEN.html)>.
  17. *Asahi Shimbun*, 05 March 2007.
  18. "Statement by the Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono on the result of the study on the issue of 'comfort women,'" August 4, 1993, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/women/fund/state9308.html>.
  19. *Asahi Shimbun*, 31 March 1997 and 16 March 2007, evening edition.
  20. *Los Angeles Times*, 06 March 2007 (reprinted in the *Japan Times*, 11 March 2007 edition).



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21 Hata, *op. cit.*, Chapter 12; “The Flawed U.N. Report on Comfort Women” in *Japan Echo*, Autumn 1996, p.p. 66-72.

22. *China Daily*, 16 September 2000.

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