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From Imperial Gifts to Sex Slaves: Theorizing Symbolic Representations of the 'Comfort Women'*

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Since 1992, owing largely to the activism of Korean and Japanese women leaders, ex-comfort women and legal experts, a precedent-setting international debate has raged at the United Nations with regard to defining the 'comfort women' issue as a war crime and gross violation of women's human rights. The UN debate has radically shifted the paradigm for representing the comfort women, from prostitutes to sex slaves. This paper examines the multiple, competing symbolic representations of comfort women by theorizing the ideologies of three principal parties implicated in the debate as 'patriarchal fascism', 'masculinist sexism' and 'feminist humanitarianism'. As a historical reality, the comfort women issue is complex, interpenetrating the dimensions of gender, social class, ethnicity and state power. This paper argues that the categorical representations of comfort women as either prostitutes or sex slaves are only partial truths deriving from narrative frames that not only reveal the ideological stances of the opposing camps but also serve their partisan interests in the global post-Cold War politics of women's rights as human rights.

The androcentric euphemism 'comfort women' (*ianfu*), an official coinage of imperial Japan, was used to refer categorically to young females of various ethnic and national backgrounds and social circumstances who became sexual laborers for the Japanese troops before and during the Second World War. In contrast, the soldiers came to refer to these women as the '*pi*' (pronounced 'pea'), a Chinese term meaning goods or articles, which, as a slang term, stood for female genitals (Nishino 1992: 46). The issue of the comfort women used in wartime by the military of imperial Japan leaped to the attention of the world community nearly half a century after the end of the War, with a series of hearings by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR), beginning in 1992.

Since then, several formal hearings have been held by the UNCHR Working Group on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, as well as the UNCHR Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities (see Soh 1996). In addition, official investigations have been conducted by 'special rapporteurs' appointed by the UN. A 1996 report submitted by the special rapporteur Radhika Coomaraswamy defined the comfort system as a practice of 'military sexual slavery'.[1] The 1998 Report on Wartime Slavery submitted by another special rapporteur, Gay J. McDougall, defined

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1. UN Doc. E/CN.4/1996/53/Add.1, para.6.

the comfort stations as 'rape centers' and recommended concrete measures to resolve the wartime comfort women issue, including the setting up of an international panel of legal experts, government officials and representatives of non-governmental organizations for the pursuit of criminal responsibility and realization of state compensation to individual survivors.[2]

The significance of the series of UNCHR formal hearings and investigations on the comfort women issue is that it has irrevocably transformed the nature of the comfort women debate, from bilateral disputes over Japan's insufficiently acknowledged post-war responsibility toward Korean victims (as exemplified by a class action suit brought by three former comfort women and other war victims in Korea against the Japanese government in December 1991) to an international indictment of Japan's violations of women's human rights during the War. In fact, the precedent-setting UN debate has resulted in a drastic shift in the paradigm for representing the comfort women. In contrast to the pre-UN debate view of the comfort women as prostitutes, the international community has now come to define them as victims of military sexual enslavement, a war crime perpetrated by the Japanese state.

Nevertheless, the Japanese government has persisted in disclaiming any legal responsibility for the sexual abuse of the comfort women on the grounds that the San Francisco Peace Treaty and other bilateral treaties had settled all post-war claims of compensation between Japan and other countries. Owing to mounting pressure from the international community, however, Tokyo helped establish the nominally non-governmental Asian Women's Fund to express its moral—rather than legal—responsibility, and to provide 'atonement money' from the Japanese people to the survivors (Soh 1999, 2000). In an effort to confront what they regard as 'Japan bashing' by the international community over Japan's pre-surrender cultural institutions, some conservatives in Japan—including veteran politicians and cabinet ministers—have intermittently asserted that the comfort women were 'licensed prostitutes' (*kōshō*) engaged in commercial transactions, to which the South Korean media have routinely responded by calling such Japanese assertions 'absurd remarks' (*mangŏn*).[3]

So, what is the truth about the Japanese institution of military comfort women? Who were the 'comfort women'? Were they prostitutes engaged in 'business', selling their sexual services to earn money? Or were they wartime victims of state and military power who were forcibly recruited and subjected to a daily routine of sexual slavery and gendered violence? Why did the Allied Forces not deal with the abuse of comfort women as a war crime at the military tribunals after the war, except for a case involving Dutch women, even though US military intelligence units had gathered relevant information on it (as revealed in documents kept at the National Archives in Washington)? These are some basic questions that must be addressed for deeper understanding and a fair resolution of the comfort women redress movement.

This paper seeks to contribute to a better understanding of this institution by analyzing the multiple, competing representations of comfort women with a view to theorizing the ideological perspectives of the three principal parties entwined in the comfort women debate, namely the state, the troops and the activists, as the main participatory and/or contesting social entities in the politics of representing comfort women. An important implication of the multiple symbolic representations of comfort

2. The report was welcomed and endorsed by the Sub-Commission, and McDougall's mandate as Special rapporteur was extended for another year so that she could present an update to the 1998 report (UN Doc.E/CN.4/Sub. 2/1998/L. 26).

3. An example of the Japan–Korea political ping-pong on the comfort women issue took place on the eve of the summit meeting between Japanese Prime Minister Hashimoto Ryūtarō and South Korean President Kim Young Sam in January 1997, when the Chief Secretary of the Cabinet, Kajiyama Seiroku, mentioned the need to consider the social background of licensed prostitution in pre-war Japan in understanding the comfort women issue, causing outrage in South Korea.

women—as reflected in the various terms used to refer to them (see below) by disparate parties other than the women themselves—is the powerful role of underlying ideologies held by the three principal groups in defining the identity of the so-called comfort women. Theorizing the three underlying ideologies in terms of 'patriarchal fascism', 'masculinist sexism' and 'feminist humanitarianism', I argue that these ideological perspectives encapsulate, in essence, the statist, masculinist and feminist positions in the conceptualization of the institution of military comfort women and the representation of the women used for it as follows.

The perspective of the wartime state of imperial Japan, which I characterize as 'patriarchal fascism', conceived of the comfort system as the institutionalization of considerate 'gifts' to the emperor's warriors for recreational sex. The state endorsed the military in the recruitment of young females from its colonies, hoping that the comfort system would contribute among other things to the enhancement of military morale. The perspectives of the troops (and apparently that of the government of contemporary Japan as well), which I characterize as 'masculinist sexism', conceived of the comfort system as a militarized version of the licensed prostitution available in imperial Japan and its colonies. (For the purpose of this paper, I use the term 'masculinist' to refer to those men and women who believe that men, in contrast to women, have biologically rooted sexual needs, and consequently, concede to men their 'natural' right to seek sexual comfort outside marriage, both premaritally and extramaritally. Masculinist sexism permeated the traditional sexual cultures of Japan and other patriarchal societies and is still prevalent today.) The perspective of contemporary activists, which I characterize as 'feminist humanitarianism', is backed by the revolutionary concept of 'women's rights as human rights' (see Cook 1994; Binion 1995). It conceives of the comfort system as military sexual slavery enforced by state power, resulting in gross violations of women's human rights and requiring state compensation to the survivors.

These different conceptions of the comfort system are directly reflected in the symbolic representations of the women who toiled as sexual laborers for the military. Depending on the ideological perspective, the specific terms and images used to refer to them vary, from statist euphemisms such as 'comfort women', through the paternalistic metaphor of imperial 'gifts' and the documentary classification of the women as military 'supplies', to the coarse and objectifying '*pi*' and the masculinist metaphor of 'public toilet', and finally to the 1990s feminist label of 'sex slaves'. The boundaries of these disparate symbolic representations, however, are fuzzy and permeable. The paternalistic 'gifts' of comfort women were unwrapped by the troops to be used as the communal and commercial '*pi*'. The living conditions of the '*pi*' often resembled those of 'sex slaves' but in reality they varied with time and place. The degree of sexual violence suffered by 'sex slaves' seems to have varied as well, not only with geographical and chronological factors but also with ethnicity. As we shall see, some Japanese 'sex slaves' apparently led relatively secure lives as imperial 'gifts', serving only officers and being charged with comforting them both physically and psychologically.

Similarly, the ideological boundaries of patriarchal fascism and masculinist sexism overlap with each other. The patriarchal fascism of imperial Japan, for example, encompassed masculinist sexism. That is, both the wartime and contemporary statist perspectives, as well as the generalized masculinist perspectives of the military and civilians, all share a common understanding of the ultimate function of the comfort system as a recreational sexual amenity for the troops. Further, the masculinist representation of the comfort women as prostitutes does not necessarily preclude humanitarian recognition and/or sympathy toward the slave-like conditions in which many of these women were placed. Feminist humanitarianism, however, refuses to acknowledge either the sociohistorical and sexual-cultural contexts of the comfort system, or the variation in living conditions and life experiences of individual comfort women. In the politics of redress movement and the compensation

issue, fuzzy boundaries between ideologically based multiple symbolic representations have solidified into dichotomous monoliths such as 'prostitutes' versus 'sex slaves', to strengthen the positions of particular interest groups.

It is worth noting that the ascendancy of the feminist representation of comfort women as sex slaves has been achieved in the context of the post-Cold War politics of human rights. This paradigm shift has materialized as a major outcome of the precedent-setting UN debates in general and more specifically, the 1993 Vienna Human Rights Conference with its slogan, 'Women's rights are human rights' (on which more later). While the feminist humanitarian representation of comfort women as military sex slaves has finally thrown light on their abject victimization, I should caution that the categorical representation of comfort women as sex slaves denies—however unintentionally—the remarkable human agency exercised by some of the comfort women against gendered oppression in their adverse social conditions.

Although it is beyond the scope of the present article to explore the point, we should also recognize the powerful human agency and adaptive skills of the survivors, rather than presenting them only as helpless victims. We should celebrate their survivorship as a victory of their personal strength in overcoming the many hardships of life, both during and after the war. Many of the life stories of the survivors reveal their independent spirit and willingness to take risks in search of a better life. In some cases these characteristics may have been among the factors leading them to the comfort stations, but they may also have contributed to their survival of the ordeal against long odds. If we adopt the Foucauldian conception of power as 'a stream of energy flowing through every living organism and every human society, its formless flux harnessed in various patterns of behavior' (Miller 1993: 15), it is relatively easy to concede that not all comfort women were powerless victims.

The main body of this paper is organized as follows: First, I provide a historical overview of the institution of comfort women, since a major source of disagreement between the Japanese government and international women's human rights activists has been over the historical facts of the institution itself. Second, I consider discourse politics in the symbolic representations of comfort women by examining the key terms that are used in Japan and Korea. Third, I elaborate on the three ideologies that underlie the multiple, competing representations of comfort women.

The data for this paper are drawn from an ongoing larger project, for which ethnographic field research has been conducted in Korea, Japan, the National Archives in Washington, D.C., and the Netherlands. A major objective of this research project is to present a balanced picture of this complex issue. As an anthropologist, I am committed to cultural relativism as a heuristic tool in order to understand human behaviors from the insiders' perspectives and at the same time, as a woman, I support the international feminist movement to engender the concept of women's rights as human rights so as to help improve women's security in war and peace.

1. The Nature of the Comfort System

The issues involved in the comfort women case are complex, ranging from the problem of 'militarized prostitution' to that of sexual slavery based on gender, age, social class and ethnicity. Coerced sexual labor, i.e. sexual slavery, was inflicted primarily upon lower-class young females of colonial Korea by imperial Japan during the Asia-Pacific War,[4] but not every former comfort woman

4. In this paper, I add Asia to the term 'Pacific War' (which Ienaga [1978: xiii] uses to cover the 'Fifteen Year War,' from the Manchurian Incident in 1931 to Japan's defeat in 1945) with the purpose of highlighting the suffering experienced by the peoples of Asia during that war.

was forcibly drafted by the state power. In addition, while teenage Korean maidens from impoverished families constituted the overwhelming majority, older Japanese prostitutes, and primarily lower-class women of colonized Taiwan and other occupied territories, were also used as comfort women during the 'Fifteen Year War' of aggression pursued by imperial Japan, from the Manchurian invasion in 1931 to Japan's unconditional surrender in 1945.

Estimates of the number of comfort women used range between 50,000 and 200,000 (see Yoshimi 1995: 79–80). It is believed that about 80% of them were Korean.[5] There is no documentary evidence to determine either how many women were used as military comfort women, or how many of them were forced into the role, except for the Dutch case revealed in a Dutch government report (Poelgeest 1994). The report concludes that of the two to three hundred European women working in Japanese military brothels in the Dutch East Indies, while some 65 *were* forced into prostitution, 'the majority of the women concerned does not belong to the groups of women forced into prostitution' (p. 24). In the Dutch case, then, one may surmise that the ratio of the women who were forced into service may have been approximately one-third of the total number. Given the fact that the forced recruitment of Dutch women was abruptly banned in April 1944 by order of Tokyo headquarters, however, the Dutch ratio of forced recruitment seems unlikely to apply to women of Asian nationalities, for whom the ban did not apply.

Moreover, the problem is how one defines being 'forced', which is one of the major bones of contention in the compensation issue, not only before but even after the 1993 Japanese government's admission of forced recruitment of comfort women. A broad definition of forced recruitment, which is taken by feminist activists and human rights law experts including the UN special rapporteur Gay McDougall, may include those who were deceived by middlemen with promises of good jobs and found themselves put to work at military brothels. In contrast, a narrower definition of forced prostitution, which people with statist and/or masculinist perspectives generally seem to take, would include only those cases of physical abduction to and/or confinement in a brothel against the individual's will. Apparently, the forced recruitment of Dutch civilian internees as comfort women (e.g. Ruff-O'Herne 1994) is the only evidence that anti-comfort women conservatives in Japan will acknowledge as an exceptional case of forced prostitution orchestrated by the military.

At one level, the debate over the representation of comfort women concerns the issue of state responsibility for forced recruitment of women and maintenance of the system. On a deeper level, however, many of the central issues around sexual violence in warfare and its relationship to the cultural constructions of gender and human sexuality—more specifically heterosexuality—in patriarchal societies, are being called into question. One of those issues is the perennial question of the proper relationship between prostitution and the state.

Systematic provision by the military for the sexual needs of its soldiers is common and may be understood as a paternalistic practice rooted in the masculinist view of female sexuality as a commodity—a prevalent view in patriarchal societies. Further, in towns where large-scale military bases are located, troops have customarily had easy access to commercial sexual services provided by local women. Thus, it is not surprising to learn that the British military authorities, for example, officially regularized the provision of Indian women as prostitutes to serve British soldiers in Bombay from 1793 to 1905 (Truong 1990). The colonial administration in Indonesia also regulated prostitution for the Netherlands Indies Army from the mid-1890s to about 1913 (*ibid.*). The

5. Hata (1998) asserts that Japanese women, not Koreans, constituted the majority ethnic group at comfort stations set up for the exclusive use of the military.

Rest & Recuperation program for US soldiers during the Vietnam War is a more recent example of the military looking after the physical needs of male soldiers (Enloe 1990, 1993; Sturdevant and Stoltzfus 1992). In fact, there are still thousands of prostitutes around the US military bases in Korea, and the Korean media used to refer to them as *wianbu* ('comfort women' in Korean) (see Soh 1996).

However, what is unprecedented about the system of comfort women for the Japanese military is not that it provided regulated prostitution for the soldiers but two other aspects. First, during its more than decade-long existence, the system evolved from urban centers of sexual entertainment for troops, offered mostly by Japanese women, into ubiquitous facilities for soldiers to quickly discharge their sexual urge in a mechanistic manner, using predominantly teenage non-Japanese females, conjuring up the metaphor of 'public toilet' for the comfort station (see below). Secondly, in this evolving process, some of these facilities degenerated into centers of authorized gang rape and sexual enslavement of women of the colonies and occupied territories, who were often recruited deceitfully by local collaborators and/or drafted coercively by the state power and shipped far away, even to the front lines in remote foreign lands.

From 1932 to 1945, the comfort stations existed in close physical proximity to the Japanese troops, not only in Japan, Korea and China, but also across the expanding Japanese Empire—in the Philippines, Indonesia, Singapore, Burma and the various islands in the Pacific. This article posits that the overall historical evolution of the comfort system may be divided into three stages as follows.

Firstly, the establishment of military 'comfort stations' (*ianjo*, literally, 'comfort place') came into being no later than early 1932 in China, in order to take care of soldiers stationed in Shanghai after the 1931 Manchurian incident started the Sino-Japanese War (Yoshimi 1995: 14). During the first stage (1932–1937), the comfort stations existed in urban centers such as Shanghai, as civilian-run clubs where military personnel could enjoy commercial sexual entertainment supplied by predominantly Japanese female employees. In Shanghai at the end of 1936, for example, there were ten comfort stations for the Navy, where 102 Japanese women and 29 Korean women were working as *shakufu* ('waitress' in Japanese; Yoshimi 1992: 91).

During the second stage (1938–1941), which started after Japanese troops invaded Nanking [Nanjing] in December 1937, the army started building comfort stations more systematically, as military-supervised places where soldiers could enjoy recreational sex. The authorities believed such facilities would help prevent soldiers from committing random acts of sexual violence toward women of occupied territories, which became a greater concern after the infamous Rape of Nanking. Besides its reputation, the military authorities were also concerned with the health of the troops, which prompted their close supervision of the hygienic conditions in comfort stations in order to help keep sexually transmitted diseases under control (Yoshimi 1995: 43–56). It was during this second stage (when imperial Japan expanded its occupied territories in China) that the military began targeting females from colonial Korea as comfort women (see below), and the ethnic hierarchy among Japanese, Korean and Chinese comfort women, in this descending order, was formally reflected in their different service fees posted at comfort stations. Soldiers began to perceive comfort women simply as sex objects, referring to them as the '*pi*', i.e. the vagina.

During the third and last stage (1942–1945), beginning after Japan attacked Pearl Harbor in December 1941, many Korean women were shipped to various distant places in the Pacific islands and Southeast Asian countries following Japan's occupation there. In Korea, it was during this third and last stage that Japan promulgated the 1944 law creating the Yŏja Chŏngsindae ('Women's "Volunteer" Labor Corps' in Korean) in order to facilitate female recruitment for its war efforts. (See the following section for the generalized Korean perception that equates comfort women with

Chŏngsindae.) Testimonies of Dutch and Filipina survivors (e.g. Ruff-O'Herne 1994; Henson 1996) prove that during this last stage, in addition to colonial Koreans and Taiwanese, many local women in occupied territories were also recruited and/or abducted into compulsory sexual labor. The testimonies given by Korean survivors indicate that they were recruited between 1937 and 1944. The majority of them were deceived by enterprising middlemen—both Korean and Japanese—into believing that they were going to work at a factory or army hospital. Others stated that they were forcibly taken by the police and/or military (see Chŏngsindae Yŏn'guhoe and Chŏngdaehyŏp 1993; Howard 1995). In short, the comfort system evolved into something qualitatively different from the commercial centers of entertainment and prostitution for the military of its first incarnation in the early 1930s.

What should be noted here as well is that for almost all the Korean survivors, low social class and/or unhappy family life were factors in their recruitment as comfort women. For example, Kim Hak-sun (1924–1997),[6] the first former comfort woman to give public testimony in South Korea in 1991, was taken to China in 1941 by her foster father, who wanted to find a job for her. Based on a contract he had made with her mother (to whom he had paid some money), he had trained his foster daughter as a *kisaeng* (professional entertainer) and wanted her to make money by working in the entertainment industry. However, Kim Hak-sun was only 17 years old when she completed her training, and would have to wait two years before she could work legally in Korea. Thinking he might find her a job in China, the foster father traveled with her to Beijing, where, according to Kim Hak-sun, the Japanese military took her away from him to a comfort station. Kim worked as a comfort woman for four months before escaping with the help of an itinerant Korean merchant. During our interview in 1995, Kim lamented her harsh fate in which she had experienced 'no luck with parents, spouse, or children'.

Prostitution, by definition, includes payment for sexual union (Truong 1990: 11), while slavery carries the notion of the social outcast, of person as property, and compulsory labor (Watson 1980). The majority of Korean survivors, including Kim Hak-sun, testified that they were *not* paid for their sexual services to Japanese soldiers. Some mentioned receiving tickets from soldiers, which were then submitted to their managers for record-keeping. A few stated that they possessed postal savings accounts to deposit tips received from individual soldiers, but that they lost their savings books when they returned to Korea after the war. Mun Ok-chu, who apparently was a most popular girl among the soldiers for her singing talent and sympathetic attitude, accumulated a surprisingly large amount of money by saving her tips. She recalls in an autobiographical account how she felt bad to possess much money while her friends did not (Mun 1996). She also mentions attempting suicide in a desperate bid to end her miserable life as a 'Korean *pi*' (see Mun 1993; Howard 1995).

In the case of Mun Ok-chu and many other survivors who labored at the comfort stations, their lives smack of sexual slavery rather than prostitution. Slavery may be defined as an extreme form of the human relation of domination and can be conceived of both as a personal relation and as an institutional process (Patterson 1982). Sexual slavery may be defined as a relation of domination based on sex. Kathleen Barry (1984) defines female sexual slavery as a social condition of sexual exploitation and violence from which a woman or girl cannot escape. Testimonies of the majority of the survivors reveal that they were forced into conditions of slavery and could not get out of it.

Nevertheless, one must also point out that the categorical definition of comfort women as sex slaves ignores (1) the historical realities of commercial sex in which some comfort women participated,

6. For a biographical sketch of Kim Hak-sun, see Soh (1997*b*).

(2) the varied subjective feelings of individual comfort women as a result of private practices of personal favoritism as well as institutionalized ethnic discrimination, and (3) rare but true instances where intimate relations developed between comfort women and soldiers, characterized by heterosexual love and humanitarian care and revealed in the testimonies of some survivors and former soldiers (see Chŏngsindae Yŏn'guhoe and Chŏngdaehyŏp 1993; Howard 1995; Nishino 1992). For example, some Japanese women who served only officers, and/or acted as a mistress for one high-ranking officer, seem to have led relatively protected, secure lives in which their main concern may indeed have been the provision of not only sex but psychological comfort to their compatriot warriors.

Nakazato Chiyo, a former military nurse stationed on Hainan Island off China during the war, stated during an interview in 1997 that the Japanese comfort woman who became the mistress of her boss at the Navy hospital lived in a very nicely decorated place with pretty dolls. Nakazato further revealed that although she was ashamed to admit it, one of the reasons she befriended the Japanese comfort woman was her ample supply of tasty and hard-to-obtain sweets that she gladly shared with the young nurse. In striking contrast, Nakazato recalled that the Korean comfort women were housed in primitive makeshift shacks constructed of tropical plant leaves.

One suspects that the conspicuous differences in living conditions between Japanese and non-Japanese comfort women may partially account for the fact that there have been no Japanese former comfort women coming forth to support the feminist humanitarian representation of comfort women as sex slaves. From the perspective of Nakazato Chiyo as a young nurse, not to mention the statist and/or masculinist perspectives of the military and the public, the life of the Japanese comfort woman described above probably would not have been conceived of as sexual slavery. Rather, they may have regarded it in terms of the traditional gendered patterns of 'sexual contract' (see Pateman 1988); that is, a typical life of a woman performing her expected role as a mistress in a patriarchal society. (What the woman herself thought is another matter. Unfortunately, there is no way for us to know.)

In the experiences of Korean comfort women, ethnicity was a fundamental source of social discrimination against them. For instance, in the ethnic hierarchy practiced in Okinawa, Korean comfort women were used by enlisted men, while Okinawans were reserved for officers. Furthermore, as Japanese nationals, Okinawan women were remunerated for their 'services' while Korean women, being colonial subjects, supplied the same sexual services unpaid. Although the local people in Okinawa were cruelly mistreated by mainland soldiers, Okinawans in turn were contemptuous of Koreans for being colonial subjects (Ueno 1993).

Ethnic discrimination by the Japanese military was most ruthlessly exercised at the end of the war, when Japanese soldiers informed *Japanese* comfort women of Japan's defeat and fled with them. In contrast, Korean comfort women were either abandoned or, in some extreme cases, killed by the retreating Japanese army. In those cases, Japanese soldiers drove the Korean women into trenches or caves and bombed, burned, or shot the women, creating mass graves on the spot (Terao *et al.* quoted in Kim 1976: 21). The massacre of Korean comfort women at the end of the war by the Japanese military may have reflected the military's fear of the revelation of their atrocities. One may also suggest that it was rooted in the generalized disdainful, ethnocentric and sexist attitude of the Japanese toward Korean comfort women. As Japan's colonial subjects and sexual objects for the troops, they had been reduced to expendable military supplies, too cumbersome to be taken along at the end of the war.

2. The Discourse Politics of Representing 'Comfort Women'

Now, in order to understand the meaning and the dynamics of the multiple forms of symbolism involved in the discourse politics of representing comfort women, it is imperative that we examine the varying shades of connotations as well as denotations of the key official terms that have been used in Japan and Korea in reference to comfort women, before the emergence of the feminist humanitarian term 'sex slaves'.

2.1 *Ianfu* and other Official Terms in Japanese

The three-syllable term *ianfu* may be written using three Chinese characters: *I* meaning to comfort; *an* meaning secure, peaceful, safe; and *fu* meaning a bride, wife, married woman. Componential analysis of this official coinage of imperial Japan thus reveals the patriarchal fascist leadership's perspective, from which *ianfu* symbolized a woman acting like a bride or wife to comfort the emperor's warrior, giving him a sense of peace and security and thereby boosting his morale to fight fiercely in order to win the war.

In addition to the term *ianfu*, the state and military of wartime Japan also used other terms such as *shakufu* ('waitress') and *tokushu* ('special') *ianfu* to refer to the comfort women (Yoshimi and Hayashi 1997). In contrast, the post-war term *jūgun* ('military') *ianfu* is what the government officials of contemporary Japan tend to use. Some researchers (see Yoshimi and Hayashi 1997: iv) suggest that the term *jūgun ianfu* became common usage after the journalist Senda Kako published a book entitled *Jūgun Ianfu* in 1973, but a reference in Kim Il Myon's book (1976: 284) reveals that the term was used in an article title in 1971, prior to the publication of Senda's book. Contemporary advocates of the comfort women redress movement in Japan and Korea have become sensitized to the connotation of the term *jūgun*, and have come up with alternative terms such as *Nihon-gun/Ilbon'gun* ('Japanese military' in Japanese/Korean) in order to avoid giving the mistaken impression that the comfort women were voluntary camp followers. Ironically, Japanese ultra-nationalists are also opposed to the use of the term *jūgun*. Their objection is due to its connotation of official affiliation with the military.

In the English translation of *jūgun ianfu* as 'military comfort women', the term, *jūgun* (*chonggun* in Korean), loses its connotation of 'following' (*jū* in Japanese, *chong* in Korean) the military (*gun*) owing to one's occupation as a nurse, journalist or photographer. In reality, some comfort women such as Kim Hak-sun, who served front line soldiers in remote battlefields, were indeed *forced* to follow the movements of the military units, but those who labored in settled and/or urban areas such as Shanghai had no need to follow the troops.

I might further note here that the Chinese character for *jū* in *jūgun* also connotes obedience. Thus, meta-linguistically the term *jūgun ianfu* in conjunction with the 1944 law for Joshi Teishintai/Yŏja Chŏngsindae (the 'Volunteer' Labor Corps, in Japanese/Korean) connotes a powerful new claimant to female obedience, i.e. the modern nation-state. It implies that in addition to the traditional Confucian edict of 'Three Rules of Obedience' for females in a dynastic polity (obedience to the father as a daughter; obedience to the husband as a wife; and obedience to the son as an old widow), a new extradomestic dimension of obedience for women has emerged in their roles as citizens of the modern nation-state.

2.2 Chŏngsindae

In contrast, it is significant to note that Korean women leaders adopted the term 'Chŏngsindae', and not *wianbu*, in 1990 when they named two organizations dealing with the comfort women

issue. One is Chŏngsindae Yŏn'guhoe, a group whose purpose is scholarly research of the comfort women issue. The other, Chŏngsindae Munje Taech'aek Hyŏpŭihoe (commonly referred to by its acronym, Chŏngdaehyŏp), is an activist organization whose name is translated into English as the Korean Council for Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan.[7]

Remarkably, Chŏngsindae ('Teishintai' in Japanese) literally means the 'voluntarily-submitting-body (*chŏngsin/teishin*) corps (*-dae/-tai*),' and the term was used to refer to a variety of *ad hoc* organizations of students, farmers, housewives and other ordinary citizens, whose members were mobilized to support the war efforts of imperial Japan. Kang Man-kil (1997) posits that in colonial Korea the term Chŏngsindae began to be used around 1941 and that after the promulgation of the Yŏja (Women) Chŏngsindae Law in 1944, the term's usage began to be limited to women only. Considering the fact that the core leaders of the two Korean women's organizations mentioned above (such as Yun Chŏng-ok[8] and Lee Hyo-chae) lived through the war as young women, it is significant that they chose to adopt the wartime fascist term Chŏngsindae.

In fact, the particular naming of the two organizations reflects a generalized Korean perception that identifies the comfort women with Chŏngsindae. Some Japanese apparently also used the term 'Joshi Teishintai' to mean comfort women. For example, in Manchuria under Russian occupation, Japanese men exercised their patriarchal authority in obtaining the obedience of about twenty young compatriot women to serve 'for the sake of the country' as Joshi Teishintai comforting the Russian troops in September 1945 (Suzuki quoted in Kang 1997). It seems that these men and women had embraced the statist ideology of patriarchal fascism, equating Joshi Teishintai with comfort women. The episode, I suggest, also exemplifies the actualization of the fourth rule of obedience for women as citizens of nation-state, as I posited above.

Nevertheless, there has been no formal testimony to support the popular perception about Chŏngsindae held by the Koreans. On the contrary, some former members of Chŏngsindae who came forth emphasized that they performed only manual labor, not sexual labor. However, the categorization of Chŏngsindae as comfort women, i.e. forced prostitutes, prevails in Korean society. It reveals the depth and strength of lingering suspicions on the part of the Koreans that comfort women were deceptively recruited as Chŏngsindae. The Korean usage of the term Chŏngsindae to refer to comfort women thus appears to be a political strategy on the part of activists, used to highlight the deceptive and/or coercive methods used in the recruitment of comfort women in colonial Korea. Moreover, use of the term symbolically distinguishes wartime comfort women from contemporary *wianbu* serving the American military in Korea. In this sense, one may also suggest that the term 'Chŏngsindae' functions as a considerate euphemism born out of cultural sensitivity for the survivors in order to avoid the negative image of prostitutes evoked by the term *wianbu*.

The official South Korean term for comfort women, as used in the Government Interim Report of July 1992, is *ilcheha kundae wianbu* (military comfort women under imperial Japan). Although both *kundae wianbu* and *chonggun wianbu* are translated as 'military comfort women' in English, *kundae* simply refers to the military without the connotation of 'following'. Also, the official Korean phrase *ilcheha kundae wianbu*, unequivocally denotes the wartime *wianbu* for Japan's imperial troops, distinguishing them from contemporary *wianbu* for the US troops.

7. For further information on this Korean activist organization, see Soh (1997*a*).

8. See Soh (1997*c*) for a biographical sketch of Yun in which she describes the fear of being drafted into the Chŏngsindae as a reason for quitting school. The title of her undated manuscript, 'Jungshindae—Korean Military "Comfort Women"', equates Korean comfort women with Chŏngsindae. ('Jungshindae' is an alternative romanization of 'Chŏngsindae'.)

3. Multiple Ideologies and Partial Representations

Let us now turn to the three underlying ideologies of patriarchal fascism, masculinist sexism and feminist humanitarianism, which are connoted in the multiple representations of the comfort women discussed above. In the process, we will consider the sociohistorical, cultural and political contexts, in which the double standard for sexual behavior of males and females has resulted in the Korean cult of female virginity and the institutions of professional female entertainers (such as *geisha* in Japan and *kisaeng* in Korea) for men's sexual recreation, and against which the revolutionary concept of women's human rights has been launched in the post-Cold War transnational feminist alliance for more egalitarian gender power relations worldwide.

3.1 Patriarchal Fascism and the Provision of Imperial 'Gifts'

Fascism, according to a Webster dictionary, is defined as 'a political philosophy, movement, or regime that exalts nation and often race above the individual and that stands for a centralized autocratic government headed by a dictatorial leader, severe economic and social regimentation, and forcible suppression of opposition'. In characterizing the nature of the hegemonic state ideology of imperial Japan, I use the term 'patriarchal fascism' in order to add to the character of the fascist regime of wartime Japan the androcentric dimension of the fascist state's perspective backed by the popular belief in male superiority.

Imperial Japan began to promote ultranationalism actively by molding the indigenous folk belief system of Shinto into a national religion and coaxing absolute loyalty from its subjects to the emperor as a living god. The emperor system and the elevation of Shinto to the status of national religion served as the unquestionable ideological sources of legitimacy and popular support for expansionist militarism and the mobilization of the populace for wartime fascist projects (see Garon 1997).

When Japan began an active assimilation policy for colonized Koreans in 1937, for instance, the agenda included reciting the 'Pledge of the Imperial Subjects', hoisting the Japanese national flag, worshipping the emperor, and attending Shinto ceremonies. Further assimilation policies followed, requiring the changing of Korean names into Japanese ones and creating a new national identity for the colonized Koreans (see Chou 1996). The Japanese government enforced all-out systematic mobilization of Koreans of both sexes for the war effort in 1939. They sent Korean laborers to Japan, Sakhalin and many other parts of Asia.[9] As the Sino-Japanese War escalated into the so-called 'Greater East Asian War' after the Pearl Harbor attack in 1941, the drafting of Korean men as soldiers and laborers and women as laborers and comfort women became more organized and compulsory.

However, with regard to Japan's mobilization of young females of colonial Korea to support the war efforts, their recruitment was nominally carried out on the basis of 'voluntary' participation in Chŏngsindae. As mentioned earlier, nearly all women laborers seem to have come from the lower classes. There was no élite female group in which members of privileged classes participated in the war effort. In contrast, among a total of 370,000 Koreans who were 'pressed into war duty' (Ienaga 1978: 158) primarily as hard laborers or civilian employees of the military, there existed an exceptional group of 4,385 young male college students who became the Special Student Volunteer Soldiers in 1944. After Korean independence, one of these men went on to become prime minister, another became a cardinal, and others served as ambassadors, corporate chairmen, etc. (Kim 1995).

9. The existence of sizable Korean communities in China, the former Soviet Union and Japan is a vivid legacy of Japanese colonial rule.

The fact that Korea was under Japanese colonial rule (1910–1945) unquestionably facilitated the conscription of the great majority of comfort women from Korea. However, the Korean cult of female virginity, which enforced pre-marital virginity so strictly that the same word, *ch'ŏnyŏ*, was used to mean both a young unmarried woman and a virgin, appears to have been a factor as well. It apparently contributed to making colonial Korea a desirable source of young maidens to satisfy the burgeoning needs of the Japanese military for comfort women. For instance, when Aso Tetsuo (1910–1989), a gynecologist who served as an army doctor, conducted his first physical examination of Korean and Japanese women to be dispatched to an army comfort station in Shanghai, he found that many of the Japanese women were older and had venereal diseases because of their prior occupational history as prostitutes. In contrast, the Korean women he examined were young and had been virgins before their mobilization, and were thus free from venereal disease. He suggested in his 1939 report that unmarried Korean women would be more appropriate than Japanese prostitutes as 'gifts for the Emperor's warriors' (Aso 1993: 217).

One may note here that in the psychology of gift-giving the recipient is obligated to return the favor of the gift, which in this case means that the soldiers become obligated to return the imperial favor by doing their best to win the war. It may be worth mentioning here that a major motivation for establishing comfort stations in China in the early 1930s was to enhance the morale of soldiers engaged in the Sino-Japanese War. Indeed, one may argue that from the perspective of the fascist state of imperial Japan, the comfort system was an institutionalized 'gift', rewarding the emperor's warriors in a spirit of paternalistic *omoiyari* (consideration) with a regulated liberation from their battlefield duties: brief moments of rest and recuperation in the comforting company of young and healthy *ianfu* from colonial Korea. From the patriarchal fascist perspective, Korean comfort women were performing their gendered duties as imperial subjects,[10] helping the soldiers recreate and re-dedicate themselves selflessly to winning the 'Sacred War'. Gradually, comfort women and condoms came to be seen as essential 'supplies' for the imperial troops. In fact, when the military transported comfort women, the paperwork listed them simply as 'supplies', with no records of their personal identities, since military transport regulations covered soldiers and horses but not women (Aso 1993: 41).

Once at the comfort station, non-Japanese comfort women typically were either given a Japanese first name by the management or commanded to adopt one. Jan Ruff-O'Herne, a Dutch survivor who was forced to work as a comfort woman in Indonesia, also states that she was given a Japanese name. She writes that she cannot remember it but that she knows it was the name of a flower (Ruff-O'Herne 1994: 79). The forced personal name change is another expression of patriarchal fascism, putting the psycholinguistic comfort of Japanese soldiers above the integrity of the personhood of the non-Japanese women. One may suggest that the name changes were a symbolic wrapping of non-Japanese comfort women with culturally appropriate labels suitable for imperial gifts to the troops.

3.2 Masculinist Sexism and Consumption of the '*Pi*'

Since Japan had a state-regulated system of licensed prostitution until 1957 (Garon 1997), it is likely that both the state and society in general perceived the system of comfort women as nothing more than an extension for the troops of the commercial services available to other Japanese men. While wartime Japanese officials coined the androcentric euphemism '*ianfu*' to cover up the harsh reality

10. Kim Tŏk-chin, a Korean survivor, confessed that she actually prayed for Japan's victory while working as a comfort woman in China from 1937 to 1940 (Kim 1993).

of military prostitution and sexual slavery, the soldiers themselves used cruder terms that reflected their masculinist sexism toward the females with whom they had sex. The Chinese slang term '*pi*', meaning the vagina, was initially used among the soldiers stationed in China. Apparently, it eventually became a common term throughout the entire Japanese imperial forces. Mun Ok-chu, a Korean survivor who worked in Burma and Thailand from 1942 to 1945, for example, remembered having been constantly denigrated as a '*Chosen* (Korean) *pi*' by the soldiers (Mun 1993: 161).

The usage of Chinese slang phrases such as *pi-kankan* (*pi*-viewing) and *pi-mai* (*pi*-purchase) by Japanese soldiers stationed in China (Nishino 1992: 46), unequivocally reveals not only their perceptions of comfort women as prostitutes, but also the objectification and commodification of these women's sexuality in terms of mere vaginas. Conscious of their ethnic differences, the soldiers would identify the ethnicity of comfort women by referring to them, for example, as 'Korean *pi*' or 'Chinese *pi*' (Nishino 1992). In the case of Korean comfort women, the Japanese soldiers had two versions of the phrase, '*Chosen pi*' and its still more derogatory abbreviation, '*Sen pi*'.

In addition to the '*pi*', the graphically objectifying term 'public toilet' was also used by the soldiers to refer to comfort women, symbolically revealing the dehumanization and objectification of women as sex objects. The use of the term 'public toilet' (*kyōdō benjo*) in reference to comfort women, seems to have originated with Dr Aso Tetsuo, who not only conducted physical examinations of comfort women (as mentioned above) but also drafted the rules and regulations for comfort stations. Aso wrote among other things that 'the special military comfort station should not become a place of hedonistic pleasure because it ought to be a hygienic public toilet' (Aso 1993: 222, my translation).

Note that this particular expression of masculinist sexism reflects generalized male contempt for females, deriving from the traditional attitude of male superiority and 'sex-right' (see Pateman 1988). Moreover, the sexual metaphor of the public toilet was not limited to the wartime military. Up to the 1970s, even male college students in Japan used the word 'toilet' to refer to the females with whom they had recreational sex.[11] Nor is the masculinist perception of females as repositories for semen limited to Japanese sexual culture. In agrarian societies such as Korea, women have traditionally been symbolized as the 'field' (*pat* in Korean) into which men cast their 'seeds' (*ssi* in Korean). In this agrarian metaphor (cf. Delaney 1991), the sexual act is accomplished unilaterally by men's ejaculation of semen into the motionless, mute fields standing for receptive objects of male desire. This stark imagery of the sex act is, in fact, quite congruent with the masculinist construction of male sexuality as biologically rooted in physical needs. From the masculinist perspective, sex acts thus are mainly bodily relief acts, akin to urination and bowel movement.

It is not surprising, then, that Dr Aso and other masculinist soldiers regarded comfort women as receptacles of male sexual energy (Nishino 1992: 48, 52). The doctor's conception of the comfort station as a hygienic public toilet merely epitomizes a phallocentric essentialist perspective on male sexuality, widely prevalent in masculinist sexual cultures. Dr Yuasa Ken, another medical doctor who also served in the Japanese imperial army, stated during our interview in Tokyo in 1997 that the great majority of the soldiers felt no compunction in regarding non-Japanese comfort women as sex objects and exercising violence against them to release their tension. The elderly doctor added that only those very few who developed close friendly relations with non-Japanese comfort women would treat them with respect and compassion as fellow human beings. Testimony from survivors amply supports Dr Yuasa's statements, both about the prevalence of abuse and the existence of rare relationships of romantic passion and affectionate care. Analysis of the two contrasting behavioral

11. Ueno Chizuko, personal communication, 31 March 1995.

patterns is beyond the scope of the present paper, but is certainly a subject worthy of scholarly research.

It is also worth noting here that the unequal subtexts of gendered lives in masculinist sexual cultures are poignantly underlined by a comparison between the post-war personal lives of former comfort women and those of former soldiers. Women survivors tried their best to conceal their wartime experiences as comfort women from their families and friends, as rape victims often do even today. Many of them suffered from infertility, chronic bodily pains from physical injuries and/or sexual abuses, plus low self-esteem and abiding psychological trauma over the loss of their virginity. Many of the survivors have been unable to lead a normal family life. One of my informants said that she had to leave home when her mother tried to arrange a marriage for her, not knowing about her past. She feels that her life as an ex-comfort woman disqualifies her from conjugal life and has never married.

Kim Hak-sun (1924–1997), whose 1991 public testimony as a former comfort woman proved to be a turning point in the Korean women's movement for redress, married a Korean man who, as mentioned earlier, helped her escape from a comfort station in China. As Kim revealed during our interview in 1995, however, she had to suffer the hurt and indignity of being debased by her own husband who, when drunk, would abuse her in front of their son by calling her a 'dirty bitch' who prostituted herself for soldiers. Her husband's accidental death ended their marriage soon after the Korean War (1950–1953) and Kim remained single thereafter. In contrast, the former soldiers and officers who had sex with comfort women had no problem reintegrating into family and/or marital life after the war ended. Some even wrote about their sexual experiences with women of varied ethnic backgrounds in their wartime memoirs (Kim 1976).

3.3 Feminist Humanitarianism and Redress for Military Sex Slaves

Initially, the English name of Chŏngdaehyŏp was the Korean Council for Women Drafted for Sexual Service by Japan—as shown in Co-Representative Lee Hyo-Chae's letter of 4 March 1992 to the UN Commissioner on Human Rights, a copy of which was given to me during my interview with her in 1992. It contained the phrase 'sexual service', and not sexual slavery. In this regard, I note that Kim Il-myon (1976: 98), a Korean writer and permanent resident of Japan, had already described Korean comfort women as 'sex slaves' (*sekkusu no dorei*) in his book on the topic published in 1976, but that the categorical representation of comfort women as sex slaves could emerge only in the 1990s, owing to the post-Cold War world politics of human rights.

As Catharine MacKinnon (1993) points out, common dehumanizing experiences of women, such as rape and battery, were not until recent years defined by the international community as human rights problems, unless directly linked to political acts of the state. The systematic rape of Bosnian women by Serb forces beginning in the spring of 1992 (Stiglmayer 1994) has raised feminist consciousness about sexual violence against women during armed conflict and has undoubtedly contributed to the increased support of the international community for the comfort women movement.

In comparison to the Geneva Convention, which characterizes rape as a crime against the 'honor' and dignity of women, feminists have argued that rape is a crime of violence against women's bodies, autonomy and integrity, comparable with other cruel and inhuman treatment (Copelon 1995).[12] From the perspective of feminist humanitarianism, sexual violence against women is a violation of human rights, and rape by the military in wartime is a war crime. The point was resoundingly

12. I owe this reference to personal communication with Margaret Stetz, 7 October 1996.

endorsed by participants in the 1995 Beijing World Conference on Women at the International Symposium on Violence Against Women in War and Armed Conflict (Soh 1996). The revolutionary idea that human rights include a woman's right to her bodily integrity is integral to feminist humanitarianism in the post-Cold War world order in the late twentieth century.

In Korea, the fact that an indigenous system of female professional entertainers (*kisaeng*) existed throughout the Chosŏn Dynasty (1392–1910) may have helped many Koreans to regard the system of comfort women as a fact of life. Note that one of the arguments against abolishing the *kisaeng* system during the reign of King Sejong (r. 1418–1450) was the importance of its function 'entertaining' soldiers stationed on the northern border with China (Chang 1986). As a formal institution, the *kisaeng* system no longer exists. However, the term is still applied loosely to women in the South Korean entertainment industry, and so-called *kisaeng* tours became enormously popular among predominantly Japanese male visitors to Korea from the late 1960s (see Japan Anti-Prostitution Association 1995). These commercially organized tours became easily available sources of income for young Korean females and earned valuable foreign currency for their nation. Although Yun Chŏng-ok first reported her research on Korean comfort women at an international conference on sex tourism held in Korea in 1988, the Korean comfort women movement languished, mired in bureaucratic evasion and the masculinist indifference of the masses in both countries, until 1992 when Chŏngdaehyŏp appealed to the UNCHR. The rest, as they say, is history.

Feminist humanitarianism, which derives from the revolutionary gynecentrism of the 1990s transnational women's human rights movement, demands a radical reinterpretation of gender power relations. Its perspective calls into question many patriarchal behavior patterns and value judgments. Radical feminism, for example, contends that female sexual slavery applies not only to 'women in prostitution who are controlled by pimps but wives in marriages who are controlled by husbands and daughters who are incestuously assaulted by fathers' (Barry 1995: 199).

In Japan it was the feminist humanitarian perspective that dominated activist groups until the latest history textbook controversy erupted in 1996. Since then, conservative nationalist activists have vigorously countered the feminist humanitarian representation of comfort women as sex slaves, with masculinist sexist rhetoric. In addition to the portrayal of comfort women as nothing more than 'licensed prostitutes', they argue that metaphors of slavery are applicable to the harried lives of ordinary men and women in today's Japan as well. Some of them are founding members of the Society for Making New Textbooks (Atarashii Kyōkasho o Tsukuru Kai) that was formed under the leadership of university professors and veteran politicians in December 1996 to oppose any reference to the comfort women issue in history textbooks for junior high school students. This group advocates teaching Japan's history from what Fujioka Nobukatsu, a professor at the University of Tokyo, calls a 'liberalist' (*jiyūshugi*) perspective, with the aim of instilling in the minds of young Japanese a sense of pride in their national identity (see Tawara 1997).

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to demonstrate that the three ideologies of patriarchal fascism, masculinist sexism and feminist humanitarianism, in conjunction with particular reference terms and images for comfort women—such as *ianfu*, imperial 'gifts', Teishintai, the 'public toilet', the *pi*, and sex slaves—combine to provide the basic framework for us to understand the multiple, partial and competing representations of the historical institution of the comfort system. The rival representations of comfort women as prostitutes versus sex slaves indicate the multiplicity and variability of the 'truth' inherent in the contending narrative frames and political interpretations of controversial

historical institutions. As the providers, consumers and critics of the comfort system, the wartime state, the imperial troops and contemporary human rights activists have all exercised the power to name the victimized women, thereby symbolically categorizing the countless wartime 'comfort women', who came from various ethnic and national backgrounds and social circumstances, and most of whom will remain forever nameless and voiceless.

Of the three ideologies I have theorized as underlying the competing representations, patriarchal fascism and masculinist sexism are from the same cultural roots of Japan, with its long history of licensed prostitution. As such, they undergird the Janus-faced discursive practice of dealing with the comfort system in terms of public formalism (coining euphemisms such as *ianfu* and 'Joshi Teishintai' to refer to the women) and private informalism (objectifying the women as the *pi*, or the '*kyōdō benjo*'), respectively. In contrast, feminist humanitarianism belongs to the post-Holocaust 'human rights culture' (Rabossi quoted in Rorty 1993: 115) in general, and to an emergent post-Cold War culture of 'women's rights as human rights' in particular.

In a nutshell, an intense international culture war is being waged over the comfort women redress movement, in addition to more concrete legal battles. For the ideological combatants, the hegemonic definition of the comfort women is crucial not only for legal victory but also for the social and cultural dimensions of national and individual lives. This is because this culture war carries symbolic implications for a variety of other issues, such as the international image of Japan's national identity, the social meaning of the sufferings endured by survivors, and the political agenda of promoting feminist humanitarianism in order to help protect women from sexual violence, in war and at home, across national boundaries.

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