CHAPTER 3

Bitter Memories I Am Loath To Recall

Kim Haksun

Kim Haksun was born in 1924, in Jilin, China. When she was three months old her father died, and she returned with her mother to P'yŏngyang, in present-day North Korea. After her mother's second marriage, she was put into foster care, and entered a kisaeng (entertainment girl) training course when she was 15. After graduating two years later, she was considered too young to be a kisaeng, and crossed back to China. Immediately after her arrival in Beijing she was forcibly taken to a military unit, and began the life of a comfort woman.

Childhood

I was born in Jilin, Manchuria. My mother told me she had married my father when she was 15, and they lived in P'yŏngyang before moving to China, fed up with continual harassment from the Japanese occupation forces. My mother gave birth to me in 1924, and she told me that my father died before I was three months old: what caused his death I cannot say for sure. My mother, a woman alone and friendless in a foreign land, found it difficult to survive. She returned to P'yŏngyang with her two-year-old daughter.

Back in P'yŏngyang with a small child, she was forced to resort to begging from her brothers and sisters to live. Maybe because she had nobody to rely on, she attended church faithfully and regularly. I can still remember going to church with her when I was little. I liked it, because I enjoyed the singing and our pastor was very friendly. I was constantly told off by my mother for being stubborn and disobedient. Whenever I paid no attention to what she said, she would bewail her misfortune, telling me: 'You finished off your father' or 'Your father was nothing but trouble and heartache when he was alive – has he passed his character on to you?'

In P'yŏngyang I attended a missionary school which charged no fees. I

went for about four years, until I was eleven. I enjoyed lessons, sports and playing with friends. I was good at running and often won relay races. Throughout my life, the memories of those years have remained dear. I recall them fondly. I was able to learn when I wanted to learn; I was able to play when I wanted to play. In my early years, my mother did all sorts of work. She was a domestic help, a farmhand and a washerwoman, often leaving home early with a packed lunch. But by the time I started school she had hired a machine that could make woollen socks and she stayed at home knitting. I used to help her when I came home from school.

During the year in which I turned 14, my mother remarried. My stepfather came with a son and a daughter – both of whom were older than myself. The son was about 20 and the daughter 16, but before long the daughter married and left home. I didn't like living with a stepfather, but I got on well with his son. I had been so used to living alone with my mother that I found it difficult to have a man around. I couldn't call him 'father' and I avoided him as much as possible. I became detached from my mother and eventually rebelled. I drifted away. She sent me as a foster-child to a family who trained *kisaeng*, entertainment girls who sing, dance and generally serve men. I was 15. She sent me to the family, and I was accepted after I sang in a sort of audition. I remember how my mother made a contract with the foster father, taking 40 yen[1] and agreeing that I should live with them for a certain number of years. Staying at home had become so uncomfortable, and I hated it so much, I felt relieved to be able to leave.

My foster home was 133 Kyŏngje village, P'yŏngyang. There was another girl there who had been taken in a little earlier. I was given a new name, Kŭmhwa, and I began to attend the *kisaeng* academy (*kwŏnbŏn*) with the other girl. The academy was a two-storey building with a large sign outside. It had about 300 pupils. We attended for two years and learned to dance, and to sing, *pansori* ('epic storytelling' through song) and *shijo* (short sung poems). When a girl received her graduation certificate she could go into business as a qualified *kisaeng*. But she had to be 19 before the local authority would issue a licence. I was only 17, so I was not allowed to go into business. My foster father took me from place to place, trying his utmost to obtain a licence for me. I looked older and more mature than my real age, so he lied about me, but the authorities knew the truth and refused to grant me a licence.

1 In the interviews, many women refer to the Korean currency, wŏn. Yen was the currency during the occupation; hence currency mentioned in the text is referred to as yen, divided into 100 chŏn.

Howard (1995), True Stories of Korean Comfort Women.

Unable to earn money from me and the other girl in Korea, he thought we would find business if we went northwards to China. So we left. The year was 1941, and I was 17. Before we left, my foster father contacted my mother and asked her for permission to take me abroad. My mother came to P'yŏngyang station, gave me a yellow cardigan as a leaving present and saw me off. We boarded a train and went to Shinŭiju. We were to continue to Shanhaiguan by crossing the Andong river, but the Japanese military police stopped our foster father. They inspected his documents and took him into the police check-point for a few hours. We waited. When he returned, we continued our journey for several days. Sometimes we would spend the night on the train, and sometimes we would stay in guest-houses. We went as far as Beijing, because our foster father had heard that business there was very good.

When we finally arrived, we had lunch in a restaurant. We were about to leave when a Japanese soldier beckoned our foster father over. He was a military officer with two stars on his lapel and he asked if we were Koreans. Our foster father explained that we were indeed from Korea and that we had come to China to find work. The officer retorted that we could have stayed in Korea if we had just wanted money, and led him away, saying 'You must be a spy, come with me'. My friend and I were bustled away by other soldiers. We were led along a back street and came to a place where an open truck was parked. There were about 40 or 50 soldiers on board. They told us to jump on and, when we resisted, they lifted us into the mass of soldiers. After a few minutes the officer who had taken our foster father off returned, and the truck immediately sped off. The officer sat next to the driver. Crouched in a corner at the back of the truck we wept, shocked at what had just happened. We were terrified. Some minutes later we noticed another truck, just like ours, following us.

We had been seized in the afternoon, and our journey continued through the night. As we travelled, when shooting was heard everyone got off and crouched underneath the truck. We were given balls of cooked rice for food. Some soldiers tried to give us biscuits, but we were so frightened we didn't even look at what was being offered. At dusk the next day we all got down, and some of the soldiers took us to a house. Later we found out that it was empty, that it had been abandoned by fleeing Chinese.

It was dark. We weren't aware of what was going on and couldn't even guess where we were. My friend and I were sent into a room, where we sat and looked at each other. We had no idea what was going to happen. A little later, the officer who had taken our foster father away came in. He began to take me to an adjacent room, divided only by a curtain. I was scared to be alone, and resisted. He dragged me off and

held me close to him, trying to take my clothes off at the same time. I struggled, but in the end my clothes were all torn away. He took my virginity. During the night he raped me twice.

The following morning he left while it was still dark. I managed to cover myself with my torn clothes, but as he left he told me that I would be no longer be able to wear such clothes. I wept. I lifted the curtain to see if my friend was still there. A soldier in a brown uniform was lying fast asleep. My friend was weeping; she like me had covered her body with her torn clothing. I was shocked and dropped the curtain. When day dawned, and after the soldier had left her, my friend came over. We wept aloud, cuddling each other. She said she had been beaten when she tried to resist. I had been so occupied fighting off the officer that I hadn't been aware what had been going on beyond the flimsy curtain.

My Hateful Life as a Comfort Woman

We heard women's voices outside. They were speaking Korean. One opened the door and came in. She asked us how we had got there. My friend told her about our journey. She said: 'Now that you're here there isn't much you can do. There is no way you can run away. You'll have to stay and accept your fate.' Later, soldiers brought wooden beds into our curtained room. We were allocated one portion each, and our lives as comfort women began.

The house was built of red brick and had two entrances. Right next to it was a military unit, and sometime later we were told by the soldiers that the place was called Tiebizhen. The village had originally been Chinese but, perhaps because a Japanese military unit had long been stationed there, we never saw a single Chinese person. There were five women in the house. They all had Japanese names. Sizue, at 22, was the oldest. Miyako and Sadako said they were 19 years old. Sizue gave us Japanese names: I was called Aiko, my friend Emiko. The soldiers brought us rice and other groceries, and we took turns to cook. Since I was the youngest I had to do much more cooking and washing-up than the others. If I asked the soldiers for some cooked rice from time to time, they would bring me the rice and soup that they had prepared to eat themselves.[2] They also smuggled us occasional dry biscuits. We wore a sort of cotton underwear that had been discarded by the soldiers. Sometimes they would

2 The staple Korean diet is rice and soup complemented by vegetables, or occasionally fish or meat side dishes. Glutinous Annam rice and a soup made with yellow bean/soya bean paste are typical foods. Japanese rice balls and *misō* soup are mentioned regularly in the interviews. The most famous side dish in Korea is fermented Chinese cabbage, *kimch'i*, but pickled radish, in either Korean or Japanese varieties, seems to have been a more common accompaniment.

bring us clothes raided from Chinese houses. Sizue spoke very good Japanese, and mainly entertained officers. Miyako and Sadako, on the grounds that they had been there long before us, sent us the rough soldiers they didn't want to deal with. I didn't like their haughty attitude, because I thought we all shared the same fate, so I kept my distance. Sizue said she had come from Seoul, but not being very close to Miyako and Sadako I had no idea where they came from nor how they had got there.

There were five rooms in the house. Each had a bed, blankets and a basin by the door. Sizue gave us bottles of an antiseptic solution, which went pink when diluted and we were told to wash ourselves with it after serving a soldier. There was no one to manage us directly, but as the unit was right next door we were checked if we tried to go out. We couldn't venture out and we had nowhere to go. When the soldiers came to the house they went to whatever room they wanted. When I had been there about a month, I began to realize that the same men kept coming back, and that there were no new soldiers. We thought that we had been allocated for just these soldiers.

The soldiers often went out on punitive expeditions. They would go out at night, stay away three or four days, and return in the early hours of the morning, singing as they marched. When they came back, we had to be up early to meet them. Usually they would come to us in the afternoon, but when they had been out they came in the early morning. On such days we had to serve seven or eight men a day. When they came in the afternoon, each would stay about half an hour. When, more infrequently, they happened to come in the evening, they were often drunk and bothered us by asking us to sing or dance. On such occasions, I would try to get out to the backyard to avoid them. But if they found me there they would treat me even more roughly.

Because the soldiers chose which rooms they fancied, each of us had regular customers. They varied in the way they treated us: while one soldier was so rough as to drive me to utter despair, another would be quite gentle. There was one who ordered me to suck him off, while he held my head between his legs. There was another who insisted that I wash him after intercourse. I was often disgusted by their requests, but if I resisted they would beat me until I gave in. They brought their own condoms: we weren't allowed to keep any. Once a week, a military surgeon visited us with an assistant and gave us routine check-ups. If he was busy he would sometimes miss a visit. Whenever he was due, we gave ourselves a thorough scrubbing with the antiseptic solution. If he checked us and found anything even slightly wrong, he would inject us with 'No. 606'. If we burped after an injection, a strong smell would trace itself upwards to our nostrils, making us feel sick.

When our menstruation was due we used cotton wool obtained from the surgeon. We had to serve soldiers during our periods. We tried to avoid them at this time, but they just forced their way in and there was nothing we could do to stop them. We had to make small cotton wool balls and insert them deep inside our wombs so that no blood leaked out. When we didn't have enough cotton we had to cut cloth into small strips and roll this up to use instead.

It seemed to us that the soldiers received special permission to visit. At first I didn't know whether they paid for our services or not, but later I heard from Sizue that the rank and file paid 1.5 yen a visit and the officers 8 yen to stay the whole night. I asked who received the money. All she replied was that we were the ones who should be paid. I never received any money all the time I was a comfort woman. I don't know what Sizue knew to make her say such things.

During the mornings when the soldiers didn't come, we used to spend our time washing clothes or talking to each other. But by nature I am not docile, and my head was full of ideas about ways to escape. Because of this, I didn't get on too well with the others except for my friend, Emiko.

One morning as we were having breakfast, a soldier rushed in and told us to pack quickly. He kept calling us to hurry out and get on a truck, rushing us. We left in a great hurry, not knowing what was happening. I had only been there about two months. There were two trucks waiting, already filled with soldiers, and the officer was on horseback, with a long sword at his side. Before evening we got to a new place. It wasn't too far away, but seemed to be more remote, further out in the countryside. From here, we could hear much more shooting than previously. The house was smaller, and the rooms were divided by walls, not curtains.

Our lives continued without much change, except that there seemed to be fewer soldiers who came. The surgeon hardly bothered with us. The soldiers went on more frequent expeditions and some brought us bottles of alcohol on their return when they visited us. Life seemed more bleak than before. I continued to look for ways to escape. Emiko and I discussed many different possibilities, but because we didn't know anything about the area where we were held we would have been lost if we had ever got away. We promised each other to escape together when an appropriate opportunity came.

Escape

I had been in the new house just over a month when a Korean man in his forties came into my room. No one except a soldier was allowed to come to the house. But he said that he had heard there were Korean women there and had managed to furtively find his way in, avoiding the

watchful eye of the guard. The soldiers were away on an expedition at the time. He claimed he was a silver coin pedlar. With a mind half-glad and half-apprehensive, I asked him to take me with him when he left. Japanese or Korean, men all seem to be the same. He, too, satisfied his desires with me and then tried to leave. But I clung to him and begged him to take me with him. I threatened that if he left without me I would scream. All this wrangling went on in hushed voices so that Emiko in the next room couldn't hear. I was afraid that if she did hear us and wanted to come along, we would be seen trying to flee. He asked me how old I was, and how I had been brought there. He said he travelled all over China, never settling in any one place, and that it would be very hard and possibly dangerous to accompany him. I pleaded. Even if I died or he abandoned me I wouldn't mind, I said, as long as he got me out of that place.

I cannot remember the exact time, but it must have been around two or three in the morning when we escaped from the comfort station together. I left what little I possessed and came out with empty hands. I was so scared that I cannot remember how we passed the guard and the military unit. Even though the soldiers were supposed to be out on expedition, there must have been a few guards stationed at the unit. Heaven must have helped us avoid their eyes.

Four months had passed since I had been captured in Beijing by the time I escaped. Summer had ended, and it was early autumn. We walked for a while until my accomplice discovered a house that had been deserted by its Chinese owners. He went in and found some clothes for me to put on. He knew his way around and could easily find empty houses. He spoke very good Chinese and at times he successfully pretended to be Chinese. Not only did I speak no Chinese but I was in constant fear of being arrested. So I followed him wherever he went. He introduced me as his wife. He said he had studied at Kwangsŏng High School in P'yŏngyang, and gave his home address as Namhyŏngjesan district, Taedong county, P'yŏngyang. He said he had a son at home. He also spoke and wrote Japanese. I suggested we should return to P'yŏngyang, but he replied that he could not go back. He gave no reason. He seemed to know every nook and cranny of China. We travelled to Suzhou, Beijing, Nanjing and elsewhere. I could never make out exactly what his business was, but could only assume that he was a sort of middleman, delivering opium for the Chinese.

In the winter of 1942, when I was 18, I became pregnant. He decided we should settle down in one place to have the baby, and he chose Shanghai. We crossed the river Huangpu, and settled in the French judicial district. There were consular offices there from 53 different

countries. We went to that district because it was said that the Japanese and British districts were easy military targets for attacks. A year later, on 20 September by the lunar calendar, I gave birth to our first child. It was a girl. Later, in 1945, when I was 21, I gave birth to a boy. Both children were born in Shanghai. We managed a pawn shop called Songjŏng. Our financial capital was provided by a Chinese man, and in effect we just ran the business for him. Sometimes we lent money out, and the profits were divided 50/50 with the investor. The business went reasonably well.

Home and Misery

After Korea was liberated in 1945, Yu Ilp'yŏng, the head of the Korean residents in Shanghai, told us to board a ship to take us home. In June 1946, we boarded and returned to Korea. The ship was large, with two decks, and carried the Liberation Army on board. The fare was 1000 wŏn for adults and 500 wŏn for children, so the four of us paid 3000 wŏn altogether. We arrived at Inch'ŏn but, due to an outbreak of cholera, we couldn't disembark. We had to remain on the ship for a further 26 days. After that we stayed in a refugee camp in Changch'ung-dong, Seoul for three months. It was there that our daughter died of cholera. As winter drew on, my husband went around his acquaintances trying to find us a room to rent. He managed to find space at the house of a friend, and in October we left the camp.

I sold vegetables while my husband worked on a construction site to make a living. From 1953, after the Korean War ended, he ran a scrivener's office and served as a local community head. He also delivered groceries to a military unit. One day after he had gone out to have the groceries inspected before delivery, I was called and told that the building had collapsed where he was working. I rushed over and found the roof of the building had fallen in as a result of the heavy rain of the previous days. Quite a number of people had been hit, and some had died. Some were covered in blood and could only breathe with great difficulty. My husband was moved to the Red Cross Hospital, but he died within a couple of months.

I had suffered so much, living with this man who had supposedly been my husband. When he was drunk and aggressive, because he knew that I had been a comfort woman, he would insult me with words that had cut me to the heart. After we had returned to Korea I hadn't wanted him to come near me. My life seemed to be wretched. I had refused to do as I was told and I had received more and more abuse from him. When he called me a dirty bitch or a prostitute in front of my son, I cursed him. Now, though, once my husband was cremated, my son and I lived alone. He had tortured me mentally so much that I did not miss him a lot. I

began to buy underwear from factories and sell it to shops around the country, travelling as far afield as Kangwŏn province. Whenever I travelled to the provinces, I had to stay away from home several days, so I took in a girl from a poor family in Sŏkch'o to help. When my son was in the fourth grade of primary school I wanted to show him the sea, so I took him back with me to Sŏkch'o during the summer vacation. He suffered a heart attack and died while swimming in the sea. I hadn't been blessed with good parents, I had been unfortunate with my husband and children. Now I lost all my will to live.

I determined to end my life. I tried to take drugs several times, but I didn't die. In 1961, I moved down to Chŏlla province. I had no definite plans, and didn't know what I would do. For roughly 20 years I did all kinds of hard work, drinking and smoking away anything that I earned. Then I began to reflect upon my miserable, wandering life. Yes, I would die when my time came, but in the meantime I realized that there was no need for me to squander my life so pitifully . So I returned to Seoul. A friend from Chŏlla found me work as a a domestic help, and I stayed with one family for seven years. But my heart was weak and the work tired me out, so I left them in 1987. With the money I had saved over the years I rented the room where I live today.

I became involved in a job creation project through the local government office. While on this project I met an elderly woman who had been a victim of the atomic bombs dropped on Japan. I harboured a considerable grudge against the Japanese, and my whole life had been loathsome and abhorrent, largely because of them. I had been wanting to talk to someone about my past for a long time, and I told this woman that I had once been a comfort woman. Since then I have been called to speak in many different places, because I was the first of the comfort women witnesses to come forward. I find it very painful to recall my memories. Why haven't I been able to lead a normal life, free from shame, like other people? When I look at old women, I compare myself to them, thinking that I cannot be like them. I feel I could tear apart, limb by limb, those who took away my innocence and made me as I am. Yet how can I appease my bitterness? Now I don't want to disturb my memories any further. Once I am dead and gone, I wonder whether the Korean or Japanese governments will pay any attention to the miserable life of a woman like me.

CHAPTER 4

I Have Much to Say to the Korean Government

Kim Tŏkchin

Kim Tŏkchin was born in 1921 in South Kyŏngsang province, where her whole family lived at an uncle's house, farming the land but scarcely making a living. After her father had been arrested and beaten to death by the Japanese police it became harder than ever to survive. In 1937, when she was 17 and working as a domestic help, she heard that a factory in Japan was recruiting workers. She left the country, only to become a comfort woman. She returned to Korea in 1940 with the help of a Japanese officer.

Escape from Poverty

I was born in Taeŭi district, Ŭiryŏng, South Kyŏngsang province,[1] in 1921. My family owned no land that they could till, and they found it extremely difficult to live. So we went to my uncle's home – he was the older brother of my father. He made a living making bamboo baskets in P'yŏngch'on village, Samjang district, Sanch'ŏng county at the foot of Chiri mountain. There, my father began to cultivate tobacco. We gathered mushrooms and wild vegetables on the mountainside, some of which we ate ourselves and some of which we exchanged for rice or cash at the local market. Tobacco was a government monopoly. The leaves which my father grew were sold to the state, and my father received only a small amount of money. After the main crop was harvested, new shoots sprang up from the tobacco stalks and he would dry these small leaves and smoke them himself. He continued to put the dried leaves aside until he was caught by the Japanese police. He was taken to the police station and subjected to a heavy beating. As a result of this, he took to his bed and eventually died.

1 Throughout the text, the following translation conventions have been used to cite addresses: 'village' for *ri* and *maŭl*, 'ward' for *tong/-dong* in a city or township, 'township' for *ŭp*, 'district' for *myŏn*, 'county' for *kun* and 'province' for *to/-do*.

CHAPTER 6

I Would Rather Die

Ha Sunnyŏ

Ha Sunnyŏ was born in 1920 in Chinju. Because her family was poor, she began school later than was usual. Her school friends teased her for this, and she hated going to class. Her father was insistent that she should graduate, so she eventually left home. For a long time she worked as a domestic help in Kwangju, and when she was about 21 or 22 she set out with others to earn money. Instead, she was taken to Shanghai, and had to serve as a comfort woman.

I was born in Chinju in 1920. My family moved to Mokp'o as soon as I was born, then, following my father's illness, we had to move to Yŏngam where we had relatives. I remember more about life in Yŏngam than anywhere else. My mother gave birth to eight daughters, all of whom died apart from me. I was the second to be born, but my eldest sister died when she was nine, so I became the eldest child. My father cultivated someone else's land, and as a consequence we were very poor.

My parents weren't able to afford my school fees, so I was twelve before they sent me to start elementary school.[1] I was older, so other children used to tease me about my age. I hated this and sometimes I ran home during lessons, or I tried to get out of going to school first thing in the morning. Most children started school at the age of eight and were already in the fifth grade when they reached my age. Because of this, they teased me as soon as I started: 'We will soon be finishing school. You, fat one, when will you ever finish? Aren't you a bit too big to be in the first grade?' Whenever I tried to miss going to school, my father cajoled me into going, saying he was sending me there not because we could afford it, but because he wanted to bring me up like the son he never had. However, I didn't like studying. I would have rather played and run around with other children of my age.

1 The Japanese colonial regime instituted a six-year school curriculum at what Koreans refer to as *pot'ong hakkyo* (ordinary school). It is this school I have glossed as 'elementary school'. High schools were optional, and few Korean girls attended them.

My father was determined to educate me, but since I couldn't stand school any longer, I finally left home. There was no money in the house that I could take, so I just got on a train with nothing, and with no particular destination in mind. I got off at Kwangju and, having eaten food that some passers-by gave me, I spent the night at the station. The next day a lady who was about 50 years old told me to go with her. I went to her house, and stayed there the night. The very next morning she took me to a relative's house, and I started to work there as a live-in maid. The couple I worked for ran a business.

Every day, after the couple left for work, I looked after their baby, did the dishes and did the housework. I lived there for about three years. They fed and clothed me, but paid me no wages. After this time a neighbour coaxed me to move and work for them, saying that they would give me a monthly allowance. So I moved to this new household. After only a fortnight my former employer came to fetch me, and the two women had a huge row. At the end I was taken back to the first place, where I stayed a couple more years. My employer said she would find me a good husband when I reached 20 or 21. I found my job as a housemaid quite comfortable and I never had to go hungry, so I didn't contact my parents at all. Later, I learned that they had been trying everything they could to find me. They even resorted to consulting fortune tellers.

One day, I think I must have been about 20 or so, my employer's baby was fast asleep and I was outside talking with some girls. They were also housemaids in the same neighbourhood. A Korean man approached us together with a Japanese man as we chatted. They wore suits and looked quite young and dashing. They asked us how much we were paid for our work. We answered that we didn't receive any monthly wages, but were given food and clothes for free. To this they responded, saying that the Koreans were thieves. They said that if we went to Osaka with them we would be able to earn lots of money. We were fascinated by the prospect of earning our own income so, without even asking what kind of work we would do, we went with them. We didn't even stop to tell our employers.

Eight of us went altogether. There were girls from Kwangju and girls from Changsŏng. I remember I was wearing a long-sleeved dress, so it must have been spring. At about 2 p.m. we got on a train and went to Yŏsu with the men. We stayed overnight, then took a ship bound for Japan. There were many Korean men on board, all of whom were going to Japan to work. We disembarked at Osaka the following morning, at about 10 a.m., and were led to the home of the Japanese man. In his house there was an elderly lady and two young children. He said we would be moving again to go to Shanghai. We asked him why, when he

had earlier said we were going to Osaka. He replied that he ran a big business in Shanghai and needed people to work for him there. We believed him. After spending the night at his house, the very next morning we boarded a ship for Shanghai.

The ship was crowded with civilians, and we sailed for many days. We were given maize for food. When we landed at Shanghai, the Korean and the Japanese, who had accompanied us all the way so far, parted. A military truck was waiting and this took us to a house. The house was next to a military unit. When we entered we found that the same Japanese man was the owner. His wife, a woman from P'yŏngyang, and a Chinese couple who did cooking for them, lived there. The wife was also Japanese even though she came from a Korean city, and she looked older than her husband. She scolded him for his delay in arriving, and they started by having a row. The other girls were taken to different places, leaving me alone. It was a single-storey house with many small rooms. I was told it had formerly been a guest-house or a boarding house, but that it had been confiscated from a Chinese owner.

The Japanese man was in effect the proprietor. He brought more women to join us until we numbered about 30 altogether. Except for two Chinese and two Japanese who arrived about three or four months after me, the other girls were all Korean. Some came from P'ohang and some from Pusan, cities in Kyŏngsang province. The Chinese women were residents of the local district. An introduction agency in Shanghai informed the proprietor when there were new arrivals at the port, and he went to fetch girls. The Korean man who had accompanied us turned out to be a dealer in women. There was a sign on the front door, which I wasn't able to read because I was virtually illiterate. The house was right in the centre of Shanghai, and I was later told it was situated in what had earlier been the French judicial area. There were a few Japanese military units there and, alongside them, brothels.

We were each given a room and told to serve soldiers. The room allocated to me was just big enough for two people to lie down in, and the floor was covered with paper and two blankets. There was a small waste-paper basket.

For the first two weeks, I had to serve one or two soldiers a day, but after that many more came. I said to the proprietor that I'd rather die than keep doing this job. We would sell wine to the soldiers, too, but when they got drunk they became unbearably rough. I begged the proprietor to let me do the cooking and washing-up instead of serving soldiers. He just slapped my face. He kicked me and told me to continue my work. I was given a Japanese name, Odomaru. I can remember there was another girl also named Odomaru and another named Takeko. The

soldiers who came to the house were in the army. Some had no commissions and some were officers. Civilians weren't allowed to come in at all). If a sailor came by, he was chased out with people shouting to him to go to the place where the navy was allowed. This sort of segregation often led to fights among the men.

We had to get up at 4 o'clock every morning to clean our rooms. On Sundays, the soldiers came from 9 o'clock in the morning until 4 o'clock in the afternoon, without respite. Sometimes we had to serve 20, 30, 40 or even more men without pausing for a break. We gave up counting. While some finished what they had come to do with us in a short time, there were some who held on and delayed, wearing us out. How can I recount everything that I was subjected to in words?

Most of the soldiers used condoms.

If, for any reason, the visits of regulars became less frequent, the proprietor would beat us, saying that because we had treated them badly the last time they were not coming anymore. For about three or four months, I didn't serve soldiers. I was allowed to help the Chinese cooks with cooking and shopping. The other girls said that I cooked so nicely and begged me to continue to cook for them. But the proprietor nagged at me and beat me, telling me to serve soldiers rather than cook. If I boiled water to wash the dishes, he would throw the pan out, saying that I was deliberately taking time out to heat the water so that I could avoid the soldiers.

Whenever we had time to spare, we Koreans sat around talking about our homes and families. One of the Chinese women was 31 years old and one was 29. The Japanese women were 25 and 27 respectively. Of the Koreans, a few were about 30 years old, and some were younger than me. There were girls who were still teenagers. The younger girls were frightened and refused to serve the men, so they were sent to different houses. Yes, the proprietors in Shanghai sometimes exchanged girls. Our proprietor favoured the women who earned him the most by serving as many soldiers as possible. The two Chinese were pretty and amiable, and served more men than anyone else. So, on special occasions they were given new clothes and good food. When I first arrived, the proprietor gave me two pretty dresses. The soldiers paid their money direct to him, and he managed this himself since he didn't trust anyone. We never knew how much the men paid, nor were we paid directly.

We had to go to a military hospital once a month for check-ups. Those who developed any venereal disease then had to attend regularly for treatment. The check-ups were carried out either by a Japanese doctor or by a Japanese nurse. The hospital was in a large, two-storey building, and it housed many wounded soldiers. As far as I could see, three doctors and two nurses worked there.

Not long after my arrival, I asked the woman from P'yŏngyang to write a letter to my parents for me. A reply came saying that my father was very ill, asking me to go home immediately. Since I hadn't written the letter myself, I don't remember the exact address where I was being kept. I wasn't allowed to go home. Later I heard that my father had died, so greatly was he disturbed by my letter. That letter of mine was lost during the Korean War.

After about a year in Shanghai, I ran away from the comfort station on a snowy winter's day. I ran as far as the rickshaw terminal. It was late at night. But there was nowhere for me to go. I couldn't communicate with anyone, because I didn't know Chinese. I crouched in the corner of the terminal and tried to sleep, waking frequently. I was frightened. In the morning, I still didn't have anywhere to go, so I returned to the comfort station. I crept back to the kitchen. I cooked breakfast, as usual, and sat down to have my own meal. But the proprietor knew. He came in and beat me all over, saying that he would teach me a lesson once and for all. When my wounds had almost healed, soldiers began to come looking to have sex with me. I resisted them, so then the proprietor hit me on the head with a club. I can remember blood gushing out from the wound but then nothing else. I blacked out. Later, I heard that he had put some soya bean paste on my head to stop it bleeding, but I was saved because a Western woman living in the neighbourhood saw me from over the wall and brought ointment to put on my wound. I am told that the proprietor told her to leave me alone to die. The woman was about 40 years old and she sold clothes in the neighbourhood. I had once bought a dress from her with a tip given to me by an officer I had served. She had remembered my face, and came to my aid when she saw me bleeding.

Lieutenant Yamamoto, who was one of my regulars, found me in bed with my head all bandaged, and took me to the hospital to have the wound treated properly. Not all the Japanese soldiers were bad. He and another soldier from Akasima were kind. Yamamoto was about 30. He was tall and healthy. After about eight weeks' treatment, the wound healed and the swelling went down. I still have the scar, some 15 cm long, on my head. After that time I was allowed to just do the cooking. The officer who had taken me to the hospital ordered that I should not serve any more soldiers. Until Korea was liberated in 1945, I cooked and washed for the others. Yamamoto gave me pocket-money now and again to buy things with.

On our free days, we took turns to go out in groups of ten with the proprietor's wife. There were restaurants and cinemas in the area, but our outings were limited to an hour and a half, so we were unable to look around much. If we were late back, we were beaten by the

proprietor. Not far from our house was a place that only accepted sailors. The proprietor there was a much nicer man, even though he was Japanese. Whenever I went over to his place, he invited me in to eat and told me how pretty I was. He said he was from Tokyo. When I went there I told our Chinese cook where I was going, but never my proprietor. There were more rooms there than at my place, and he had about 40 women from Korea, Japan and China. One of the Japanese women was called Sanai, and she and I became good friends. If I didn't visit her for a while she would telephone to ask me over. She was from Nagoya and quite a bit older than me. She would often come to see me if I was ill.

Two women in the station caught cholera nostras and died in hospital while undergoing treatment. After two or three years, the woman who had written the infamous letter for me died of opium addiction. She used to sniff white powder at the dinner table and, when I asked her what it was, she used to say it was just a kind of medicine. After she had snorted, she would get high and dance about. We took our meals in the kitchen while the proprietor and his wife ate in their own rooms. This meant that they remained ignorant of what was going on. Some other women also took opium behind their backs. If the proprietor had found out he would have beaten them up, just as he had hit me. The woman who died had graduated from school and started taking opium while she was still living in P'yŏngyang. Her habit had begun as a boost to give her strength because so often she felt weak. But gradually she became more and more addicted. Anyone could buy cheap powder from a Chinese shop right opposite our place. Anyway, that woman used to serve many soldiers and she saved up her tips to feed her habit. Quite a few Japanese women took it, but very few Koreans were interested.

On my visits to the house which served only sailors, I met a Japanese woman and a Korean woman who were both pregnant. I also met two Korean soldiers in my own place, one from Chinju and one from Pusan. Those Koreans were allowed in, but they pitied us and spent their time talking instead of making us serve them.

Towards the end of the war we were bombed several times. If air raids were announced we would be evacuated to the piers. When Japan was defeated, the proprietor promptly disappeared, leaving us penniless. For a while we stayed with the Chinese cook at his home. There were five of us left, including one girl from P'ohang and another from Kwangju. One day our host told us that there was a ship in port leaving for Korea, and we rushed out to get on it. We were afraid that we might not be allowed to board, since we did not have any money to pay the fare with. But our

host explained everything about our circumstances, and we were allowed to get on the last ship to be found in the port.

It was 1946, the year after our country had been liberated. I disembarked at Pusan and went home to Yŏngam. My father, remember, had died of grief at my letter. My 14-year-old sister welcomed me. As my mother was too poor to keep me, I quickly left home again and went back to Kwangju to find work as a domestic help. I moved around many different places trying to eke out something of a living. Between moving from one household to another, I briefly lived with a man. But I soon left him because he was a heavy drinker and a gambler. At present I live with my sister, surviving on government aid. All the beatings I received in Shanghai have so affected my health that on wet days my body aches all over and I am unable to move about. Even now, I can't bear to watch violent scenes on television.

CHAPTER 7

I Thought I Was Going to a Textile Factory

Oh Omok

Oh Omok was born in 1921, in Chŏngŭp, North Chŏlla province, the first child in a poor family of five children, two boys and three girls. In 1937, at 16 years of age, she was promised work in a textile factory in Japan by a Mr Kim from her home town. She left home with a friend. When they arrived in Manchuria, where Mr Kim handed them over to a Japanese man, they were taken to a Japanese unit and forced to become comfort women.

I was born into a poor family on 15 January 1921, in Chŏngŭp, North Chŏlla province. I was the eldest child, and I soon gained two brothers and two sisters. My father had been in poor health since I was very little and was now no longer able to work. My mother ran a small shop next to the police station where she sold vegetables. I couldn't go to school, because we were too poor to pay the fees.

It was 1937, and I was 16. My parents had begun to try to find me a husband. One day a Mr Kim, from Chŏngŭp, visited us and said that he could get me a job in a textile factory in Japan. He also offered to find work for a friend of mine. He said that our job would be as weavers and added that we would be paid such and such a month. I forget the actual amount. After the visit he didn't come back. We had almost forgotten about him when he suddenly reappeared and urged me to take the job which was on offer. I needed to earn money, so I went along with him, taking an old friend of mine called Okhŭi. She was two years younger than me. She used to visit me often and I had shown her how to embroider.

When I left home for the factory, my mother was expecting another child. It must have been winter, since I remember wearing padded clothes. Okhŭi and I arrived at Chŏngŭp station with Mr Kim, where there were three other girls waiting. We all got on board a train and travelled to Taejŏn, where Mr Kim bought us lunch. Then we boarded the train again and travelled for three or four days, all the way to Manchuria.

CHAPTER 10

Return My Youth to Me

Yi Yongsu

Yi Yongsu was born in 1928 in Taegu, the only daughter of a poor family. Due to financial difficulties she had to leave school after attending for less than a year. While she stayed at home, she looked after her younger brothers for her mother. Her mother was a wet-nurse. She then worked in a ginnery for a time. Tempted by a Japanese man, she left home with a friend and was taken to a comfort station in Taiwan.

I was born on 13 December 1928, in Kosŏng ward, North district, Taegu city, the only daughter of a poverty-stricken family. There were nine of us: my grandmother, father, mother, an older brother, myself and four younger brothers. I started to attend Talsŏng Elementary School, but had to give up within a year because my parents couldn't afford the fees. When I was 13 I went to evening classes for a short period, where I used a Japanese name, Yasuhara Riyosyu. I learned Japanese and I learned to sing, accompanied by the organ. I was not very bright at school work, but I did enjoy singing. One of the male Japanese teachers told me that I sang well. Although I attended evening school for about a year, I often missed classes since I had to work in a factory during the day.

My mother was a wet-nurse for a wealthy family who lived in front of Sujŏng Elementary School, and it was my job to look after my younger siblings. The house we lived in, together with the paddy field and vegetable plot we cultivated, belonged to a wealthy family, the same family for whom my mother worked. From the age of nine to 13, I worked in a ginnery in Ch'ilsŏng ward managed by a Japanese man. They fed cotton balls into gins and made cotton wool. The place was full of dust. One day I witnessed a terrible accident. A man was dragged into the machine and his head was smashed. After that I hated working there, but I had to continue as my family needed the money. When I was 15, I was drafted to the training group for the Voluntary Corps in Ch'ilsŏng Elementary School. Boys and girls lined up separately for training, and we did exercises and marched in neat lines. We also had to march home at the end of

each day. It was autumn 1944, and I was 16 years old. My father was a casual labourer carrying rice from the warehouse. I had a friend called Kim Punsun who was the same age as me and whose mother sold wine. One day I went to see her for a chat, and her mother said: 'Look at yourself! Poor thing! You haven't even got proper shoes. I'll tell you what, why don't you go somewhere with my daughter? I hear that you can have everything you want there. You'll be able to eat nice food. You can even help your family.' She was talking about Japan. I certainly looked a mess in my rags.

After a few days, 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 more elderly of the two 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 left 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. He handed me a bundle and told me I would find a dress and a pair of leather shoes in it. I peeped in and saw a red dress. I was so delighted that without any further thought I followed him. Altogether, there were five girls with him, including myself.

We went to the station and took a train to Kyŏngju. It was the first time I had been on a train. In Kyŏngju we were put up in a guest-house. I was washing my hands in the stream in front of the building when I noticed a purple flower on the hillside. I had never seen a flower like it before, and when I asked what it was I was told it was a bellflower. We stayed in the guest-house for two days, during which time two more girls joined us. Now there were seven of us. We boarded a train and passed through Taegu where I could just see my home through the broken window. I suddenly missed it and missed my mother. I began to weep, saying I wanted to go home. I pushed the bundle of clothes away and continued to cry, asking the man to let me get off. He refused. I finally fell asleep in exhaustion as the train just kept on going. We must have travelled for several days.

Beating and Torture

We got off the train at Anju, in P'yŏngan province, and were led to what looked like an ordinary residential house. It was typical, with a thatched

roof and four rooms in the main part, an annexe and a stable. An elderly woman was keeping the house on her own. She wore baggy trousers and a long top, and had her head wrapped in a towel. Food was short, and we were given boiled potatoes and corn. We felt very hungry and sometimes during our stay there we would pinch apples from the tree. The Japanese man who had led us from Taegu punished all of us if any single girl did something wrong. We had to stand on small round clubs, holding large bottles filled with water in our hands. Or he would beat our palms and the soles of our feet with sticks. He would ask one of us to bring him water to drink, and if the girl was slightly slow in doing what was asked, he would beat all of us. Any excuse prompted a beating. We became so scared that we tried not to upset him in any way.

Winter was coming. The ground froze hard and a biting wind began to blow. Every day we had to go out to the fields and collect radishes in straw sacks. We were still wearing light clothes and we froze, feeling ice form all over our bodies. If we complained of the cold, he would beat us. We shivered and tried to keep our frozen hands warm, doing everything behind his back. The two girls who had joined us in Kyŏngju were taken away, leaving the five of us who had set off together at the beginning of our journey. We remained in Anju for about a month and then boarded a train once more to travel to Dalian [Luda]. We stayed overnight in a guest-house in Dalian. The following morning we were given soup and steamed bread. I remember enjoying that meal since I was so hungry and had never had any similar Chinese food before. We boarded a ship and were told that a convoy of eleven boats would be sailing together. They were big ships. We were taken into the last one. It was already crowded with Japanese sailors. We were the only women.

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. We weren't allowed to disembark. I was summoned on deck and sang for the men. Afterwards, an officer gave me two rice cakes. I shared them with the other girls. The ships started to sail again but often halted because of bombing. One day our ship received a direct hit. The other ships were destroyed, but only the front of our ship was damaged. Men shouted and screamed outside our cabin. The ship was tossed about, and I suffered with severe seasickness. My head was splitting with pain, and my stomach seemed to turn upside down. I remember crawling towards the bathroom, throwing up as I went along, when I was grabbed by a man and dragged into a cabin. I tried to shake him off, biting his arm. I did my best to get away. But he slapped me and threw me into the cabin with such force that I couldn't fight him off. In this way I was raped. It was my first sexual experience. I was so frightened that what actually

happened didn't sink in at the time. I vaguely thought that this man had forced me into the room just to do this.

People kept shouting that we would all die since the ship had been torn to pieces. We were told to put life-jackets on and to stay calm. We thought we were going to drown. Dying seemed better than going on like this. But the ship somehow managed to keep going. Later I found out that I was not the only one who had been raped. Punsun and the others had also suffered that same fate. From then on, we were often raped on the ship. I wept constantly, until my eyes became swollen. I was frightened about everything. I think that I was too young to hold a grudge against my aggressors, though looking back I feel angry and full of the desire for revenge. At that time I was so scared I didn't even dare look any man squarely in the face. One day I opened the window of our cabin and tried to jump into the water. It would have been better to end my life then and there, I thought. But the water, blue-green and white with waves, scared me so much that I lost the courage to throw myself out.

Eventually we arrived in Taiwan. When we disembarked I couldn't walk properly as my abdomen hurt so much. My glands had swollen up in my groin, and blood had coagulated around my vagina. I could walk only with great difficulty, since I was so swollen that I couldn't keep my two legs straight.

The man who had accompanied us from Taegu turned out to be the proprietor of the comfort station we were taken to. We called him Oyaji. I was the youngest amongst us. Punsun was a year older than me and the others were 18, 19 and 20. The proprietor told me to go into a certain room, but I refused. He dragged me by my hair to another room. There I was tortured with electric shocks. He was very cruel. He pulled out the telephone cord and tied my wrists and ankles with it. Then, shouting *'konoyaro!'* he twirled the telephone receiver. Lights flashed before my eyes, and my body shook all over. I couldn't stand it and begged him to stop. I said I would do anything he asked. But he turned the receiver once more. I blacked out. When I came round my body was wet; I think that he had probably poured water on me.

The comfort station was a two-storey Japanese-style building with 20 rooms. There were already many women there when we arrived. About ten, all of whom looked much older than us, wore kimonos. There was a Japanese woman, the proprietor's wife. But that same man also had a Korean mistress. He beat both his wife and mistress without any reason. We changed into dresses given to us by the other women. The proprietor told us to call them '*nesang*', 'big sister' and to do whatever they told us to. We began to take turns to wash their clothes and cook for them.

The food was again not enough. We ate gruel made with millet or rice. Even now I get frightened easily. I was much worse then and, because I was terrified of being beaten, I was always scared. I was never beaten by soldiers, but I was frequently beaten by the proprietor. I was so frightened that I couldn't harbour any thoughts of running away. After having crossed an ocean and not knowing where I was, how could I think of escape?

The rooms were very small. Each was big enough for two people to lie down in. At the entrance of each hung a blanket in place of a door. The walls and floor were laid with wooden boards, and there was nothing else. We were each given a military blanket and had to sleep on the bare planks. One day, a man came in and asked my name. I was still frightened and just sat in a corner shaking my head without answering. So he said he would give me a name, and began to call me Tosiko. After that day I was always called Tosiko in the station.

We mainly had to serve a commando unit. They were not in the slightest way sympathetic towards us. They wore uniforms, but I had no idea whether they were from the army, navy or air force. I served four or five men a day. They finished their business quickly and left. Hardly any stayed overnight. I had to use old clothes, washed thoroughly, during my period. Even then I had to serve men. I never saw any money. There were frequent air raids, and on some days we had to be evacuated several times. Whenever there was a raid, we were forced to hide ourselves in mountain undergrowth or in a cave. If the bombing ceased, the men would set up make-shift tents anywhere, on dry fields or in paddies, and they would make us serve them. Even if the tents were blown down by the wind, the men didn't pay any attention but finished what they were doing to us. Those men were worse than dogs or pigs. I don't remember ever having a medical examination. I didn't know what condoms were, either.

One day, while we were in an underground shelter, the comfort station collapsed in a bombing attack. Our shelter was buried under the rubble. We dug through the soil, trying to get out. After a while we saw light through a small hole. I was incredibly relieved to be able to look out and shouted 'At last I can see outside!' Then I smelt smoke, and blood gushed out of my nose and mouth. I lost consciousness. The proprietor's wife and mistress, the latter tall and long-faced, died. As the house had collapsed, we were moved into a bomb shelter at the foot of a hill, and there we again had to serve the men. After a while, the proprietor got hold of some material and built a rough and ready house. It didn't take him long. We continued to serve the men. In the end I was infected with venereal disease and the proprietor gave me the injection,

'No. 606'. The fluid had a reddish tint. The disease stayed with me for a long time because I had to continue to serve men before I was clear. So I had to have constant injections. There was no hospital or clinic in the vicinity.

Apart from going to the bomb shelters we weren't allowed out at all. We were warned that if we tried to venture beyond the confines of the station we would be killed, and I was sufficiently scared not to try anything. The men we served in the unit were all young; they seemed to be 19 or 20.

One evening, a soldier same to me and said he would be in a combat later that same evening that would mark the end of his early life. I asked him what his commando unit was. He explained that one or two men would fly an aeroplane to attack an enemy ship or base. They would be suicide pilots. 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. Then he taught me a song:

I take off with courage, leaving Sinzhu behind,
Over the golden and silver clouds.
There is no one to see me off:
Only Tosiko grieves for me.

Until then I had known we were somewhere in Taiwan, but I had no idea of exactly where. From his song I knew we were in Sinzhu.

When we were evacuated to avoid the bombing we stole sugar cane. We were that hungry. But if we were caught we were beaten. We were not allowed to speak in Korean. Again, if we were caught doing so, we were beaten. One day, one of the older girls who normally hardly spoke a word to us announced that she, too, was Korean. She told me, in Korean, that the war was over. We hugged each other and wept with joy. She held my hand tightly and told me I must return to Korea. We could hear people shouting and running about. This confirmed to us that the war was really over. By the time we had calmed down, the proprietor and the other women who had been at the station before us were nowhere to be found. We walked to a refugee camp by the pier. It looked like a warehouse. We were given balls of boiled rice which had dead insects mixed in. We waited for a ship. I was scared even there in case someone might drag me away, so I sat, shaking with fear, in a corner wrapped in a blanket. I kept crying so much that my small eyes got even smaller.

Return my Youth to Me!

We finally got a ship. When it arrived in Pusan, the barley was green. As

we disembarked, someone sprayed us with DDT and gave us each 300 wŏn. There were four of us: Punsun, a plump girl, another girl and myself. We said farewell and went our separate ways. I got a train to Taegu. I kept weeping and tried to hide myself from other passengers in fear that someone might take me away again. I found my house, just as run down and poor as before. My mother asked if I was a ghost or a real person and fainted.

I couldn't dare think about getting married. How could I dream of marriage? Until recently I had suffered from venereal disease. My parents and brothers didn't know what I had been through. My father was upset merely because his only daughter wouldn't get married. Both my parents resented the fact that they weren't able to see me hitched before they died. I worked in a drinking house which also sold fishballs in Hyangch'on ward, Taegu, for a number of years. For three years or so I ran a small shop on the beach in Ulsan. For some time I ran a small stall selling string. Then I worked as a saleswoman for an insurance company. I gave up when I began to get too old.

My parents have died. My brothers long ago became concerned about their older sister living on her own in her old age. People in the neighbourhood were also worried because I lived alone. I got fed up with all of them, and I felt a little sad that I would die without ever having had the opportunity to wear a white veil. So at the age of 60, I married a 75-year-old man. That was in January 1989. I chose an old man because I basically dislike men. But he was jealous of me and he abused me so much that the marriage failed. In February 1992 I divorced, and I now live alone in Taegu. I pay 900,000 wŏn ($1150) every ten months for my housing. I have a small room with a kitchen attached. My brothers help me each month with my living costs.

Now, having reported to the Council and after having poured out my story, I feel so relieved. How many more years can I live? I am grateful that the Council is trying to help us. These days I hum a song, *Katusa*, putting my own words to the tune: 'I am so miserable; return my youth to me; apologize and give me compensation. You dragged us off against our own will. You trod on us. Apologize and give us compensation. This lament, can you hear it, my mother and father? My own people will avenge my sorrows.'

I visited my parents' graves the other day. I said to them: 'Mother, I know you won't come back to life however much I may wish for it. My own people will avenge me. Please close your eyes and go to paradise.'

CHAPTER 11

Taken Away at Twelve

Yi Okpun

Yi Okpun was born in 1926 in Yŏngch'ŏn, North Kyŏngsang province, to well-off parents. She was the only daughter amongst four children. At the age of eleven, she started to attend Nambu Elementary School. A year later, her family moved to Ulsan. About two months later, while skipping with her friends outside the house, a Japanese and a Korean man approached her and told her her father was asking for her. She went with them, was held for three months, and was taken taken by ship to a comfort station in Taiwan.

I was born in 1926, in Yŏngch'ŏn county, North Kyŏngsang province, the only girl in a family of four children. I had one elder and two younger brothers. My father ran a stall in Yŏngch'ŏn market that sold fishing nets and food such as dried whiting, squid, chestnuts, plums and the like. He had two men who helped him. My mother was kept busy at home with housework and weaving. We had a plot of land let out to other people, and we were quite comfortably off. I started at Yŏngch'ŏn Nambu Elementary School when I was eleven. I learned Japanese, and I was quick to read and speak. The grown-ups in the neighbourhood used to pat me on my head and say that if I had been born a boy I would have been successful when I grew up. When I was twelve, we moved to Ulsan. I had just completed the first term in the second grade and was on my summer holidays. My parents were busy as before, looking after the shop. I played with the neighbourhood children every day. We used to skip, jumping over elastic bands singing the songs we had learnt at school. I still remember two of the songs. One ran: 'Mother, what will you do with this baby? Please come with me, you poor thing.' The other: 'Twilight is descending, the sun is going down, temple bells are ringing. Let's go home holding hands. Let's go home with the crows.'

Taken...

It was two months after the move. It was autumn, I think 16 September