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Reviewed by Boram Yi

It has been over three decades since Hak-sun Kim publicly testified about her ordeal as a “comfort woman” (sexual slave) in Imperial Japan during World War II. Since Kim’s courageous act in 1991, numerous former comfort women from countries including China, the Netherlands, Indonesia, Japan, the Philippines, South and North Korea, and other Asian-Pacific countries have come forward to share their harrowing stories (Ruff-O’Herne; “Hankuk chongshindae munje daechack wiwonheo [A Committee for the Korean Comfort Women]”; Henson; Qiu). Inspired scholars and activists around the world joined the courageous comfort women to shed light on this long-buried atrocity of World War II. Together, they have pushed for justice for comfort women (Dolgopol and Paranjape; Howard; Hicks; Moon; Tanaka; Yoshimi; Soh; Henry; Kim and Sohn). These collective efforts have uncovered the establishment, management, and eventual abandonment of comfort stations by Imperial Japan throughout its overseas territories, as well as the horrifying acts of terror, violence, and dehumanization inflicted upon the comfort women.

The volume under review draws readers’ attention to yet another important aspect of the comfort women’s stories—the forces behind the global comfort women redress movement, asking questions such as “How did the movement for women’s rights in South Korea evolve into a global movement?”, “What goals has the movement accomplished and what work remains to be done?” and “What factors contributed to its success and the challenges it faced?” By addressing these questions, the book presents an authoritative history of the global comfort women redress movement.

The Transnational Redress Movement for the Victims of Japanese Military Sexual Slavery has two sections. The first section narrates the development of the transnational redress movement and highlights key activities of diverse organizations in South Korea, Japan, and the United States. Not surprisingly, the book opens with a chapter by Mee-hyang Yoon, the long-time director of the lead comfort women redress movement organization in South Korea, the Korean Council for Justice and Remembrance for the Issues of Military Sexual Slavery by Japan (The Korean Council). Following this chapter are three chapters examining the crucial roles Japanese citizens played in the redress movement. Puja Kim, a Japan-based historian and activist, Pyong Gap Min, a Korean-American sociologist, and Mina Watanabe, the director of the Women’s Active Museum on War and Peace in Tokyo, chronicle the contributions made by Japanese civic groups and Korean-Japanese individuals to the redress movement. Their work includes unearthing essential documents and collecting testimonies from Japanese veterans and military nurses of World War II that corroborate the comfort women’s accounts. They also presented their findings to the United Nations Human Rights Commission, assisted comfort women in filing lawsuits in Japanese courts, and organized the 2000 Women’s International War Crimes Tribunal on Sexual Slavery by Japan, held in Tokyo. During this tribunal, renowned international jurists declared Emperor Hirohito

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guilty of the rape and sexual slavery of comfort women. Together, the authors emphasize the solidarity among activists that transcends ethnic and national boundaries while contrasting their approach with that of comfort women denialists in Japan. By refraining from making sweeping statements about the reactions of Japanese citizens, this volume not only recognizes their crucial contribution to the redress movement but also underscores the movement’s transnational nature.

The redress movement extended across the Pacific Ocean, as illustrated by Jungsil Lee, Dongwoo Hahm, and Phyllis Kim, who provide detailed accounts of how Korean Americans mobilized themselves to raise awareness of the comfort women issue in the United States. Their dedicated efforts ultimately resulted in the unanimous passage of the U.S. House of Representatives Resolution 121 in 2007, which defined comfort women as sex slaves and called for an apology and compensation from the Japanese government.

In addition, San Francisco-based activist Judith Mirtkinson chronicles how a coalition of Asian-Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) in her city spearheaded the construction of the largest comfort women memorial in the United States in 2015. This initiative serves as a testament to the collective efforts of the AAPI community. Finally, Seattle-based activist Emi Koyama explains how the Japan-U.S. Feminist Network for Decolonization has diligently identified, documented, and countered the spread of misinformation propagated by Japanese right-wing comfort women deniers within the United States.

Through the voices of activists, *The Transnational Redress Movement for the Victims of Japanese Military Sexual Slavery* highlights the significant impact and diverse collaborations that characterized the redress movement, transcending borders and forging connections between activists in different countries. The movement has manifested in various forms and strategies, ranging from legal actions taken against the Japanese government to public education campaigns involving developing educational materials, constructing comfort women memorials worldwide, and organizing weekly protests outside the Japanese Embassy in Seoul. Additionally, activists have provided for the daily needs of surviving comfort women. Despite adopting different strategies, these activists are united by a shared goal: seeking justice for the comfort women and working towards preventing crimes against women and vulnerable minorities in the future.

The second section of the book consists of a collection of academic analyses examining the impact of the comfort women redress movement. Anthropologist Tomomi Yamaguchi traces the origins of the history revisionist movement in Japan, which denies the country’s wartime human rights violations and the Japanese government’s responsibility for comfort women. In doing so, she builds upon Puja Kim’s earlier discussion on the emergence of comfort women denialists in Japan. Yamaguchi investigates how a small yet influential minority of revisionists have exerted influence over the Japanese government and promoted the denial of Imperial Japan’s wrongdoings, including the establishment of a system of sexual slavery under the guise of nationalism. She uncovers the connections between Japanese revisionists, particularly highlighting the role of *Nippon Kaigi* (Japan Conference), the most prominent conservative organization in Japan, conservative media outlets, and neo-nationalist factions within the ruling Liberal Democratic Party.

Peipei Qui introduces a wealth of documents found in the Jilin archive of China, which further substantiates the direct and systemic involvement of the Japanese government in the comfort women system, effectively refuting the false claims made by Japanese revisionists. Psychologist Angela Son endeavors to explain the underlying reasons for Japan’s comfort women
denialism. Bonnie B.C. Oh and Margaret D. Sertz examine the impact of the growing comfort women redress movement on diverse academic disciplines in the United States.

Overall, *The Transnational Redress Movement for the Victims of Japanese Military Sexual Slavery* provides a comprehensive overview and analysis of the worldwide comfort women redress movement over the past thirty years. The text’s significance is multifaceted. It stands as the first and only English-language volume dedicated entirely to the development of the comfort women redress movement on a global scale. By introducing the voices of diverse activists, this volume underscores the importance of local activism in sustaining and advancing a transnational redress movement. Additionally, the meticulous documentation of local community activities in addressing a global issue offers a roadmap for those interested in tackling global challenges by engaging local citizens. Lastly, the book ensures a balanced understanding of the movement by incorporating the perspectives of activists and scholars from South Korea, China, Japan, and the United States.

Including the voices of more diverse activists from Australia, the Netherlands, North Korea, and the Philippines would have made the book even richer. For instance, Dutch, Filipina, and Korean comfort women testified during the 2007 U.S. House of Representatives hearing. These women’s stories would have highlighted how these events have influenced the movement in different countries.

Furthermore, drawing parallels between the comfort women redress movement and the recent #MeToo movement, which both address issues of sexism, sexual violence, and their pervasive effects on societies, could have deepened the book’s exploration. A chapter delving into the interconnections and divergences between these two movements would have added value to the volume and emphasized the relevance of the comfort women redress movement in contemporary times. These considerations would be welcome additions to an expanded edition.

This book effectively presents the essence of the comfort women redress movement, which stands as a global movement against racism and sexism, transcending the realm of Japan-South Korean bilateral relations. Its greatest inspiration lies in the fact that the world has not forgotten the tragedy of World War II. The ongoing challenge lies in the Japanese government’s failure to provide a meaningful official apology and compensation that surviving comfort women have sought for three decades. As many contributors highlight, the rightward shift in Japanese politics remains the most significant obstacle to achieving a satisfactory resolution to this tragic chapter of World War II in Asia. This book is an essential starting point for those seeking to understand the worldwide comfort women redress movement. It will also be of interest to those studying the interplay between local and global human rights movements.

**Works Cited**


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