

True Stories of the Korean Comfort Women

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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

1937. I was playing with my friends with the elastic bands as usual. A Japanese man and a Korean, who seemed to be working for him, approached us. The Japanese man wore a pair of work trousers and the Korean our traditional costume. They pointed to me and said that my father was playing *paduk* (go) in Cho's guest-house and had asked them to fetch me. The other girls ran away. Although I was only twelve, I looked about 15 since I was tall for my age and dressed neatly. My father had sent me on errands before, so I thought he was doing this again. I trusted the words of these men and went along.

They took me to the guest-house and pushed me into a small room at the rear. Three girls were there who had been similarly deceived. Two were from Yŏngch'ŏn and one from Ulsan. They were older than me, probably about 17. I still remember the Yŏngch'ŏn girls: one was called Tokiko and the other Myŏnggyo. The next day, another girl was brought in from Chinju. Her name was Myŏngnan. I cried and shouted, banging at the door asking for it to be opened, asking to be allowed to go home to my mother. A man unlocked the door and rushed in agitated. He held me by my hair and beat me on my back and bottom. We were locked in that same room for three months, and we dared not cry too loudly. The manageress brought us rice balls and pickled cabbage, *kim-ch'i*, and we had to use a chamber pot to urinate in. If we had to go to the toilet, the woman would accompany us and keep guard. The manager and manageress watched over us all the time. When I returned home a few years later, I went to Cho's guest-house, ready to demolish the building and beat the couple to death. But the house was gone, and a new building stood in its place.

After three months, the Japanese man came back. He was still wearing work trousers. He took me and four other girls to Pusan. He put us on board a ship. We had to get boarding passes, and because I was smaller than the others he had me stand on a wooden box when the police came to ask questions. He said that if I was asked how old I was, I should say I was 14. It wasn't a passenger ship, but a cargo vessel. There were about 30 people on board, many of them Korean girls. At night I went up on deck, but could see nothing but sky and water. As I cried up there, the Japanese man came looking for me. He was afraid that I might jump overboard into the water. He told us he was taking us to a factory in Japan where we could earn money and go to school.

We left Pusan at about 5.00 p.m., and were told that it was about 8.00 a.m. when we arrived the following morning at Shimonoseki. Without being given any food, we were immediately taken to a big hall, something resembling a warehouse. There were already 33 Korean women there, so with our arrival the number increased to 38. The wooden floor

was large enough for all of us to sit down. The man who took us there said that we would soon be going to a nice place. He started to teach us to count in Japanese: one, two, three.... Those who were quick were all right, but anyone who was slow was beaten severely. Then he asked us to raise our hands if we had been to school. I thought that if I raised my hand I might be taken to the nice place he had promised. I was the only one to do so. He asked me to teach some Japanese to the other girls, who appeared to be between 17 and 19. We were watched over by three Japanese men wearing light khaki work trousers. They didn't tell us anything of our fate. We were each given a dress, and for meals we had balls of cooked rice.

We stayed for about a fortnight, during which time I continued to teach bits of Japanese. Then we were all taken back to a ship. This ship was a little larger than the previous one and was loaded with military commodities. There were many Korean women on board, and the men watched them like hawks. We sailed for about three days and landed in Taiwan. We disembarked in the morning and then travelled by train for some time. When we got off we were greeted by more Japanese men. We walked to the place where we were destined to stay. Since I was young, a guard let me ride his rickshaw. It was evening by the time we arrived at what appeared to be a guest-house shaped like a temple. It was a month before we learnt that this was Shyoka.

The house was a two-storey building with a vertical signboard at the gate saying 'Shyoka Comfort Station' in Chinese characters. The station was close to a mountain, and there were many other women there. Some wore kimonos, and some had nice blouses. We found out later that the man who took us there had sold some women from our group to other comfort stations, and the rest of us were sold here. The man who took me from Ulsan and sold me was called Nakamura. There were about 40 in the station when we first arrived, and we were told that it acted as the headquarters of all the stations in the region. Women were constantly brought in and sent on. The day after our arrival, seven moved on. The proprietor was Japanese, in his early forties, and he also wore work trousers. He seemed lost for words when he first saw me, because I was so young. The police issued permits for girls to serve men from the age of 14, and I was clearly too young to get one. So he let me do the washing and run errands.

One day as I was scrubbing the floor and carrying water for the women as usual, I went upstairs and peeked into one of the rooms through a hole. I almost fainted at what greeted my eyes. A Japanese man wearing a *yukata* was clambering over a woman, and right next to him a Taiwanese man with red lips and a Japanese soldier were doing the same

thing. I was terrified and wondered how I could survive. I noticed that men paid money to the receptionist at the entrance. There were two more Japanese men working there apart from the proprietor and the receptionist.

I slept in a back room and had to get up at 5.00 a.m. to cook breakfast. If I didn't, one of the women would cook. Over about three months I trained myself not to sleep during the night, looking for an opportunity to run away. One night, at about 3.00 a.m., while the guard was fast asleep, I crept out of the back door, released the bar that locked the gate, and ran away, holding my shoes in my hands.

I kept running, asking those I met on the street the way to the nearest police station. I finally found it, and begged the sergeants through my tears to help me. One policeman looked me in the eyes and shouted 'Aren't you a *Chosenbi*?', a Korean woman. I kept on pleading until a Korean interpreter asked me where I was from. I replied that I was from Yŏngch'ŏn, and they sent a telegram home to check my identity. A month later, no answer had been received. Later, I learned that when a policeman with a sword at his side came by to ask my mother if she had a daughter with the name Okpun, my mother had been so frightened that she denied my very existence. During the month I was in the police station I did odd jobs. When I heard that there was no reply, I again burst into tears.

There was a Chief Superintendent at the station called Hujimoto. He told me that I could look after his young children. So I worked for his wife as a maid. I looked after the children, I cooked and I cleaned. Then the Pacific War broke out, in the winter when I was 16. The Chief Superintendent's wife and family returned to Japan in 1942. I was now 17. I had hoped that they would take me with them. For five years I had not been paid a penny for my work. As my reward, he must have reported to an army unit nearby that there was a Korean girl in his house.

...to a Comfort Station

Hujimoto asked me to mind the house while he was away and suddenly left. I was alone in the house. The next day, two Japanese soldiers on a truck arrived at the door. They were sergeants. They asked me to hurry and board the truck and, although I told them I was meant to wait until my master returned home, they kept on pushing me to get a move on. Eventually I was lifted on to the truck, and we drove off for what I reckoned to be 24 km before we arrived beside a hill. The Kaohsiung Commando Unit was based there. They had dug a tunnel through the hill, and you walked in one side and came out the other. The soldiers occupied an elementary school not far from the escarpment. It was a single-

storey building with 17 classrooms. Each classroom was divided into three by wooden boards. There were about 40 women there. In front of the school was a sign saying, 'Commando Unit Comfort Station'. The distance from the barracks to the station seemed to me to be about 2 km.

On Saturdays, the Japanese soldiers formed long queues outside the school building. The ends of the queues were sometimes invisible. They each had a piece of paper with a red chop mark on it. They came from 9.00 a.m. until midnight on both Saturday and Sunday. Sometimes, after the soldiers had returned to barracks, officers came and stayed the night, leaving at about 5.00 a.m. On such nights we got no sleep. Each woman had to serve 20 to 30 soldiers a day. We were already very weak, but going without good food and being forced to serve so many men left some of us half dead. If anyone was too weak to work, the receptionist dragged them out and put a more healthy woman in their cubicle. Three to five weak women were typically kept in a back room without any food. If they thought such a woman could not recover her health with herbal tonics and medicines, she would be loaded on to a truck and taken to a mountain. She never came back. Anyone who died was also carted away to the mountain, the bodies left there, barely covered with grass.

If you wanted to survive, you had to be tactful. If we made faces at the men we were taken to a confinement room by the receptionist, so we smiled regardless of whether we felt like doing so. Each man was given 30 minutes in the cubicle, and I would try to prolong the time in an effort to lessen the number I had to serve, even to lessen the number by one. At first, I got away with this, but later on I was too exhausted to do anything but lie still like the dead with my face turned to the wall, avoiding his stare. During menstruation we had to use cotton wool and continue to serve the soldiers. For my first eight months I only served Yamamoto, the captain of the unit. But once he was transferred to Tayoko, I had to join the other women and serve 20 or 30 men a day. It was better to serve officers, as they would order the proprietor and receptionist not to send anyone else to me until they were spent and satisfied.

During my time there I was called both Haruko and Kohana, whichever name the men chose. We took turns to cook our meals, typically rising at 5.00 a.m. We ate rice with some vegetables or pickled radish as side dishes. Since we were given food only twice a day, we were always hungry. We had breakfast in the kitchen at 9.00 a.m. and supper at 6.00 p.m. We often looked at each other's rice bowl, wishing we could have some of our neighbour's food as well. If one of us was ill or looked extremely hungry, we would each give them a spoonful from our own bowls behind the backs of the Japanese. But if we were caught

sharing food, both sharers and recipients got a severe beating. The Japanese had their own rations and didn't have to eat such meagre food as we received.

The tickets, as I saw later, bore the seal of the unit's commander. They were as big as a small pocket diary. The men handed them to a receptionist. There were two receptionists, Eiko and Masako. They passed the tickets on to the proprietor, Itakura. Itakura and Masako shared the same room. Itakura was a sergeant. These three handled the soldiers well, and there were no incidents such as soldiers stabbing us with their swords. We didn't know how they managed money, nor were we ever paid. Other matters were managed by other sergeants. I suppose since there was a war going on, there was no more senior authority watching over us. The cubicles were just large enough for two people to lie down in, and we each had two blankets for bedding. There was a small box for clothes and possessions and a dustbin in each room. Toilet paper was provided.

The soldiers all used condoms. We had a medical examination twice a month for venereal disease in a big room resembling a warehouse more than a hospital. We would wait in a corner surrounded by curtains for a Japanese military surgeon to examine our vaginas by inserting an instrument. There were no nurses. If the surgeon found any of us had caught a disease, he gave us an injection. The shot was so strong that we couldn't eat properly afterwards. It was said that the drug was strong enough to separate the womb from the body. We didn't have any cosmetics, and we were given two pairs of baggy trousers for our clothes in winter, spring and summer. There was a war raging, so we were not allowed to go out. Nonetheless, Yamamoto did take me out occasionally, and we went twice to a Chinese restaurant. Because of the war we had to cut hay during the weekdays, wearing a military uniform topped by a cap. Each of us was told to cut a certain amount of hay. We carried the hay to the roadside and burnt it, filling the air with smoke.

On weekday evenings we were made to sing, dance and play the violin in the bomb shelter. Even there we weren't allowed to sleep properly. The presence of officers in the shelter stopped the rank and file from approaching us. The shelter was huge, 4 km long,¹ big enough to accommodate all the soldiers. We were taught how to play the violin by the soldiers so that we could entertain them. They had eight instruments. If we couldn't play well, we were beaten. The men drank heavily and would quickly become very violent. Because we had to sing to entertain them, I still remember around 50 military songs, one about the commando unit,

1 Yi says '10 n' in her testimony, indicating a distance which would take about an hour to walk from end to end.

others praising Taiwan, lively Korean folk-songs, songs of blind men; of youth, of comfort stations, of *samurai*, of pilots and so on. The song dedicated to the commando unit went:

See the aircraft in the blue sky; my heart flies with it.

The engine has started and I turn the wheel.

*Mother, I am going before you: when you hear of my death,
please record my name in the temple;*

When you receive my ashes, please hug them as if you were hugging me.

The song of the blind men ran 'If I could see I would know what you look like', while the song dedicated to life in the comfort station went something like 'My body is like a rotting pumpkin left out in summer'.

I still have a photograph taken when I was 19. In it I am working, dressed in a military uniform. The woman in a dress standing behind me came from Sariwŏn, Korea. In the original photograph there were many Japanese soldiers surrounding us, but since I hated them I have since cut them out.

The war was coming to an end, and Japan was thrown on the defensive. The soldiers moved about in a frantic muddle. They fought during the day, and at night they hid in caves. As the American bombing raids became more frequent, soldiers could no longer come to the school. Instead, they would abuse us in the caves at night. They demanded that we sing, dance and pour drinks. If a woman was a little slow in meeting their demands, they slapped her face without hesitation. If she cried from the pain, she was slapped again. The comfort station was for the commando unit only, so no civilians were allowed in. Among the soldiers we had to entertain, there were young Korean men who had been drafted as a student corps. We got on very well with the Korean soldiers. We called them brothers behind the Japanese soldiers' backs. We asked them where they were from and talked about our home towns, sitting and smoking together. Together, we wept a lot. If any of them suddenly stopped visiting, we knew he had been killed on the battlefield.

When I recall my life, I feel an unspeakable anger rising in my throat. Whenever any of us were beaten by the soldiers for having shared our rice, I used to grind my teeth together, saying to myself: 'One day I am going to kill you all. I will wipe out your descendants.' At the same time I used to ask myself 'Why is life so tough? Why can't I have my life, instead of living so wretchedly?' I lived each day hating myself that I continued to live. One morning I left the shelter at 3.00 a.m. while the others were fast asleep. I went to the seashore, intending to throw myself into the water, but I didn't have the courage. I tiptoed back and never told anyone.

Return

In 1945, when I was 20, Japan lost the war. When I went into the proprietor's room to clean it – it was my turn to do the cleaning – I heard on the radio that the Emperor had acknowledged defeat. The very next day the proprietor and receptionists packed their bags and hurriedly left. I told the others that our country had been liberated; Japan had been defeated by America. There were about 35 of us, and we all went our own ways. The Japanese left by ship to return to their own land. Although our country had been liberated, we were still in Taiwan and had to cope with the Taiwanese. To make a living I started to work in a bar run by the local people. I entertained customers and sang Chinese songs, wearing a Chinese dress. But I was soon discovered to be a Korean and from then onwards wasn't allowed to work there. Nonetheless, I stayed in Taiwan one more year, working in different bars.

Suddenly, a man began to hand out leaflets. They were written in Korean and asked all Koreans to come to Yasukuni Temple at a certain hour on a certain day. I went and found many of my countrymen already gathered there. One of the draftees came to the front and told us that if we stayed in Taiwan we all stood to be killed. He told us to find our own ways to return to our home towns. And then he taught us a song: 'Asian Coins, we the Koreans, we are smart and gifted...' 'Coins' referred to the Korean people.

I started going around with Kim Nae, the woman from Sariwŏn. We hid in a small cave in Shyoka for a few days, wondering what might be lurking at the far end of the long passageway. Then we started walking deeper and deeper into the cave. We must have travelled several kilometres. Then we saw light, and emerged in an expanse of reeds. We could see water. It was the sea. We couldn't walk any further. Disappointed, we sat on the seashore, looking out to the horizon. There was a ship in the distance. I took off my blouse and waved it about. The ship stopped and a dinghy was let down which was rowed towards us. There were two Korean men in it, dressed in American military uniforms. They asked us our nationality. We shouted that we were Koreans and asked them to help us. They told us to get on the dinghy. We got to the big ship and found many of our countrymen returning to Korea from American refugee camps. There were many women. We were each given a card which we were told to stick on to our chests. It was big enough to cover half my chest, and on it was written: 'This person was dragged away from her home but has survived. Do not accept any money from her.'

To kill time, we held singing competitions. When it was our turn to sing, my friend and I sang the *Song of the Commando Unit*, since we only knew Japanese songs. We were warned not to sing Japanese songs once

we got home. After four days we arrived at the southern port of Pusan. I had been taken away when I was twelve and now, at 21, I was finally returning. Kim Nae took a train home. The first thing I did was go and visit Cho's guest-house, but there was nobody left there. I went to Sanakkol, the place in Kyōngju where my mother's family came from. My father had died, because he believed he had lost his only daughter, but my mother was there with my three brothers. She didn't recognize me. I showed her the birthmark on my neck and cried 'Mother, it really is me. Can't you recognize this?' Only then did she realize who I was and began to hug me. I lied to her. I told her I had been working in a factory. My mother died three years back, unaware to the last that I had ever been a comfort woman.

I stayed with my family for eight years, but when my brother married and began a family, I left and settled in Pusan. I worked as a domestic help and as a cook. I have been running a small café for the past 18 years, ever since I was encouraged to do so by the owner of the petrol station next door.

I have tried to forget my past. What prompted me to give this testimony was an article I read in the paper last year. There, the Japanese government said that comfort stations had been run by civilians and that the government and military had had nothing to do with them. It isn't true. I wanted to prove to those lying Japanese that at least I am still alive and I know what they did. So in July 1991 I contacted the *Pusan Daily News* and told them my story. They did not publish it immediately, but held on until the end of November, when the Japanese Prime Minister visited Korea. I told my story to the National Assembly in December 1991, and I visited Japan in June 1992, to sue them for what they did to me.

It Makes Me Sad That I Can't Have Children

Yi Sunok

Yi Sunok was born in 1921 in Yöngdök, North Kyöngsang province. A relative in the village had been actively involved in the independence movement against the Japanese occupation and, because of him, police surveillance was tight. When she was 17, she heard a rumour that the Japanese government was recruiting girls, and registered herself on paper though not in reality as married. It was difficult for a young girl to pretend to be a newly-wed. So, intending to earn some money, she left home with a man who had promised her work in a Japanese factory. She was taken to a comfort station in Guangdong, China.

Branded and Deceived

I was born in 1921 in Yöngdök, North Kyöngsang province, the first of four children. I had two sisters and a brother. My father was a farmer who sometimes worked in the gold mines near Kyöngju and Yöngch'ön. Because I was the first child and was in poor health, my parents took special care of me. They wanted to bring me up gently and then find me a good husband. I didn't help with the farm but helped mother around the house. When I was 15 or 16, I went to evening classes in a thatched house used as the village hall to learn to read and write Korean. The teacher was a young Christian.

About that time, a distant relation lived with his family just behind our house. He had been in prison for taking part in the independence movement against the Japanese occupation while he had been studying in Japan. He and his family had lived in Kyöngju before moving to Yöngdök. My father treated him well, saying he was intelligent and had great knowledge. The authorities, though, kept a tight watch on us, on the grounds that he was a member of our lineage. If the police visited his house, they would also come to ours and search it. Sometimes my father was taken to the police station for questioning.

When I was about 17, we had to practise drills. These were led by the Korean village head. He frequently made us sing Japanese songs. An alarming rumour was floating around that the authorities were offering Korean girls to their government back in Japan. My father was afraid that I might be taken away, and discussed tactics with my uncle. They decided to register a marriage, in name only, not in actuality, between me and a Mr Pak from Ch'ongha district. It was October 1937. My uncle said he had met Pak in Japan while he had been a student and that he had helped run errands for the independence movement. Pak was much older than me and already had a wife and a son, but he had divorced because he had a personality clash with his wife. I never lived with Pak, and I had never even seen his face at this time. It was agreed that when I really married, my registration with Pak would immediately be cancelled. After filling in the documents to register the marriage I went around like a newly-wed, putting up my hair and wearing a scarf. We told our neighbours to say that I had been married off if they were asked about me.

After a short while, my uncle suddenly died. Ever since then we have had no way of finding out what happened to Pak. We moved to Yasa ward in Yŏngch'ŏn, where a married aunt was living. Now there were seven in the family: me, my grandmother, my parents, two sisters and my brother. Another boy had been born just after me, but he died soon after birth.

In Yŏngch'ŏn we lived in the annexe of a big house where some acquaintances of my aunt, the Moritas, lived. They were an elderly Japanese couple who said they had lost their son in the war. Although they were heavy drinkers, they had kind hearts. They spoke good Korean, maybe because they had lived in our country for such a long time. I washed clothes and carried water for this old couple, and they were kind to us. I asked Mrs Morita about Japan. She told me that there were many factories there where girls could earn lots of money by working. She said that everyone worked and earned money, and that no girls of my age were jobless. I had been finding it hard to act as if I was married, with my hair up even though I was still a virgin. I also found it difficult to live in a strange area which was not my home town. So I told the Moritas that I wanted to go to Japan to earn a living. They said my father would be displeased and advised me not to talk about such things.

We kept discussing it until one day a man, a Mr Oh, aged about forty, visited Mr Morita. I was there, listening to them talking about different topics while they drank in the hall. Oh said he had come to recruit girls to work in a factory. Knowing what I wanted, Mr Morita asked Oh if he knew of a good place for me. Oh replied that there was a silk factory which needed many girls, since they had recently opened a new building,

and that any young girl could get a job there. He added that the factory would pay travel expenses and that many girls would be going. He also said I could leave at any time if I didn't like the work there. Oh came and asked me if I wanted to go, and I answered that I would like to, given such good terms. My parents were against the idea, but I persuaded them on the grounds that I found it very difficult to act as if married, with my hair up and covered with a scarf, besides which we were very poor. In this way, I left home with Oh. I was wearing blue summer clothes, and it was the season for cucumbers. It must have been early summer 1938.

I got on a train at Yŏngch'ŏn with Oh, and we travelled to Taegu. There, we were joined by Yoshiko from Taegu, Itsimaru from Kyŏngju, Sadako and Masako. These were the names given to the girls later at the comfort station. I was to be called Takiko. Yoshiko was from a *kwŏnbŏn*, a training school for entertainment girls, *kisaeng*, in Taegu. She said she had come along because her foster mother had told her to volunteer for work in a Japanese factory. We had our hair cut at a hairdressers then boarded another train. Oh put us in a cargo carriage, and took himself off to a passenger carriage. We must have been early for the appointed date, for we got off at P'yŏngyang and stayed about a week in a house reached after a long walk from the station. At night, Oh went out to attend to his affairs, and we took baths or washed our clothes. A woman in her fifties cooked for us, making side dishes of fried potatoes and cucumber salad. We slept together in a large room. Namiko, Mitsuko, Yuriko and Eiko from Chŏlla province joined us there.

After a week, we boarded another train at the station. There were many Chinese on it. We got off somewhere, and stayed for a while. A Korean cooked for us there, but the pickled cabbage, *kimch'i*, was terrible. Then we took a khaki-coloured truck covered with canvas. The driver was Japanese and wore a military uniform. Oh sat beside him while we crouched in the back. The vehicle stopped after a short ride. We had heard that Japan was a clean country and we thought it strange, for this place was filthy. Only then did we find out that we had come to Guangdong, in China, not to Japan. From then on, our wretched lives began.

Beaten

When we got off the truck it was cold and there was a biting wind. We were standing in front of a two-storey red brick building. From the outside, the entrance door was very high and big, but inside we found an empty house with no people and no furniture. There were many rooms, each the same size, divided by partitions into cubicles. There was a

wooden fence along the little track in front of the house, and a military unit could be seen directly beyond it. There were hardly any Chinese around. We could see no Japanese women, just Japanese soldiers. Once we had all entered, Oh talked to the soldiers then disappeared. The house was cleaned with disinfectant. A woman in her fifties from Chōlla province came to us. She was obese and had lived in Japan for many years. She always cautioned us to keep ourselves clean. We were to call her *Obasang*, grandmother. She told us not to wait for Oh.

On the day we arrived we were sent to rest in the rooms. The following day, *Obasang* told us to have a bath. The same day, high-ranking soldiers came and stayed the night. I hated what they forced me to go through. It was the first time in my life that I had sex, and I wept a lot. The soldier whom I served first was about 30 years old. He came again after that, once in a while, and was always kind to me, telling me to look after myself, and not to forget to use condoms. He even gave me a ring, which I wore during my time as a comfort woman but which, when I was returning home, I threw into the sea thinking it useless. High-ranking officers hardly ever came; our soldiers were mostly low-grade privates. About 25 came each day, and many more from 9.00 in the morning onwards on Saturdays and Sundays. We waited in the ground floor hall. When soldiers came in, they would choose a girl and go into her cubicle.

We had a box in which to store belongings, and a small cement space for our shoes. My room was on the first floor, and it was about one *p'yōng*, 3.2 square metres in size. It had straw mats on the wooden floor, laid so badly that the floor creaked whenever I stepped on it. We spread mats and blankets out. We were given four blankets each, two to lie on and two to cover ourselves with. On the door was my name and photograph. Cotton curtains hung at the door which were let down when soldiers came. We were not paid, but soldiers gave us pocket-money once in a while. I owed nobody anything, but those who drank became indebted to *Obasang*. The military police often looked around the comfort station and talked with her. She kept a sword and pistol in her room, and later she would sometimes wear a military cap. If the women didn't listen to her commands, she beat them severely. I was beaten on my abdomen and bottom. If the bedding was dirty or if I refused to serve men, *Obasang* threw my stuff outside.

Among the soldiers, some carried a flask of alcohol at their side. They would get drunk and become violent. Not long after I arrived I was stabbed on the thigh by one. This happened after I tried to refuse him when he went for me several times. I screamed when I was stabbed and the other women and soldiers in the station rushed to my room in surprise. I had to continue to serve the soldiers, even while I was receiving

treatment from the military hospital. When this wound had nearly healed, another soldier pushed me backwards for not welcoming him. My hip was hurt, and my thigh began to swell because of the impact. It became so swollen and painful that I had to have an operation. I stayed in hospital for about a week, but was then discharged to rest at the comfort station because of a shortage of beds. The hospital was very small. It only had two military surgeons and three or four beds. After my discharge, I went back to the hospital by rickshaw for treatment. For some time there was a notice on my door that said I could not serve men. While in bed, because I was not serving men, I was given no warm rice, only cold rice with pickled radish.

We took our meals together downstairs. There were long wooden tables and benches in the dining room. Rice and pickled radish were the usual fare. When we served more men than usual, *Obasang* would treat us with a small portion of pork boiled in soy sauce given by the unit. There was no heating at all. When it was very cold, we could have hot water tins, but only those who had been obedient to *Obasang* and had served many soldiers were allowed them. The slightly larger rooms were divided into two by a curtain down the middle. There were about 20 Korean girls in the house, and Chinese women did the cleaning, cooking, washing up, nursing and laundry. We wore yellow underwear and navy long-sleeved dresses. These were issued to us. We also got baggy navy trousers. Later, we were given kimonos and *haoris*. We hung the clothes on the walls. Our hair was always bobbed, and *Obasang* cut it. We went weekly to the military hospital to have check-ups for venereal infection. *Obasang* delivered a box of condoms and cotton wool for sanitary purposes to each of us in the morning. Even during menstruation we had to wash ourselves with an antiseptic solution, insert cotton wool and continue to serve men.

After three years we went to Singapore with our proprietor. We weren't given any notice. Suddenly, one night, *Obasang* distributed cotton sacks and told us to pack our things. Some girls remained, but some volunteered in the hope of seeing Singapore. We heard new girls would be sent to replace us. I kept quiet, saying nothing, but the proprietor told me to go. The soldiers also seemed to be moving on, and we actually went with them. We took a truck, a military train, then a ship. In the truck, there were two soldiers. It was covered, so we could not look out. We were transferred to the big ship by a small boat. There were three or four ships, and all held women in a similar predicament to us. As the ships began to sail in convoy, we waved our handkerchiefs to the girls in the other vessels. We wept, wondering how we would live so far away. We understood that one ship was going to an unknown island and the

others to different places. In the main, Japanese soldiers occupied our ship, and Chinese men carried their luggage. We weren't allowed to leave our cabins, and we only managed to look at the sea through a small porthole. We ate in a small dining room and were given cooked rice, pickled apricots and pickled radish. When we were eating, no one else was allowed in the room. The cabin floors were covered with soft *tatami* mats, and the nights weren't cold. I don't remember how long we sailed for. When we disembarked, we used small boats again.

In contrast to the comfort station in China, which had been secluded and had hardly any trucks passing nearby, Singapore was a city hectic with the buzz of heavy traffic. The comfort station was a single-storey long wooden building surrounded by a wooden fence. It seemed to have been purpose-built. Another comfort station could be seen beyond the fence, but I never visited it. Our station had about 30 cubicles. There was an electric fan in the ceiling above every two cubicles. All the women were Korean, and our *Obasang* again managed the place. There was a pregnant woman amongst us, and a girl from Chŏlla province gave birth to a daughter. There was one who had come along believing she was going to an island, and another who had previously worked on another island. We could overhear *Obasang* and the proprietors talking between themselves as they went in and out of the house. They would say 'These girls are obedient', 'girls in such and such a place wouldn't listen to us', and 'it is easy to work the girls from Kyŏngsang provinces'. If a woman drank, *Obasang* reported her to the soldiers, and a soldier would come and give her a mighty beating.

We got up in the morning, cleaned our rooms, washed and had breakfast. Then the soldiers began to come. There were chairs lined up outside the building where we sat, waiting. The soldiers chose whoever they liked and went to the cubicles. There were more women than there had been in China, so we each needed to serve fewer men. We sometimes tried to be clever and serve even fewer. The soldiers would drop into *Obasang's* room before they came into a girl's cubicle. I don't know if they paid her any money. I don't remember being paid except for occasional pocket-money. Although I had left home specifically to earn money, I had never thought I would end up in this kind of place. In the evenings, high-ranking officers came to stay the night, leaving at dawn. If they came to have a drink, they were given a nice big room. Among the soldiers, there were some who taught us to read *hiragana* and *katakana*, the Japanese writing systems.

It was very hot in Singapore, and there was a downpour every day. Outside the back door of our station, there was a place where we could take baths, and we threw cold water over ourselves once a day because of

the heat. Amongst the shower cubicles, one was curtained so that we could wash our genitals. We were given condoms in boxes, as we had been in China, and we had check-ups once a week for venereal disease. Often, *Obasang* did the check-ups herself at the station, but sometimes a soldier came to give us injections in her room. If we became seriously ill, we would be taken to the military hospital for treatment. Our meals consisted of cooked rice and pickled radish. All the time I was a comfort woman, I never ate anything spicy, so I still cannot take hot food. There were many fruit trees and gum trees around the comfort station, and we ate a lot of red fruit which looked like plums, and something similar to pumpkin.

Japan and Home

Fujiwara, actually a Korean from Kwangju in Chōlla province, was one of my regulars. He was a carpenter and a civilian employee working in Singapore. I earnestly appealed to him, saying I wanted to go home, even if I died in the process. He agreed to help. Some women had already left the station to return, but it was said that ships bound for Korea were often bombed so many died on their way. Even so, I desperately wanted to go home. After a while, he asked me and some of the girls to meet a high-ranking soldier. He seemed to know senior officers quite well, I suppose because of his carpentry work. Six of us slipped quietly out of the comfort station, asking the others to tell *Obasang* we had gone for a walk into the gum tree forest if she came to look for us.

We reached the barracks, and Fujiwara said something to the guard. We were allowed in. We entered and met the officer. He asked us how long we had been there, and we told him six years. We said we wanted to go home to Korea. He told us that a hospital ship was short of nurses and asked if we would look after patients on our way, and enquired whether we would be any good at it. We replied in the affirmative. He told us that it was a Red Cross ship and would leave for Japan in a fortnight, and that we should board it. In this way, the six of us were able to leave Singapore. It was winter 1944. An army official came to the comfort station and told *Obasang* to let us go. She didn't like it, and muttered and moaned. But new Korean women arrived to replace us before we left.

Among my regulars, there had been a Japanese soldier called Haname. He proposed to me before I left Singapore, but I turned him down because I wanted to get back to Korea. One day, he said he would buy me whatever I most wanted and took me by car into the city. I chose a handbag. On the day we were to depart, Haname bade me farewell. He gave me an armful of bananas, but what with seasickness and having to look after patients, I wasn't able to eat them.

I still remember Sadako, Itsimaru, Masako and Fujiko, four of those who left with me. Yosiko, Midori and Eiko had already left, but I had been told that they died in air-raids while at sea. On board the hospital ship, the patients slept on the main deck and the nurses on the lower deck. There were only a few qualified nurses, and numbers were made up with the many helpers like ourselves. The patients smelt and suffered from many different types of wound. Some had lost eyes, some arms, some legs and some their hips. Some grasped photographs of their families in their hands, saying they would remain with them until they died. Our job was to look after these patients. We took a bowl of rice gruel and one pickled apricot to each, and we spoon-fed those who could not eat because their lips had been damaged. For the first few days, I couldn't eat properly because of the strong smell of the patients and their dreadful wounds. The air on the ship was very bad, so the nursing staff were allowed up on deck to get fresh air. I noticed many Red Cross flags, but American planes still flew near our ship, and some torpedoes menacingly approached us. On some days, the air-raid sirens went off several times in an evening. We put on baggy trousers and red socks and held a float in our hands. There were many small boats tied around the ship, and we were told to lower them and jump in if the bombing got too serious.

We arrived at Ōshima, Japan, after 20 days. As soon as we came ashore in a small bay, we had to rush into a shelter because of enemy bombing. The shelter was packed. When the air-raid siren stopped, we told the people who we had joined that we had been looking after patients on a hospital ship and asked where we could spend the night. They led us to the town guest-house. I remember an earthquake that occurred while we were sleeping on the first floor. We thought it was another air raid, but the proprietor came up to tell us what was happening. The next day, we asked how to get to Korea. We were told that Shimonoseki was not far and that from there we could take a ship to Pusan. We were told where to board a train. We had received certificates with the seal of the high-ranking officer when we left Singapore, so were able to travel free if we showed them. In this way, we got back to Kyōngju. From there I went to Talsan district in Yōngdōk county, where my parents were living. I couldn't tell them that I had been a comfort woman.

About six months after my return, Korea was liberated. I worked in a restaurant in P'ohang run by a childhood friend. But the venture was unsuccessful, so I worked with my friend in the canteens of various banks for about six years. We rented a room together. During those years, Sadako and Masako often visited me, but then Masako died following an operation. She had been one year older than myself, and had she still lived, she would have registered at the Korean Council with me. Some

of those who were comfort women with me still live in Kyōngju, but it seems they have not registered. I don't know where Sadako is now, nor how she makes a living.

After leaving the canteens, I sold fabrics back in P'ohang. I carried them on my head to market. Then I decided to return home to live with my mother, who was by then farming. I reported a divorce from Mr Pak in 1960, thereby putting my registration documents in order. When I was 42, through a matchmaker, I became the second wife of an elderly man who already had three sons and two daughters. But I didn't move in with him, and for the next 15 years I stayed with my mother in a village where my sister also lived. I kept a small general store. After my mother died, only then, I moved into my husband's home. But we don't get on well together, so I live mostly at my brother's house.

My brother and sisters encouraged me to register as a former comfort woman, but I felt so ashamed. In this society, people still talk behind our backs. I would feel humiliated, even if I was to receive compensation. But then, I would feel mistreated if I didn't get any compensation. Whenever I think of those years, my heart pounds and my whole body is racked with pain. I live now only with the help of my brother and sisters. My wish is to live the rest of my life on my own in comfort. My greatest regret is that I was not able to have children. This was the result of my life as a comfort woman.

Death and Life Crises

Kim T'aesŏn

Kim T'aesŏn was born in 1926, in Kangjin, South Chŏlla province. After her parents divorced she was brought up by her uncle. Her father was an opium addict and quickly disappeared from family life, and a few years later Kim's mother died. When she was 18, two men visited her uncle and promised Kim work in a Japanese factory. Trusting their word, she left home, passed through Pusan Refugee Camp, Osaka and Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City) and finally ended up at a comfort station in Burma.

I was born on 20 February 1926, in Hangmyŏng village, Kangjin county, South Chŏlla province. I was the youngest of three daughters. My father helped on a farm owned by his elder brother. Whenever his legs ached from neuralgia, he took opium. My mother tried to stop him, believing drugs were bad for his health, but he beat her severely if she said anything. She found it impossible to live with him and eventually left home for Kwangju, the provincial capital. My father sold our house and promptly disappeared. I followed my mother to Kwangju and attended Pokchŏng Elementary School for four years. My eldest sister was already married, and my second sister lived with an aunt in Haenam, a town further south. When I was twelve, my parents formally divorced. I went to live with an uncle, another of my father's brothers. He ran a business in Kwangju but, unable to make a good enough living, moved back to Kangjin. I went with him and his family. My mother died a few years after the divorce became final, but by that time nobody knew where my father was or even if he was still alive. My uncle consequently took over all responsibility for me. He tried to find me a husband, and I had to meet several young men he arranged for me to see. He couldn't find a suitable young man, so I continued to live with his family.

It was some time early in September 1944. I was 18. My uncle had told me of a rumour about men taking girls away and one day, when I returned home from outside, he told me to hide myself immediately. I went to the attic, and continued going up there every morning after

breakfast until 2.00 or 3.00 p.m. for about a week. One day, when I was still hiding during the morning, I became so hungry that I came down and had lunch with my uncle and his family. A Japanese man in his thirties, dressed in civilian clothes, and a Korean man in his forties and wearing a Western suit, kicked our brushwood gate open and entered. Both spoke good Japanese, and at the time we thought they both were native Japanese. The Korean was really called Mr Ch'oe but went by a Japanese name, Iwaoka. Later, I asked him if he was Japanese, and he shook his head.

Ch'oe urged me to quickly finish lunch. It was September, and we had left the door open, so I could see from the room the two men sitting at the end of the hall. As soon as I had finished, he asked 'Wouldn't you like to earn money in Japan? Come with us and work in a factory for a year where you will earn lots of money.' They grabbed me by both arms and marched me out. We walked for about 30 minutes to the bus station. We took a bus for Kwangju, where they led me to a house which looked like a guest-house but had no signboard. There were four girls there already from Naju, Posŏng and Yŏsu. As we were all from the Chŏlla countryside we soon became friends. We stayed the night, and the next day walked to Kwangju railway station. We took a freight compartment with Ch'oe and the Japanese man and travelled north to Seoul. There we took another train in a further freight carriage and went to Inch'ŏn. There were civilians and soldiers on the trains. In Inch'ŏn, the port to the west of Seoul, we were taken to a place which looked like a hostel. There were two or three rooms, and in one about 20 women waited. Some were young and unmarried while others had already had children. Some came from Kyŏnggi province in central Korea and the Kyŏngsang provinces in the south-east, but the largest number came from Chŏlla.

In Inch'ŏn, I took the Japanese name Mizuko. This name reflected Kwangju, the place where I had come from. I had adopted a Japanese surname, Kanetani, in Kangjin. Even here, the two men told us that we were going to factories in Japan. They said there were many factories and that we would work as factory hands. We were given clothes: two pairs of dark baggy trousers, two blouses and two sets of underwear. The blouses were of many different colours, but I asked for white ones because it was my favourite colour. When I had been taken from my uncle's home I had been wearing dark baggy trousers and a long-sleeved blouse. All the others seemed to be wearing *geta*. We stayed a week at this house, during which time we were subjected to medical check-ups. Two doctors, one Japanese and one Korean, examined us with a stethoscope. They looked down our throats and a few of us were diagnosed as having

lung problems. We didn't have gynaecological examinations. I was healthy, 160 cm tall and weighed 55 kg.

We boarded small ships, 20 to each, and sailed around the coast to Pusan. We arrived on or about 20 September and were led to a camp that housed many women. It was a large prefabricated building which looked like a warehouse, and it was sited some distance from the pier. There we were each given a ball of cooked rice. We asked once again where we were going, and were told simply that the factories were in Japan. The factories in Pusan, we were informed, couldn't employ many more people. We were watched by a Korean man, not a Japanese. He kept a close eye on us, and even followed us when we went to the toilet. He wore a Japanese military uniform, and talked with Japanese soldiers in their own tongue. I think we stayed about a week. Around the end of September, we boarded trucks and were taken to the pier, where we embarked on a ship. About 40 of us were to be sent to Osaka, and about 20 to Shimonoseki.

I was in the group sent to Osaka. There, we were housed in a relocation camp, alongside a Japanese military base. Besides the 40 of us, there were about 50 more Korean women who had arrived earlier. We stayed in this place for two weeks, and still had not seen any factories. Ch'oe said we would have to go on to another place. We responded that we had come as far as Osaka for the factories, and asked why he was proposing to take us elsewhere. And we asked how much longer we would have to wait before we got our jobs. He said a ship would come within a week, but in actual fact we waited about a fortnight. After the beginning, no, in the middle of October 1944, about 100 of us boarded a large boat with five decks called the *Arabiya Maru*, with its name stencilled in Japanese script. We women occupied the first, second and third decks. I cannot remember whether I was on the second or the third. As we sailed south, about 60 women were taken off at Okinawa. The ship sailed only at night because of the danger of daylight bombing raids. There were soldiers on board.

We travelled as far as Saigon. I think it must have been around the end of October. When we arrived, there were already other women there, so the total number rose to 100 again. It was here we learned for the first time that we were going to comfort stations. We were watched even more tightly. Guards followed us to the toilets, our meals were brought to us. Even when we were asleep, they kept up their surveillance.

We were divided into three groups, and my group of 20 were sent to Burma. I don't know where the others went. The Japanese man and Ch'oe, the two who had brought me all the way from Kangjin, came

with us. We arrived at Rangoon either at the beginning or towards the middle of November. It was very hot. When we disembarked, a truck was already waiting, and there were Japanese soldiers on it. We travelled north along a road clinging to the mountainside for two or three hours, and arrived at a house with a signboard saying it was a comfort station. It was dusk. The station was situated on a wild mountainside. We could hear the soldiers moving about in the nearby army unit. We could even hear bombs falling. The unit sent enough cooked rice for 20 of us: it could not have been far from the comfort station. Two Burmese women cooked for us in a kitchen.

The station comprised two long buildings separated by a road. There were ten rooms in each building, giving 20 in total. It was new and had no gates or fences, so people could walk in and out freely. There was one dining room and two bathrooms. Each room was the size of one *tatami* mat, and the walls and floor were built from wooden boards. Each room had two blankets. Of the 20, I was put in room number 3, which was not far from the office, perhaps 7 or 8 m away. Each room had its number, and under my '3' was written my name, Mizuko. The entrance to each room was closed by a curtain. All we had with us was a small bundle of belongings. There were thousands of mosquitoes, which tortured us day and night. We were watched closely, and couldn't run away.

We had to begin working the very next day, and this was the first time I had had sex with a man. The first client was a soldier about 25 years old with an Osaka accent. When he came into my room, he said he was glad to see me and shook my hand. He told me he had to rush because there were so many men waiting, and he just opened his fly and finished what he had come to do in no time. Because this was all so sudden and I had to serve so many men from then on, my abdomen hurt and I began to bleed. I couldn't lift my legs up because my body hurt so much. Ch'oe said 'You won't become pregnant or get an infection so long as you use condoms. Just tolerate the pain for a little while, and soon you will be all right.' The young soldiers were very excited and ejaculated in a very short time. I think that was the reason why we were able to serve so many men and yet survive. Nonetheless, it was sheer agony for a week or so. We had breakfast around 7.00 and started to serve soldiers from 9.00. We had to serve the lower ranks until 3.00 p.m., then non-commissioned officers from 3.00 p.m. to 7.00 p.m., and officers until 10.00 p.m. Some officers stayed overnight, leaving at about 6.30 the following morning. We were given three meals a day, usually a ball of rice cooked in salty water which was so meagre it could almost be blown away, pickled radish and soya bean soup. When it was very hot, we were allowed a bath, using water from a pump which had been installed outdoors.

The soldiers waited outside the huts in orderly lines. When they came in, they would keep their shoes on and just pull their trousers down. They wanted to save time. I, too, just pulled my underwear down. On busy days, I had to serve 20 of the lower ranks, five or six non-commissioned officers and three or four officers. The smallest number I ever had was about ten regulars during a day. The soldiers' Osaka accents were very noisy, and sounded rather like a Korean Kyōngsang accent. They were unkind to us, probably because they were staring death in the face, and some kicked us as if we were little more than animals. There were, however, some officers who tried to comfort us. Some just sat and talked then left without doing what they had supposedly come for in the first place. After about a month, I became somewhat used to this life. Some soldiers would return and visit me again, and I would then help them take off their shoes or clothes, or put on condoms. This made them come more quickly. Sometimes, the kinder officers and non-commissioned officers brought large strawberries or grapefruit carefully wrapped in paper.

When we were ill, we received some treatment. I suffered for about a week, and was given ointment for my soreness and allowed to rest. Although illness and so forth meant that some rooms were gradually vacated, no new women arrived. The Japanese man who had brought me all the way from Kangjin took tickets off the soldiers at the entrance to the station, and Ch'oe told them which room to go to. When officers and non-commissioned officers came asking for me, Ch'oe would lead them to my room after making sure I was alone. It was Ch'oe who kept a record of the number of soldiers we served. I kept my own record, dividing it into the number of privates, non-commissioned officers and officers served each day, and would show this to Ch'oe. We didn't receive any money from the soldiers. The station was on a mountainside, and if we had got money, we would have had nowhere to spend it because there was nothing to buy.

Condoms were distributed to us and we used them on soldiers who didn't bring their own. But there were never enough to go around. So, we collected used condoms in a jar and washed them with soap in a nearby stream whenever we had time. We would dry them in the sun, then spray them with a white antiseptic powder to use again. This was the worst of the jobs we had to do, and I hated it the most. I saw one soldier wash his penis with a blue antiseptic fluid after his condom burst. Even when we were menstruating, the soldiers didn't pay any attention and just kept going at it, as if they were oblivious because they had condoms on. The Japanese man and Ch'oe, the two men who controlled us, shared a room. They didn't sleep with any of us. I worked for about a month from the middle of November 1944.

After 10 December, Allied bomb attacks became more frequent. The army told us to get ready to leave, since they would be moving in about ten days time. Three days before the predetermined move, we were having our supper when an officer from the unit visited the station. He confirmed that we would be leaving, and when we asked him where we were going he responded that we just had to follow the troops. Ch'oe suggested it might be better if we ran away. He told me in confidence that I and my two best friends, Haruko from Kyōngsang and Kimiko from Chōlla, should be the last to board the truck on the day of the move. On the allotted day, the comfort station was completely demolished. A truck drove up and we hurriedly packed our clothes and boarded it. I waited with my two friends until the others had leaped aboard. Countless trucks seemed to be rushing here and there and, while we hesitated, all of the others drove off. We were left alone, Kimiko, Haruko, Ch'oe and I. We sat down and discussed what we should do. All through the night we walked and came to the conclusion that, since the troops had moved to the front line, we would die if we followed them. We began to feel that whether we died from bombing at the front line or from being shot while trying to escape, we would soon perish anyway. So we determined to run away as far as we could get without being caught. We had also realized that if we didn't hurry we would all die where we were crouched.

We began walking south. The bomb attacks were too serious during daylight, so we walked only at night. During the day, we found whatever shelter we could. At one point, we walked into a Burmese village to ask for help. We managed to find some rice and fruit. Ch'oe had money he had received as his wages, and he exchanged this for red-coloured Burmese currency. Being able to use local money certainly helped us as we walked along. After about ten days, we came to a large river. The year of liberation, 1945, began some time then. It was New Year, but we still hadn't reached Rangoon. We attempted to cross the river on a small boat, but it capsized. There were about 20 of us on it and we all fell into the water; people threw ropes to us from the bank. Ch'oe managed to get to the bank and threw us a rope. He called out to reassure us that the river wasn't deep and that we would survive so long as we kept hold of the rope. But Kimiko was weak. She couldn't catch hold and drowned. I held tightly until, in the end, Ch'oe and a Burmese man pulled me to the bank. We had to cross many rivers, both big and small, after we left the comfort station.

There were three of us left: Ch'oe, Haruko and me. Then, cholera reared its ugly head. We knew that the disease could kill us, but we had no medicine. We were determined to survive, but Haruko died. The

bomb attacks ceased in May 1945. Ch'oe and I walked into Rangoon. We had wandered around the front line for six months.

British and Indian soldiers were in Rangoon. Ch'oe and I went to the British camp. A Korean-born British soldier interpreted for us. We told them how we had run away from a comfort station. They didn't ask anything about our personal background. So far as I know, I am the only surviving woman from the station. I was already infected with cholera, but the British gave me antibiotics which helped me recover. The camp was clean and had nice rooms. I think we stayed for about a month. Then we took a train to Bangkok. In the autumn, Ch'oe and I boarded a large ship off Bangkok and sailed back to Pusan. On board were Korean and American soldiers and about 20 women who like me had served as comfort women. Two held tiny babies. We had medicals on board, and we were all disinfected. We disembarked after a week and were taken to a refugee camp where we received a further check-up because of the prevalence of cholera. It was breezy and cold when we arrived back in Korea.

Ch'oe originally came from Seoul. Although he was the one who took me to the comfort station in the first place, I don't think he had any choice at the time about it.

I went to Inch'ŏn from Pusan and worked in a restaurant for about three years. My employer introduced me to a man in 1948, when I was 22. I lived with him quite happily. We had two girls, and it was only when I went to register their birth on the family registration that I learnt my husband already had a wife. So my daughters were registered under his first wife's name, and so far as my family registration is concerned, I am still unmarried. Both daughters graduated from high school. My husband died of stomach cancer, and I have worked and lived with a family as their domestic help for the past 20 years. I have been going to church for a decade. I now blame my past on my ancestors. What happened occurred because my country was poor. I sometimes wonder if I would have become a comfort woman had I been married at the time my uncle tried to hide me. I think it was my misfortune to have been born when and where I was. My daughters know nothing of my past. I don't think it is necessary to tell them.

I pray to God every day, but I will never forget those months. I feel relieved, now, as I pour out the story of my past. I am now receiving medical treatment because I have trouble with my colon.