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COMFORT WOMEN AND  
SEXUAL SLAVERY  
DURING THE CHINA  
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# The Japanese Comfort Women and Sexual Slavery during the China and Pacific Wars

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Caroline Norma

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*Dedicated to the South Korean prostitution survivors group Moongchi,  
in solidarity and admiration.*





# Contents

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Acknowledgements   | x  |
| Introduction: The First Victims  | 1  |
| Structure of the discussion  | 7  |
| Underpinnings of the discussion  | 9  |
| Abolitionist terms of the discussion   | 12 |
| What was the comfort station system of military sexual slavery?                      | 19 |
| Why focus on prostituted victims of military sexual slavery?                         | 22 |
| Contemporary comfort women   | 24 |
| 1 Scapegoat Survivors: Japanese Comfort Women and the Contemporary Justice Movement  | 27 |
| Scapegoating as a methodological framework   | 30 |
| The abolitionist history of the ‘justice for comfort women’ movement                 | 32 |
| Prostituted victims in the rhetoric of right-wing defenders of the Japanese military | 37 |
| Progressive scapegoating of prostituted victims of the wartime system                | 40 |
| ‘Sex worker rights’ discourse in Japan in the 1990s                                  | 44 |
| Myths about Japanese comfort station survivors                                       | 47 |
| Radical historical critique  | 51 |
| 2 The Taisho Democratization of Prostitution   | 55 |
| The Japanese ‘New Woman’   | 57 |
| The dark valley of prostitution  | 59 |
| Ideological resistance to a prostitution ‘dark valley’                               | 62 |
| The sex industry boom of the Taisho era  | 64 |
| Trafficking: The sex industry supply chain of the Taisho era                         | 66 |
| The prostitution of girls  | 69 |
| Geisha sector prostitution   | 71 |
| Women’s experience of brothels in the Taisho era                                     | 73 |

|   |  |     |
|---|--|-----|
|   | Accounts of Taisho-era civilian sexual slavery   | 74  |
|   | Conclusion   | 77  |
| 3 | The 1930s Militarization of Civilian Prostitution  | 79  |
|   | Military co-optation of Japan's civilian economy and society   | 81  |
|   | Civilian prostitution and the shaping of male sexuality  | 83  |
|   | Behavioural antecedents of military sexual slavery   | 84  |
|   | Pornography consumption among military men   | 88  |
|   | Civilian sex industry response to military demand  | 90  |
|   | Total war mobilization and Japan's civilian sex industry   | 95  |
|   | Conclusion   | 98  |
| 4 | The Military Democratization of Prostitution   | 101 |
|   | The pre-war trafficking of prostituted women out of Japan  | 105 |
|   | The deployment of men out of Japan   | 110 |
|   | The military democratization of prostitution   | 112 |
|   | Military export of prostitution demand   | 115 |
|   | Democratized access to prostitution  | 117 |
|   | Democratized prostitution rights and the 'catharsis effect'  | 120 |
|   | Intra-military transmission of a 'prostitution sexuality'  | 124 |
|   | Conclusion   | 129 |
| 5 | Japan's Imperial Sex Industries and the Trafficking of Colonial<br>Prostituted Women into Comfort Stations | 131 |
|   | Women who are forced and women who choose  | 134 |
|   | Japanese development of Korea's colonial sex industry  | 137 |
|   | The pre-war trafficking of Korean women out of the colonial sex<br>industry                                | 142 |
|   | Japanese development of Taiwan's colonial sex industry   | 148 |
|   | Conclusion   | 152 |
| 6 | Okinawan Prostituted Women and Comfort Stations at War's End   | 155 |
|   | Condemning military sexual slavery for its lack of prostituted<br>victims                                  | 157 |
|   | Prostituted victims till the very end  | 159 |
|   | Japanese prostituted women on Okinawa  | 165 |
|   | Conclusion   | 165 |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Conclusion: Sexual Slavery and the Crucible of Contemporary Japan | 167 |
| The Taisho era rebooted?  | 168 |
| Scapegoated victims of military sexual slavery                    | 174 |
| Military reductionism   | 177 |
| A historical view of civilian sexual slavery                      | 180 |
| Notes   | 187 |
| Bibliography  | 222 |
| Index   | 238 |

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# Introduction: The First Victims

Whether we were ‘comfort women’ or ‘sexual service providers’, when, now, I look back forty years and think about how many of us died in huge numbers in the most inhuman of circumstances, I’m just overwhelmed by its stupidity (Japanese comfort station survivor, Shirota Suzuko, speaking in 1986).<sup>1</sup>

Serial penetration by many men is not a mild form of torture. Just the tears at the vaginal opening feel like fire applied to a cut. Your genitals swell and bruise. Damage to the womb and other internal organs can also be tremendous ... [B]eing used as a public dumping ground by those men left me with deep shame that I still feel in the pit of my stomach – it’s like a hard, heavy, sick feeling that never entirely goes away. They saw not just my completely helpless, naked body, but they heard me beg, and cry. They reduced me to something low and disgusting that suffered miserably in front of them ... Even years later, it has taken tremendous courage for me to put these words on the page, so deep is the cultural shame ... (US military prostitution survivor, Suki Falconberg, writing in 2006).<sup>2</sup>

The sexual slavery system of the Japanese military during the China and Pacific wars (1937–1945) interned tens of thousands of women of different nationalities, with Korean women the most widely known victims. Less well known is the trafficking of Japanese women into military brothels or ‘comfort’ stations throughout the two wars. This book describes the history of Japanese women enslaved in military brothels in Japan, Okinawa, Japan’s colonies and occupied territories, and overseas battlegrounds. They were the first victims of the ‘comfort women’ system of sexual slavery operated by the Japanese military with support from the Japanese bureaucracy, but have been mostly sidelined in research and activism taking place since 1990. As the book shows, Japanese women were trafficked into comfort stations throughout the China and Pacific wars, and while the full picture of their historical experience has not been captured in English before now, it tells us a great deal about the military sexual slavery system and its origins and causes.

Information on Japanese victims of military sexual slavery has been in the Japanese-language media since the 1970s, but only one woman of Japanese

nationality is widely recognized as a comfort station survivor. Her biography was published in 1971 under the pseudonym 'Shirota Suzuko' and she became publicly active as a survivor under her own name in the 1980s. She recounted her experience to newspaper reporters, went on radio, and raised money to build a modest memorial shrine in Japan to victims of the military system. The shrine remains today in Chiba prefecture near the women's shelter where Shirota lived from 1965 with other survivors of prostitution. Before her death in 1993, she was quoted in a newspaper expressing happiness that South Korean survivors of the military sexual slavery system had spoken out publicly.

Shirota's feelings of solidarity with survivors of military sexual slavery from other countries are well justified on the basis of her own experience of the system. As a teenager, she was trafficked into comfort stations on Taiwan and Truk during the war years for sexual use by both Japanese military officers and rank-and-file troops. She lived in the comfort stations with women from Korea, as well as with women trafficked from civilian sex industries on Japan and Okinawa. Her biography records that she was approached by brokers to travel to Taiwan while in a civilian brothel in Tokyo, and accepted the offer in order to escape crushing debt. She had been sold into a geisha venue by her father at age 17, and he took out further loans against her subsequent trafficking into a brothel, and then again when she was trafficked into a naval comfort station on colonial Taiwan. Shirota and the seven other Japanese women trafficked with her were all 'sex industry women',<sup>3</sup> and they ended up on a Taiwanese island hosting twenty naval comfort stations that were managed by Japanese operators. Shirota's station alone interned fifteen women. Their movement outside the venues was heavily restricted, and they were subjected to regular venereal disease examinations, for which station managers bribed military medical staff to let them pass.<sup>4</sup> Shirota recalls that weekends in the brothel were terrifying: soldiers would line up in droves and 'jostle' to get their turn, which meant the women were used by up to fifteen men each day on Saturdays and Sundays. For Shirota, this was like living a nightmare in which she had to 'fend off wild beasts coming at me one after the next'.<sup>5</sup>

While the experience of Japanese survivors of military sexual slavery might be different from that of women of other nationalities for the fact they were more often trafficked into comfort stations directly from civilian brothels, this book highlights the fundamental similarity of their experience. This common experience was primarily of prostitution and other forms of sexual violence in



the stations, but extends to other aspects: for example, Shiota's life after military sexual slavery had much in common with that of other survivors. She continued to be prostituted after the war in civilian venues, specifically by American occupying soldiers in Japan. Reflecting on this experience, Shiota said, 'at any rate, I felt I existed to be used by men for profit and for fun, that's a woman's lot, I just felt like my body was a throwaway object'.<sup>6</sup> Like most other survivors of the military system, Shiota was left with little money, psychological trauma and in poor physical health after her experience of the comfort stations (and in civilian prostitution before this from the age of 17), and this left her vulnerable after the war to trafficking into 'camptown' prostitution (i.e. prostitution by military men in peacetime).<sup>7</sup> Katharine Moon notes in her 1997 discussion of postwar Korean camptown prostitution that 'former comfort women ... worked as GI prostitutes [and were] among the first generation of kijich'on [camptown] sex workers',<sup>8</sup> and this fate was common for Japanese survivors as well. Regardless of the pathway that led women into the wartime comfort stations – whether it was manipulation, abduction, or trafficking out of civilian brothels – their health, welfare and life-course outcomes, irrespective of nationality, were depressingly the same. At least two Japanese survivors are known to have committed suicide after returning home.

A number of Japanese women are described in media articles and books as survivors of the military system, but these women do not necessarily self-identify as survivors, their experiences have not always been well documented, their identities have sometimes been unknown, and they have rarely spoken in public using their own names. Nonetheless, Japanese women are referred to repeatedly in the survivor testimony of women of other nationalities, especially Koreans.<sup>9</sup> There has been no estimate made of the number of Japanese women prostituted through the military system, but the broad consensus is they were a minority of victims. Qiu Peipei writes that,

[b]ased on the evidence gathered by Chinese researchers since the 1990s ... from 1937 to 1945, the comfort women replacement rate was much higher than previously thought, approximately 3.5 to 4., which brings the estimated total number of comfort women up to either (1) more than 360,000 ( $3,000,000 \text{ Japanese soldiers} / 29 \times 3.5 = 362,068 \text{ women}$ ) or (2) more than 400,000 ( $3,000,000 \text{ Japanese soldiers} / 29 \times 4.0 = 413,793 \text{ women}$ ). In terms of nationalities ... about 140,000 to 160,000 of the total number of comfort women were Korean and ... 20,000 were Japanese, with several thousand being from Taiwan and Southeast Asia and several hundred coming from European countries. The rest were Chinese women who numbered about 200,000.<sup>10</sup>

While this book does not necessarily seek to challenge such numerical estimations, it does urge reconsideration of the longstanding view that Japanese women were infrequent victims of the system. Their early trafficking into comfort stations out of civilian sex industries in Japan, Korea and Taiwan; their widespread prostitution and trafficking on the Chinese mainland and elsewhere as '*karayuki*' before the military system began operating; and their on-going trafficking into military stations throughout the years of war, including on Okinawa, is likely to mean their numbers were not insignificant. Japanese women were found in stations all over Asia and the Pacific, including as far out as Burma and Rabaul, throughout the years of war, including in the final months in large numbers on Okinawa. They were also prostituted, together with Korean women, through stations created on Japanese soil during the war years, and particularly after 1944 when a domestic network of 'comfort facilities' (*ian shisetsu*) were set up under a policy of the Home Ministry, as is described in Chapter Three.

The experiences of Japanese survivors, including those of Shirota Suzuko, are described throughout this book, and particularly their histories of civilian prostitution (in Japan, colonial Korea and Taiwan, and Okinawa) before being trafficked into comfort stations. In most of the cases, Japanese survivors were sold into prostitution as girls, and entered comfort stations after being bought out of debt bondage by brokers and traffickers acting for the military, or when civilian brothels were converted into military stations. Many did not survive the ordeal, and those who returned home sometimes faced early death from disease or suicide. A former nurse who worked at a venereal disease sanatorium in Fukuoka and cared for a Japanese returnee from a mainland comfort station at the end of the war recounted to researchers in 2005 her memory of this patient before she died. The woman (whose name is unknown) had been sold into prostitution by her parents, and was in a local brothel when she was approached by a broker to travel to a wartime comfort station in China on the promise her debts would be paid off and she would receive a regular income. As a result of this experience, according to the nurse,

she was physically and mentally scarred, spoke very little, and her mind seemed far away ... she had late-stage syphilis, and the infection had permeated her mucous membranes. Her lips were peeling off and pus was leaking from her skin ... There was no penicillin ... Her hair had already fallen out ...<sup>11</sup>

Nonetheless, the nurse mused, the woman's short stay in the sanatorium before her death had probably been the first and only time in her life she

would have had 'the chance to experience a day lived in peace without imposition from other people, and without being humiliated, beaten, or caused physical pain'.<sup>12</sup>

No Japanese woman has received compensation for these kinds of outcomes of the military system (nor for similar outcomes of civilian prostitution, for that matter); indeed, Japanese survivors were specifically excluded in a financial 'atonement' scheme administered by a Japanese semi-governmental agency in 1995. They are nowhere mentioned in the two reports of the United Nations Special Rapporteurs published in 1996 (Radhika Coomaraswamy) and 1998 (Gay McDougall), and this omission is inexplicable in the case of the Coomaraswamy report, given it acknowledges stations were set up in Japan, and that Japan was the first source country for women trafficked into mainland stations (but it suggests these women had been Koreans living in Japan). Japanese survivors were not represented at the citizens' show trial held in Tokyo in 2000 (which featured participation by sixty survivors) that assessed the historical culpability of the Japanese government and emperor for wartime sexual slavery. Although, it must be noted, this Women's International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan's Military Sexual Slavery did recognize, as Nishino Rumiko recounts, that

Japanese victims of the system were women incorporated into the civilian legalised prostitution system of the time, and who were sold into prostitution by impoverished families from disadvantaged rural areas ... [and] the military had targeted for trafficking into comfort stations these women as the most vulnerable members of Japanese society.<sup>13</sup>

Nonetheless, Japanese women were excluded from a bill presented to the Diet by the Japan Communist Party in the year 2000 to propose measures for resolution of the wartime sexual slavery problem. The bill proposed that victims be recognized without respect to nationality for the payment of compensation funds, but this clause was eventually amended to exclude Japanese women.<sup>14</sup>

Shirota's valiant efforts in building a memorial shrine in Chiba notwithstanding, there are no public monuments or observance rituals honouring Japanese survivors (there are monuments on Tokashiki and Miyakojima islands, but not specifically for Japanese survivors), and only recently have Japanese women been the subject of a historical materials exhibition at the Women's Active Museum on War and Peace in Tokyo. A major aim of this book, therefore, is to examine why Japanese survivors have been overlooked in the 'justice for comfort women' activism and scholarship that has

been continuing in a number of countries since the early 1990s, including in Japan. This aim is addressed in the next chapter.

While most of the book's discussion focuses on Japanese victims of military sexual slavery, this focus is not ultimately determined by nationality. Rather, most Japanese victims of the comfort station system were trafficked from the civilian sex industry – by pimps and brokers operating either in Japan or overseas. It is this prior experience of prostitution before being trafficked into military sexual slavery that guides the focus of the book, and so the experiences of prostituted women of other nationalities are also discussed. While Kinoshita Naoko calls for recognition of non-prostituted Japanese women trafficked into military stations,<sup>15</sup> prostituted victims of military sexual slavery – in other words, women with historical experience of enslavement in both civilian and military forms of prostitution – are prioritized. Reasons for this focus are explained further below.

Having said that, the author is not interested in creating a hierarchy among victims of different forms of prostitution, whether military or civilian. Rather, she follows Yoshimi Yoshiaki's view that

[t]here is no point debating which was the worse system [between the pre-war legalised brothel system or the comfort station system]. This is because, for the women who were victimised in each of the respective systems, their sexual victimisation was so severe as to be unforgivable. Both were extremely severe systems of sexual slavery and sexual violence.<sup>16</sup>

Accordingly, traditional distinctions drawn between prostituted women and non-prostituted women trafficked into comfort stations are deemed irrelevant to the book's discussion. Historical accounts of women prostituted in comfort stations being subsequently singled out for trafficking into other prostitution systems (and vice versa) illustrate the absurdity of attempting to create hierarchies among comfort station survivors. These historical accounts include Hirai Kazuko's observation that thirteen former comfort women were singled out after the war for trafficking into prostitution to serve invading Russian troops in Dandong, China,<sup>17</sup> as well as Yoshimi's research showing that, on the Indonesian island of Ambon Pulau in 1944,

[a] list of women with experience as comfort women, prostitutes, women rumoured to be prostitutes, and women who wanted to be comfort women was drawn up ... The women rounded up were Eurasian (in this case, women of mixed Caucasian and Indonesian ancestry) and Indonesian.<sup>18</sup>

Further, as recalled by Australia-based Dutch survivor of a comfort station Jan Ruff-O'Herne, survivors were subsequently harassed on the basis of their

victimization in comfort stations in exactly the same way civilian prostituted women are denigrated as 'whores':

The women in the other part of Kramat Camp had been ordered not to make contact with us. Somehow, rumours still spread as to why we were being kept in isolation and cruelly, they gave our camp the name 'Hoeren Camp', meaning, 'Camp of Whores'. They thought we had been voluntary workers in brothels for the Japanese. They also believed that because of this we were being given special treatment and food ... At times, the women from the other part of the camp would shout abusive names at us through the fence and throw messages, written on paper and tied to a stone, over the fence. They addressed us as whores and traitors.<sup>19</sup>

The absurdity highlighted in these accounts is that attempts to differentiate between women trafficked into comfort stations on the basis of prior experience of prostitution are ultimately meaningless, because the same distinction that made women in the civilian sex industry vulnerable to trafficking into comfort stations became the distinction subsequently used to victimize comfort station survivors, regardless of whether or not they had originally been prostituted.

## Structure of the discussion

This book engages centrally with these kinds of historical connections and overlaps between the military comfort station system and various forms of civilian prostitution operating before and during the China and Pacific wars in Japan and overseas. Each chapter considers the military system from a different angle, but always with regards to its historical *civilian prostitution* context: for example, the existing prostitution habits of the creators and users of the military system in the 1920s (Chapter Two); civilian sex industry involvement in the development of the military system, and military mobilization of the homeland sex industry in the 1930s (Chapter Three); the trafficking of women out of civilian prostitution into the military system (Chapter Four); the reliance of the military system on colonial sex industries (Chapter Five); and the mobilization of prostituted Okinawan women for military sexual slavery at the end of the war (Chapter Six). This book is the first attempt in either English or Japanese to recognize and problematize specifically *prostituted* victims of the military system, but its discussion builds on research already expertly undertaken on Japanese survivors of military sexual slavery by feminist historians such as Nishino Rumiko, Onozawa Akane, Yamashita Yeong-ae, Kawada Fumiko and Kinoshita

Naoko. Its conceptual framework relies on Katharine Moon's important 1999 discussion about similarities between the 'comfort women' system and post-war *kijich'on* prostitution in South Korea,<sup>20</sup> and also Hayakawa Noriyo and Fujinaga Takeshi's painstaking and prolific work linking the military scheme to civilian prostitution in Japan and its colonies.

The book's research mostly comes from existing historical scholarship on the comfort station system rather than archival or field-based sources. There is certainly urgent need for research on prostituted victims of the system using primary sources, and Yoshimi notes that research on the military system's 'historical place' within the 'overall prostitution system' (*baibaishun shisutemu*) is unfortunately 'still very far away'.<sup>21</sup> No conceptual framework yet exists to make this research a recognizably productive avenue of inquiry, I would add. The doubly victimized population of prostituted comfort station survivors has not just been overlooked in research on the wartime system to date, these women have been actively sidelined in public and academic discourse. The disproportionate targeting of prostituted women for military sexual enslavement relative to other populations of women is a fact mostly not grasped even in feminist scholarship, let alone in work specifically on the comfort station system.

There does exist, though, first-hand recorded accounts of comfort stations and their victims written by soldiers, journalists, and other men connected to the Japanese military in the China and Pacific wars. This book consults a number of anthologies of these accounts compiled by Japanese historians who have sifted through hundreds of published and unpublished items held in the National Diet Library and other venues to excerpt mentions of the military prostitution scheme. Histories of Japan's 1920s pre-war sex industry are also consulted for their inclusion of information relating to the military or to wartime mobilization. These sources include secondary historical accounts, as well as primary survey reports of the sex industry generated by Japanese public servants and police around the time. In addition to these, a compilation of interviews with people connected to a pre-war brothel district in the city of Sapporo published in the early 1980s is comprehensively referenced for its historical snapshot of the civilian prostitution system that preceded the wartime system. Conversely, the research consults secondary historical sources describing the wartime comfort station system for information relating to Japan's civilian sex industry, its operators, or its victims. In other words, historical sources referring to any civilian prostitution context of the wartime military comfort station system, as well as sources revealing military aspects and connections of the civilian prostitution system, are relied upon in the research of this book.

The thesis of the book that wartime military sexual slavery has origins in the institution of civilian prostitution aligns with an emerging cluster of historical literature that observes institutions, practices, and systems of Japanese militarism and imperialism in the twentieth century as having antecedents in aspects of pre-war Japanese society. Among this scholarship is Tessa Morris-Suzuki's account of Tonohira Yoshihiko's grassroots research showing the existence of a prototype forced labour system on Hokkaido (even using Korean forced labourers) that pre-dates the well-known slave labour schemes of the Japanese military in the China and Pacific wars.<sup>22</sup> Mark Driscoll's account of enslaved labour systems operated by Japanese private entrepreneurs in pre-war China similarly includes the suggestion that these systems were built upon in wartime when the Japanese military developed its mainland forced labour schemes.<sup>23</sup> This growing body of scholarship is interesting for the perspective it develops about the nature of the relationship that existed between war and society in Japanese history. In this perspective, also advanced by the current book, institutions important to military endeavour were forged domestically in peacetime and then developed in wartime in Japan's colonies.

## Underpinnings of the discussion

Late feminist theorist Andrea Dworkin wrote at length about attention owed prostituted women in histories of war and mass murder as first-targeted victims of sexual violence and other atrocities, and her writing in this regard is discussed in the next chapter. In brief, she theorized a social function for prostituted women within military victimized populations as 'scapegoats', which is the theoretical insight that drives the approach of this book. She wrote in groundbreaking terms in 2000 that

[p]rostitutes were the first: gassed in Poland, sent to Auschwitz ... Auschwitz 1 to 999 were largely if not entirely prostituted women from Ravensbruck ... Prostitutes were also first in another way [i.e. the first to be deported] ... Well, who could care? These are the women left out of any Jewish reckoning with the Nazis – or any feminist reckoning with prostitution: wherever there is racial or ethnic stigmatization, the women of the stigmatized group who are prostituted are the first to be rounded up, shipped off, and forgotten ... This is how to find prostituted women: look at the bottom of the hierarchy – they will be poor relative to those who use them even when wealth is calculated in pieces of bread.<sup>24</sup>

This book takes Dworkin's advice, now more than a decade old, to centrally examine the experience of prostituted victims of the comfort station system. In turn, it examines the system from the viewpoint of their experience. It suggests in the next chapter that prostituted victims have been scapegoated in research and activism on the issue since the early 1990s. In Dworkin's terms, feminists have largely failed to 'reckon with prostitution' in their pursuit of justice for comfort station survivors, in spite of the fact these survivors include prostituted women, and all survivors, regardless of the path that led them into the wartime stations, were victimized through a system of prostitution, albeit a military one.

Not only to understand the experience of prostituted survivors of the military system but also to understand the prostitution experience of all its survivors, this book reassesses existing historical work on the comfort station system. It filters information about the system's links to civilian prostitution already contained in the historical literature. The historiography of the system incorporates frequent reference to civilian sex industries, prostitution entrepreneurs, sex industry practices and conventions, prostitution attitudes and values, and the military trafficking of civilian sex industry victims, but this information is left mostly uncommented upon, or is even cast as irrelevant to historical knowledge about the military system. For example, Hayashi Hirofumi's archival research in 1998 found that,

[i]n Kuala Lumpur [in 1941], the Quartermaster Corps rounded up fourteen Japanese women who had remained there. Twelve of these women had experience in prostitution and were known as '*karayukisan*' (overseas Japanese prostitutes). These twelve were entrusted with the recruitment of women and the management of comfort houses ...<sup>25</sup>

Yet, neither Hayashi nor any other historian has pursued the probable implication of this observation that the Japanese military recruited people with strong connections to local sex industries (and especially if they could speak Japanese) to broker the trafficking of locally prostituted women into military stations. In this case, the military targeted formerly prostituted Japanese women (who were likely to have been of an older age by the 1940s, after having been trafficked to the Malay Peninsula in the early 1900s as girls).<sup>26</sup> This in itself is a notable fact, but further overlooked is the possibility that the Japanese military took active and systematic steps during the war to arrange the trafficking of women out of civilian prostitution to enter its comfort stations.

The book's discussion draws together snippets of information like this to describe the development and operation of the military system in a way that



shows its features to fundamentally reflect and rely on aspects of civilian prostitution. Through emphasizing continuity between the military system and various civilian prostitution systems operating before and during the China and Pacific wars, the discussion poses a challenge to the view that the military system developed uniquely and peculiarly to wartime and battle. This reductionist understanding of the origins of the comfort station system as deriving from 'militarism' and the harsh conditions of war is advocated by the most critical historians of the system, even feminist ones, including Vera Mackie who claims that a 'particular form of masculinity is fostered through military training: an active, aggressive form of masculinity which is seen to need particular sexual outlets'.<sup>27</sup> It is taken as almost axiomatic in both the scholarly and popular literature that men will prostitute women in war and military adventure, but it is not a maxim endorsed in this book. Rather, Antje Kampf's 2008 analysis of the New Zealand military in the two world wars is preferred. She correlates prostitution activity among military personnel quite simply with policies and implementation strategies enacted by military command to prevent or tolerate the behaviour.<sup>28</sup> This alternative understanding, which does not presume any inevitable or universal link between militarism (however 'masculinist' this is in nature) and men's prostitution of women, is reflected in the book's henceforth discussion.

For now, the methodology that guides the book's approach might be provisionally indicated through citing an example of its polar *opposing* approach, as articulated by Kelly Askin in 2001:

The so-called 'comfort women' of World War II, while clearly victims of sexual violence, have in the past been most commonly referred to as victims of enforced prostitution, although emerging norms deem the crime more appropriately termed sexual slavery. The term 'slavery' is appropriately invoked when victims effectively lose all or partial ownership over their own bodies, being treated as the personal property of the perpetrators or other culpable parties. Referring to the institution as a 'comfort system', naming the venue a 'brothel', or linking the activity to 'prostitution' attempts to transform the crime into something which may have some form of legitimacy by inferring that choice was involved, as if the women and girls participated without coercion or force, received some sort of compensatory benefit, were free and able to leave anytime they chose, or were able to dictate the nature or terms of the sexual services (such as requiring condom use, limiting their number of partners, refusing to participate in certain forms of sex, rejecting persons using physical violence, or demanding specific compensation terms). The former 'comfort women', however, overwhelmingly characterize their treatment as slavery, and tend to reject adamantly any terminology linking their treatment to the word 'prostitution'.<sup>29</sup>

Askin's approach is almost universally adopted by advocates, scholars and activists working towards justice for comfort station survivors today. But it is a view that eschews consideration of civilian prostitution in understanding the history of the system and the experience of survivors, while at the same time trumpeting women's comparative exercise of 'choice' in civilian prostitution on the basis of their supposed ability to 'demand' 'compensatory benefits', and do things like choose customers. While, as discussed in the next chapter, the campaigning of contemporary right-wing defenders of the Japanese military has perhaps understandably caused reactionary thinking to sprout among progressives (e.g. conservatives say comfort women were merely prostitutes, so we must say they were not), this fact does not fully account for the tendency of the progressive position to defend civilian prostitution. If we are truly mindful of survivors in considering the history of comfort station system, how can we comprehend Askin's claim that 'former "comfort women" ... tend to reject adamantly any terminology linking their treatment to the word "prostitution"'? For many survivors of the military system, including Shirota Suzuko at the outset of this chapter, it was precisely membership of the prostituted class that prefaced their experience of military sexual slavery, and military sexual slavery prefaced the experience of many more survivors becoming members of the prostituted class thereafter. This overlooked point anchors the discussion of the book overall. It is a thesis succinctly summarized in Suzuki Masahiro's alternatively formulated understanding that

Japan's sex industry has significant historical origins as an institutionalised system of sexual violence. The idea that girls sold into the industry by their parents were exercising choice is not comprehensible ... it was a system of sexual slavery. If we are to seek to identify the differences between the civilian legalised prostitution system and the comfort station system, we have to first acknowledge the slavery of the civilian system ... attempts to insist on differences between the two systems are likely to come from proponents who are capitalising on tenets of Japan's contemporary rape/prostitution tolerant culture. It would be better to re-examine the comfort station system from the critical perspective of the rape/prostitution culture circulating in Japan in the pre-war period, as well as the pre-war sex industry.<sup>30</sup>

## Abolitionist terms of the discussion

The way that Askin defines the experience of military sexual slaves as losing 'all or partial ownership over their own bodies, [and] being treated as the

personal property of the perpetrators or other culpable parties' is the view taken in this book of the experience of *all* victims of prostitution, regardless of their victimization in either civilian or military systems. This stance resists liberal attempts to split military sexual slavery from its connection to, and origins in, civilian prostitution. Catharine MacKinnon has been writing about these connections since 1993, and suggests military sexual slavery 'is at once both mass rape and serial rape in a way that is indistinguishable from prostitution', and that '[p]rostitution is that part of everyday non-war life that is closest to what we see done to women in ... war'.<sup>31</sup> Connections between the Japanese military sexual slavery system and civilian prostitution in a range of respects are highlighted in the book's discussion, as well as the common experience of victims in both contexts. On this basis, the phrase 'civilian sexual slavery' is coined to mirror the phrase 'military sexual slavery', which are terms I believe accurately describe prostitution from the viewpoint of its victims.

It is an aim of the book to forge an understanding of prostitution in peacetime as a system of 'civilian sexual slavery' in the same way prostitution in wartime is now understood by the United Nations as 'military sexual slavery'. It is the author's hope that reflection on the slavery of the Japanese military system as an historical system of prostitution might inversely spark recognition of the slavery of contemporary civilian prostitution. We might reflect on this fundamental similarity while still being aware of asymmetries, as MacKinnon recognizes in her remark on sexual violence in the 1990s Serbian war that '[t]his war is to rape every day what the Holocaust was to anti-Semitism every day: without the everyday, the conflagration could not exist, but do not mistake one for the other'.<sup>32</sup> In relation to the comfort station system, Morita Seiya distinguishes it on the grounds it was 'more extreme, [operated] on a wider scale, was more debased, and targeted a broader base of women' than prostitution in peacetime but, following MacKinnon, he nonetheless advocates recognition of its essentially identical nature.<sup>33</sup>

Terms commonly used to describe civilian sexual slavery, like 'prostitution' and 'brothel', are used to describe aspects of the military system in this book. It is unfortunately the case that, even taking into account the alternatively formulated descriptions of sexual slavery that have been achieved for the military system since the mid-1990s, as long as these euphemisms remain current for civilian sexual slavery they continue to be useful for describing its military equivalent. The author looks forward to the day when civilian brothels are called 'rape centres' in the way the United Nations has described the wartime comfort stations since 1998, and to the day when someone like former US secretary of