

The Korean War and the Role of Women

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This study investigates the roles, experiences, and hardships of women during the Korean War. Women were mobilized as soldiers from the beginning during the wartime. The battle line was divided into two, the front and the rear. The former was allotted to men while the latter was allotted to women who were mothers and wives of the soldiers at the front line.

Unlike this kind of mobilization, some women were mobilized to fulfill sexual desires under the name of relief or comfort. Those women attended the wounded, washed bloody military uniforms, made comfort kits that wished for the victory of the soldiers, raised funds to buy articles of comfort, collected letters, and provided comfort in the form of relieving their sexual desires.

Women were forced out of home to support their families as men were sent up to the front line. Although this kind of role for women during the war was a severe ordeal regardless of the social class, it was also a new opportunity for women to promote their status.

Keywords: Korean War, women, the Volunteer Troops of Korean Women, comfort women, women's labor

Front and Rear Lines, and the Position of Women

There is no clear-cut distinction as to what the position of women is under wartime circumstances. It is because women, like men, are placed everywhere from the front to the rear lines. But it is undeniable that in many cases, women have had to help men as agents of war. Thus, the fact that women are in the midst of war but are considered marginalized beings holds various meanings.

First of all, this is related to the issue of what rights and responsibilities women have in a modern national state. As Syngman Rhee (also known as Yi Seung-man) stated, “The most glorious death will be a death for one’s country by means of becoming a soldier and going to war in a national emergency,” the most secure way of proving to be a “citizen” was to fight and die for one’s country (Fujii Takeshi 2004: 258). If one of the qualifications as a citizen is “an obligation to serve as a soldier,”¹ it can be said that, with the Korean War as the impetus, women established their position as citizens by becoming soldiers during the Korean War. If this statement is true, then women were also qualified as citizens within the identity of “the Republic of Korea” because of their roles and activities during the War.

Next, we should look at women’s experiences outside the home. Wherever or whenever it may be, war calls adolescent males out of society *en masse*. And the society left behind by the men fills their vacant positions with women and child labor. Accordingly, war is an ordeal for women but can simultaneously be an opportunity to escape from the boundary of home as well. But Korean society sometime ago began to claim that women advanced into society from the sphere of the home during the economic development of the Park Chung Hee regime. Is this true? Did the Korean War bring results different from wars experienced in the West? Or was the efforts of women during the war efforts just a short outing?

Also, war vividly reveals the view of womanhood inherent in a society. Women’s bodies were objects of violence either on the battlefield or in the neighboring areas. And people are told that there was no violence and that violence should be forgotten after the war under the disguise of peace and reconstruction. Then, can the Korean War we have suffered be free from this fact?

Besides this, war has an influence on women’s lives and experiences in various ways. War confuses social positions, results in deaths, and sometimes brings the fortune to survive alone. However, in any case it is clear that war is an embarrassing reality to women.

This article is divided into three chapters dealing with the Korean War and women’s experiences on the basis of this critical mind. First of all, this article surveys the cases where women were mobilized as soldiers during the Korean War. This is connected with the first question raised above and shows simultane-

1. In this article, a “soldier” means the agent that defends the country and the people from foreign invasion, or directly participates in a war of aggression or supports war to secure territory and material resources.

ously the possibility and limit of women to be qualified as citizens. The second chapter surveys how society mobilized women under the disguise of “comfort” during the Korean War. This will reveal that women’s sexuality was mobilized violently during the Korean War. Lastly, this will survey women as producers, and the labor of “survived” women. In particular, this will reveal a certain peculiarity of the Korean War towards women’s labor. This will deal with the fact that women’s labor could not help but appear in a different way from that of the West because of deficient industrial facilities and destruction.

Women Who Became Soldiers

It was not until the end of August 1950 when the Volunteer Troops of Korean Women (hereafter referred to as “the Volunteer Troops of Women”) was established where women were mobilized on a large scale not as nurses but as soldiers during the Korean War.² Even before the establishment of the Volunteer Troops of Women, women had already joined in army.

There was a tendency to fill positions left void by male administrative staff who were deployed to some of the combat units at the battle line with women. The following testimony on the battle of the Nakdong River is a representative example.

Later on, because of the shortage of platoon commanders and squad leaders, Non-Commissioned Officers were appointed as officers on the spot and 150 key administrative personnel of a regiment were appointed as platoon commanders and squad leaders, who were driven to the front. Instead, 150 high school girl students were allotted to be rear key members. This helped exercise the fighting power of our regiment. (The *Jungang ilbo*, ed. 1983: 266)

In the second case, women were recruited and used as members of a pacification squad. Afterward, they became members of TI & E (troop information and education).

2. “Volunteer Troops of Women” was the name of female soldiers recruited and trained at the beginning of the Korean War. The term “Volunteer Troops” did not mean an irregular army but a regular army. But they did not compose an independent corps, except for “the training camp for the Volunteer Troops of Women,” but scattered and served with common troops.

The last case arose for the purpose of making propaganda to strengthen the mobilizing position through indirect mobilization. The most dramatic response of women to strengthening mobilization appeared in the form of volunteering as troops “by writing in blood a letter that a girl of sixteen years old would fight for her own country” or sending soldiers “the letters of appreciating the National Army and the U.N. soldiers written in blood by enclosing little fingers cut off” (*Pusan ilbo*, August 13, 14, 15, and 27, 1950).

Volunteering of women for military service, letters written in blood, cutting off their fingers, and the propaganda for letting these incidents be known were expressions of support and cooperation sent from the rear to soldiers at the front line and also dissuaded men from evading military service and the draft. The fact that women, thought of as weaker than men, went to war as soldiers was an effective way to heighten the minds of men participating in the War and fostered the integration of the whole nation. These circumstances were confirmed in a newspaper with the title of an article informing the establishment of the Volunteer Troops of Women was “Reflect on Yourselves, Cowardly Men!” (*Pusan ilbo*, August 27, 1950).

Under these social circumstances, women officers who served since before the Korean War pushed forward the establishment of the Volunteer Troops of Women. Kim Hyeon-Sook recognized as leader of the establishment of the Volunteer Troops of Women proposed a plan to Shin Seong-Mo, then Minister of National Defense, at the end of July. The defense minister accepted this plan and immediately obtained the sanction of President Syngman Rhee. Therefore, the establishment of the Volunteer Troops of Women was pushed forward earnestly.³ The recruitment of the Volunteer Troops of Women began in the middle of August through street recruiting, recommendations of the local administration, individual applications, and school recruiting. The public notice about recruiting the Volunteer Troops of Women published in then newspapers was as follows:

3. Kim Hyeon-Sook recalls that she visited President Syngman Rhee by herself and obtained the presidential sanction as to her role at the time of the establishment of the Volunteer Troops of Women (Kim Hyeon-Sook 1980: 19-20). But judging from contemporary circumstances, her political position, and other testimony of those concerned, it is assumed that Kim Hyeon-Sook rather exaggerated her merits (Dept. of Military Affairs, ed. 2000: 83-4).

< Prospectus of the Volunteer Troops of Women >

- Volume of Recruitment: 000 persons
- Qualification:
 - a. Korean women graduates of elementary schools and junior middle schools
 - b. Ages: Between the full ages of seventeen and twenty-four
- Place of Reception: Press Corps, Martial Law Enforcement Headquarters
- Period of Reception: August 17-30, 1950 (08:00-18:00 everyday)
- Documents:
 - 3 copies of personal history
 - a. 3 photos
 - b. 2 copies of references
 - c. 3 copies of recommendations
 - d. 1 application form
 - Place of Screening: Press Corps, Martial Law Enforcement Headquarters
 - Date of Screening: August 31, 1950
 - 1) Date of Notice of Success: September 1, 1950
 - 2) Others:
 - a. In case of members of both the Girl-Student National Defense Corps and the Korean Young Women's Association, a written acknowledgment of the chief of their posts is required.
 - b. For particulars, apply to the Liaison Section of the Dept. of TI & E. (*Pusan ilbo*, August 24, 1950)

The recruitment of the Volunteer Troops of Women received a strong response. The fixed number of the volunteers was exceeded in a few days after recruitment began. And to maximize the effect of propaganda, each local recruiting headquarters and administrative organization held “a ceremony of welcoming women volunteers” on a large scale.

The qualification to apply for the Volunteer Troops of Women as stated in the prospectus was unmarried women above a certain level of education. At the beginning, teachers, students of training schools for teachers, and girl students held an overwhelming majority in the recruitment. But like the case below, the application for the Volunteer Troops of Women was pushed forward almost semi-compulsorily on the level of local administrative organizations or schools.

Unmarried female teachers were ordered to gather at Jeju South Elementary School and volunteered for the Volunteer Troops of Women. ... The enlistment of the students of teacher training schools in the Volunteer Troops of Women was fairly compulsory. I think the enlistment of women was not voluntary and I enlisted according to the solicitation of the principal who came to my house. (Dept. of Military Affairs, Headquarters of Army, ed. 2000: 64-5)

The Volunteer Troops of Women recruited like this received military training at a unit attached to the second training corps. In case of first-term trainees, a ceremony of welcoming new recruits was performed on September 4, 1950. In accordance with the training motto for approaching the level of noncommissioned officers, they received such training in firearms, squad battle, marksmanship, map reading, and night drill. The first-term trainees completed their training course on September 26. Twenty of the trainees were deployed at a training unit and 471 at female companies. And centering on these female companies, the Volunteer Troops of Women were established on October 2. After establishment, they were scattered and deployed at the Ministry of National Defense, the Army Headquarters, the signal and supply corps, and the department of chief procurement, etc.

Most of the Volunteer Troops of Women worked at TI & E, art squads, and key administrative personnel to the rear. Some of them were deployed in fighting units but actually did not join in battles.

The most conspicuous TI & E activities of the Volunteer Troops of Women between November 1950 and May 1951 were production of posters, reportorial activities for civilians, the holding of various meetings, the enlightening education toward civilians, the illiteracy eradication campaign, broadcasting toward the enemy, the publication of a wall newspaper, the publication of a camp newspaper, diffusion of martial songs, and the camp education of private soldiers. Afterward, educational duty for private soldiers was added in July 1951. In addition to early duties, they took care of discussion, speech contests, instruction of lessons and gymnastics, individual conversation, education of noncommissioned officers of TI & E, organization of information and education, consolation of the wounded soldiers, reading clubs, and surveys of public opinion (Dept. of Military Affairs, Headquarters of Army, ed. 2000: 106).

The contents of activities of the Volunteer troops of Women who took charge of information and education at TI & E and fighting units were as follows:

I was deployed as a reportorial officer of the sixth company and took charge of publication of a camp newspaper, preparation of leaflets to conciliate the enemy's surrender, and the dispersal of the leaflets, etc. I volunteered to go to the front and disperse the leaflets in the air over the enemy. My duty was to disperse the leaflets flying over Gaeseong with a door of the plane open. When the plane became unsteady because of the enemy's anti-aircraft fire, it heightened and then lowered its altitude, then I dispersed the leaflets again. I performed my duty for my country with my mind prepared for death. (Dept. of Military Affairs, Headquarters of Army, ed. 2000: 108)

The Volunteer Troops of Women at 773 Unit of the Korean Army organized a mobile education unit and advanced to the front line. On the smoky mountaintop at the front, they encouraged the soldiers' morale by singing martial songs and reading poems, taught Hangeul (Korean alphabet), and wrote letters bound for native places for soldiers. ... With their young and beautiful bodies clad in military uniforms, they consolidated nostalgia of the weary soldiers and shared their difficulties as their friends. (*Kyunghyang sinmun*, October 15, 1951)

The major duties of the Volunteer Troops of Women deployed at fighting units were such simple administrative affairs as transmission of documents and writing of letters, or attending the interrogation of captured female North Korean and Chinese soldiers. But a sergeant second class of the Volunteer Troops of Women died in battle at Gangwon-do in 1951. With this death as momentum, all the Volunteer Troops of Women retreated to the rear together with the last retreating sixth division on August 12, 1951.

The organization of an art squad derived from the project of Kim Hyeon-Sook, commander of the training camp of female soldiers, to congratulate the restoration of Seoul and to let the establishment of the Volunteer Troops of Women be known to the citizens of Seoul. Most of the members were girl students. The areas of activity at the beginning of the establishment were hospitals at the rear, training camps, battleships of the U.S. Navy, and the theaters in Busan and Masan. Afterward, the art squad started its performance in Munsan in summer 1951 and made its rounds throughout all the units on the front. The art squad of the Volunteer Troops of Women was dissolved on October 20, 1951.

Thus, the Volunteer Troops of Women were organized as regular army per-

sonnel at the beginning of the Korean War and worked in such particular arms and services as information and education, general administration, and accounting and communication. But not only the Volunteer Troops of Women as regular soldiers but also many women as irregulars joined directly in the War.

The most conspicuous activities were those of women who participated in various corps of rangers. Women's activities were involved almost without any exception in the activities of the corps of rangers at Gaema plateau, Taegeukdan, the corps of rangers at Guwolsan, and others. They took charge of secret information, medical support, cooking, and washing etc. Also, some of them directly joined in battle.⁴

Other women who directly joined in the War were the girl students who joined in the Volunteer Troops of Students. Aside from boy students who were organized at the beginning of the War and joined in the battle of the Nakdong River, many girl students joined in the War after the Landing Operations in Incheon or the January 4th Retreat and carried out such works as pacification activities, washing, and cooking.

Thus, women joined in the Korean War in various ways. This was an extraordinary phenomenon considering that the leaders of the Korean Army had come from the Japanese or Manchurian Armies and had experienced the Japanese system of organization and behavior and applied them to the Korean army. Accordingly, women's participation in the War is considered a mixed phenomenon of the politics of Syngman Rhee's style⁵ to take advantage of women at the beginning of the Korean War to mobilize everything, and women's desire to participate in society. The fact that women joined in the War as soldiers could be momentum to secure their positions as citizens apart from the recognition that "women are beings protected by men." If people are divided into honorable ones willing to die for the country and dishonorable ones, and the former can attain the qualification of the people, then women's participation in the War as soldiers was a golden opportunity for women to attain such qualification. The impression

4. Yi Myeong-suk of "Wolf Back 3rd Regiment" established during the 1/4 (January 4th) Retreat and Bak In-ja of "Ju Ji-bong Corps of Rangers" that played a part from April 1952 were remarkable women; Kim Jeong-suk of "Ju Ji-bong Corps of Rangers" died in battle (Dept. of Military Affairs, Headquarters of Army, ed. 2000: 76-80).

5. Syngman Rhee used to mobilize women and hold a party for the officers of the U.S. Army and the officials of the U.N. since the American Military Government in Korea. This was no exception during the Korean War. In this way, he gathered necessary information and formed public opinion favorable to him (Lee Im Ha 2004a: 110-17).

of Helen Kim who compared the Volunteer Troops of Women with “Joan of Arc of save-the-nation” and an editorial urging “Be the first to go to the front line of the sacred war with patriotic passion for sweeping the communists” show this phenomenon very clearly.

As a woman myself and the chief of the Office of Public Information, I cannot stop the admiration by arising from my heart at “we women also...” as well being deeply moved by “we women also...” To join in the sacred war is the duty of our whole nation and our pride as cosmopolitans. In accomplishing this duty and keeping pride, how can even women be far behind men? Thus, we Korean women burning with patriotism follow a French girl, Joan of Arc, with bravery and burning patriotism and come to enlist in the army bravely and voluntarily in accordance as our country and people call us.... I expect the Volunteer Troops of Women to receive honor and play a conspicuous role. I also expect more women to abandon old customs and ideas and join in the call of our country voluntarily. (*Pusan ilbo*, September 10, 1950)

However, the participation of women in the War including the Voluntary Troops of Women could not bring forth a basic change, like a new view of womanhood. Moreover, what they did was nothing more than limited works like administrative ones and helping male soldiers. Later, a number of the Voluntary Troops of Women left the army fighting units on the front in 1951. According to the following testimony, “Women complained that the division granted them not fighting duties but administrative work. The use of the Voluntary Troops of Women was insufficient,” the female soldiers who wanted to join in the Voluntary Troops of Women and join in battles with rifles were greatly disappointed (Dept. Military Affairs, Headquarters of Army, ed. 2000: 116). The administration-centered duties could not satisfy the expectation and needs of female soldiers belonging to the Voluntary Troops of Women.

Such a limitation was revealed vividly in the establishment and the administration of the Voluntary Troops of Women, and the consciousness of women who had encouraged participation was not far from this. The following quotation reveals this limitation very clearly.

Afterward, the Voluntary Troops of Women will train enlightening, fighting, and nursing squads, as well as establish communications corps.

Thus, the main object of the Voluntary Troops of Women is to serve the country by taking the place of male soldiers. (*Pusan ilbo*, August 24, 1950)

The speech of Kim Hyeon-Sook, who had played a major role in the process of organizing the Voluntary Troops of Women, contains the recognition that women are different from men. It is premised on an assumption that the duties of women are not to join in battle but to help the fighting male soldiers in the rear. These women could not imagine that women could join in battle directly. Accordingly, what was required of women during the Korean War was the support in the rear rather than participation on the front.

The “Comforting” of Soldiers⁶

The enormous participation of soldiers from the U.S. and the U.N. and the mobilization of young and middle-aged men in the Korean War brought forth new problems connected with the sexuality of women in Korean society.

Above all, sexual crimes connected with the U.S. and the U.N. soldiers, that is, social problems relating to rape and prostitution, increased. The sexual crimes that have been committed until now at the U.S. Army posts were not the first experience Korean society had due to the Korean War. During the period of the American Military Government in Korea, South Korean society had already suffered sexual problems connected with U.S. soldiers such as rape, the increase of comfort women, and the spreading of venereal diseases. Accordingly, at the same time the U.S. and the U.N. soldiers participated in the War, lots of people in Korean society advised that, “In case of going out, girl students should not go out alone except with school permission,” (*Pusan ilbo*, August 11, 1950) or called women’s attention secretly and strongly saying, “At night, women should not go out alone if possible” (*Pusan ilbo*, August 12, 1950).

Meanwhile, the government established comfort houses, legalized places for

6. During the Korean War, the terms to comfort the pains of soldiers were *wian* (comfort), *wimun* (consolation) *wimu* (soothing). These terms differed in their nuance. In general, *wimun* (consolation) meant the support by means of goods and labor services including money or letters. On the contrary, *wian* (comfort) and *wimu* (soothing) meant entertainment and recreation including sexuality (Lee Im Ha 2004a: 109).

prostitution, as a countermeasure against sexual deviation committed by the U.S., the U.N. and Korean soldiers.

The establishment of “comfort houses for the allied forces” proves that sexual services were officially given to the U.S. and the U.N. soldiers by the state. The full-fledged and large-scale establishment of comfort houses was carried out when the front line was formed along the 38th parallel at the end of January 1951. In the middle of January 1951, the number of foreign soldiers was 199,000 (178,000 American soldiers), but 281,000 (including 253,000 American soldiers) in July 1951 when truce negotiations began. The number increased by about 100,000 in six months. The increase of the U.S. and the U.N. soldiers without the movement of the front line raised an urgent problem for the sexual comfort of soldiers. To cope with this problem, “comfort houses” increased to a considerable degree.

The first comfort houses that can be confirmed up to this point were five “comfort houses for allied soldiers” permitted by the City of Masan at the beginning of August 1950 (*Pusan ilbo*, August 11, 1950). Seventy-eight “comfort houses for allied soldiers” permitted by the government did business only in Busan in July 1952 (*Pusan ilbo*, July 13, 1952). Besides comfort houses, dance halls with the same object as comfort houses were operated centering on U.S. Army posts. Aside from the comfort houses for direct sexual relations, dance halls provided entertainment like dance and music and sexuality at the same time. Officers mainly used dance halls. According to official records of the government, five dance halls did business in Busan in July 1951 (the Bureau of Public Security, the Ministry of Home Affairs 1951). In addition, dance halls were operated in Seoul, and Incheon etc.

Moreover, it can be confirmed that higher bureaucrats including President Syngman Rhee and his officials were involved in the establishment and management of comfort houses and dance halls, the places for prostitution. The document “The Method of Comforting U.N. soldiers” (*Daebiji*, The Direction of the President’s Secretariat) shows clearly the aims of the establishment and management of dance halls (comfort houses) as follows:

As a way of comforting U.N. soldiers, dance halls were established at some places under the auspices of the Navy (an officers’ club, etc.). The police or the army should help them not to exceed their rights indirectly and should grant female attendants special gate passes to distinguish them from common women. Dance halls should be built far from the houses of

civilians and women attendants should treat only foreigners in a restricted area. The MPs of the U.N. forces together with our police and MPs should take care they do not go astray and harm public security. The police, with the help of governors and mayors, should make detailed regulations and collect extra taxes. In wartime, the U.N. soldiers should not be left to themselves. If so, they will cause a lot of harm to civilians and have an evil influence on the future. This arrangement is an inevitable and temporary step and should be carried out absolutely within the limits of regulations. The cooperation among all the districts, the army, and police should be required.

Judging from the record that the “President’s Approval of the Original” was attained, this document in which the Secretariat seems to have put a presidential order in writing⁷ reveals the establishment and aims of dance halls (comfort houses) and the problems of management.⁸ According to this document, some cabinet ministers, including the President, were involved in the establishment of dance halls (comfort houses). The copies of this document were sent to the Army Chief of the General Staff, the Navy Chief of the General Staff, and the Chief of the Bureau of Public Security via the Prime Minister, the Minister of Home Affairs, and the Minister of National Defense. Also, it can be known that local officials were closely connected with the management of dance halls (comfort houses), judging from the document indicating the cooperation of the governors, mayors, and the police concerning the establishment and management of dance halls (comfort houses).

Besides this document, it can be confirmed that the police and the army were involved in the establishment and management of comfort houses as follows:

It is said that the chief of the Seoul Metropolitan Police gave a strict order to all the police stations on November 4 that the authorities concerned were willing to find appropriate buildings or places and give permission

7. It is assumed that the class number of this document, “The Direction of the President’s Secretariat” is abbreviated to “*Daebiji*.”

8. Even though there was no expression of comfort houses in this document, the establishment of comfort houses was no different from that of dance halls. The core contents of the document indicate that dance halls or comfort houses should be managed according to the official procedure and isolated from the civilians.

concerning requests for the establishment of dance halls or comfort houses and would exercise strict control over outlawed acts. (*Kyunghyang sinmun*, November 5, 1950)

Also, there is evidence of the U.S. Army's involvement in the establishment of comfort houses. As an example, the authorities of Seoul Metropolis and the U.S. Army discussed a plan to concentrate comfort women in Seoul in the Yeongdeungpo area to "comfort" the U.S. and the U.N. soldiers (*Seoul sinmun*, September 20, 1951). On Jeju Island, Jeju Office and the U.S. Army also discussed the establishment of comfort houses (*Cheju sinbo*, September 1, 5, 1951).

One of the reasons for the Korean government to push forward the establishment of comfort houses positively was to separate the U.S. soldiers and common women. But the establishment of comfort houses did not meet the purpose to protect "common women." In spite of the establishment of comfort houses, common women were not protected from the sexual crimes of U.S. soldiers. During the War, the sexual crimes of the U.S. soldiers continued and some of them regarded all Korean women as comfort women.

Another purpose of establishing comfort houses was the way the Korean government or the Republic of Korea could express its thanks to the U.S. Forces like the following speech of the chief of TI & E Bureau, the Ministry of National Defense: "We common citizens should heartily welcome and appreciate the U.N. Forces that left their countries to fight for the unification of free Korea" (*Kyunghyang sinmun*, October 12, 1950). The supply of sexual entertainment through comfort houses additionally meant the repaying of the "graceful" U.S. soldiers to maintain and strengthen vested rights.

Comfort houses had another purpose which was to help elevate the morale of the soldiers and maintain their fighting power. The Headquarters of the Army established the comfort houses for Korean soldiers and revealed the purpose as follows: "These special comfort houses are established for the purpose of special comforting activities for the welfare and morale of all soldiers" (The Headquarters of the Army, ed. 1956: 147-148).⁹

Thus, the government established comfort houses for the purpose of protect-

9. The special comfort squads were the organization operated directly by the Korean Army. They were established approximately in 1951 and dissolved in March 1954. Three squads were established in Seoul and another squad in Gangneung, making the round of districts to serve sexuality.

ing pure women, appreciating the U.S. Army, and elevating the morale of the soldiers. These comfort houses were divided into those for the U.N. soldiers and special comfort squads for Korean soldiers on the basis of the buyers of sexuality. Also, on the basis of managing sponsors, they were divided into comfort houses operated by civilians permitted by the government and those established by the Army and operated by businessmen under the control of the Army.

The government collected certain taxes from licensed whoremasters (*poju*) and comfort women (*wianbu*). The state-regulated prostitution system whereby the government permitted prostitution and collected tax according to their business status was legally abolished in Korea in February 1948. Accordingly, prostitution became an illegal act. Nevertheless, the government became a permitted whoremaster and a criminal that permitted prostitution and collected taxes.

In spite of the lack of nation-wide statistics and materials for research, there was a considerable number of comfort houses operated with the permission of the government throughout the country. At the turn of 1953, comfort houses had been established permanently to the degree that they could be called “necessary evils” and the nation-wide distribution of comfort houses caused discussion on “the establishment of special areas,” i.e., collected gathering place for prostitution.

The policy and public opinion on “the establishment of special areas” and the nation-wide distribution of comfort houses were realized as the establishment of sections of “concentrated prostitution” and base towns. The comfort house system made by the government during the Korean War served as momentum to legalize prostitution once again. These concentrated areas of comfort houses at that time became base towns centering on the U.S. camps and urban “concentrated prostitution” areas. Also, in company with the lives of poorer people, the number of comfort women increased even more than during the Japanese colonial period.

On the Front Line of Life in Men’s Places

The mobilization caused by the War naturally turned men out to military service, causing them to become wounded, missing, or dead.¹⁰ In particular, the number of men in their 20s to 30s mobilized as soldiers or laborers amounted to about

10. Refer to Lee Im Ha (2003) for men’s isolation from society caused by the mobilization system.

one million in an instant. This corresponded to one third of the male population of 20 to 39 years of age according to the census of 1949. The number of males segregated from their daily lives by evading military service also amounted to about 200 thousand in an instant.

More serious problems than mobilization or evasion of military service were such non-combat related elements as defecting to North Korea, disappearing, kidnapping, and death. Scattered here and there were deaths from the massacres by the police and the army of members of the National Guidance Alliance, politically suspect “potential enemies,” and persons who had taken sides with the enemy, the massacre of civilians, and bombing due to the result of battles by the U.S. and Korean Army, and the massacre by the North Korean Army and leftists of persons who supported the U.S. Army and the South Korean government. Besides this, various other incidents occurred including spontaneous defecting to North Korea and kidnapping. The official number of civilian casualties (deaths, wounding, kidnapping, etc.) was 990,968 (764,281 males) (the Institute for National Defense and Military Affairs 1996: 85-87). Also, the unofficial number of massacred civilians during the Korean War amounted to about one million. The number of loss of male civilians through massacre, missing, defecting to North Korea, kidnapping, and death amounted to not less than one million.

Thus, considering all the elements like mobilization, national violence, and ideology, the number of males segregated from society during the Korean War amounted to two million. The labor force of two million was segregated from the scene of production and agriculture because of the War and this loss had to be recovered in order to maintain society.

In order to cover the lack of labor power and meet the needs of supporting the War, the government tried to construct the system of full mobilization of all labor and resources irrespective of age or sex under the slogan, “Universal conscription, universal labor,” “One side war, the other side construction,” and “Secure maximum efficiency with the minimum of personnel!” (*Kyunggyang sinmun*, November 11, 1950; *Dong-A ilbo*, December 12, 1950; *Pusan ilbo*, November 11, 1950).

To do this, at the beginning of the War, various ordinances were declared such as “Suspension of All Public Performances in Music and Dancing,” “Suspension of Sales of all Alcoholic Liquor Day and Night,” “Economy Required from Rice Cake and Taffy Sellers.” In addition, the Department of Public Information in Gyeongsangnam-do ordered all women “to wear their wartime clothes, *momppe*” (*Pusan ilbo*, July 29, 1950).

After all, in order to continue the War and meet the needs of maintaining society, the number of women advancing into official areas, including areas of production, increased.

At the beginning of the War, the Army and public institutions mainly recruited women to serve in military or public institutions. Besides the Volunteer Troops of Women, the Army substituted part of key male administrative personnel with females. Also, there were many newspaper ads to recruit telephone operators, interpreters, typists, and clerks at the beginning of the War. Most of the recruits were to work at the U.S. camps, the Martial Law Enforcement Headquarters, or other public institutions.

But as the situation on the front line became complicated along the 38° parallel and became divided into the front and the rear, fields in need of women increased. Factories and enterprises as well as the Army and official institutions recruited office ladies. Most of the workplaces had been men's places before the War. This phenomenon was a remedy to substitute the men mobilized to war and a statement of the chief of the Military Service Bureau, the Ministry of National Defense published in September 1951, reveals this very well.

All youths should be engaged in business ready to be drafted for service at any time and all students should be indulged in studying. The others should be engaged in business in comfort and all workplaces should employ women if possible. (Chosun ilbo, September 4, 1951)

The most conspicuous fields women advanced into because of the Korean War were the public fields. The Ministry of Education established a training school for teachers in each city and province to recruit elementary school teachers and gave priority to women over sixteen years of age with four years of middle school experience (*Dong-A ilbo*, November 22, 1950). Also, the Ministry of Communications trained woman technicians to make up for the recruitment of technological personnel and began to substitute clerks at the windows of post offices with women (*Kyunghyang sinmun*, November 12, 1951). The Bureau of the Security Police also increased the number of policewomen to make up for policemen recruited and dispatched to the battlefield (*Chosun ilbo*, July 23, 1953). The Ministry of Home Affairs tried to substitute heads of a neighborhood meeting with women or officials (*Pusan ilbo*, April 2, 1953). As a result of the recruitment of woman power in public fields, the number of women engaged in "official and free business" abruptly increased from 24,454 in 1949 to 182,048

in 1951 (Lee Im-Ha 2004c: 90).¹¹

The advance of women in other areas than public fields was conspicuous. In agriculture and fisheries, the number of women increased from 2,544,335 in 1949 to 4,967,733 in 1951. The increase of farming women resulted from various elements. Above all, it was a natural phenomenon considering above 80% of the whole population were living in farming villages. Next, the recruiting and drafting carried out centering on the farming villages were easy to control. The mobilization and wartime damage increased the agricultural labor of women.

The number of women laborers engaged in the manufacturing industry and commerce also increased. In the manufacturing industry, they increased from 28,872 in 1949 to 84,892 in 1951. In transportation, they increased from 1,845 in 1949 to 30,490 in 1951. In particular, in commerce, they conspicuously increased from 81,204 in 1949 by about 7.3 times, to 593,264 in 1951. Most of them were peddlers of rice cakes, vegetables, clothing, and cosmetics.

The economic activities of women were called “the creators of today’s wealth and productive persons in charge” and prevailed throughout whole areas of society during the confused wartime. “Women monopolized daily employment: Laundry at U.S. Army posts, peddlers with baskets, peddlers with wooden platter, cigarette sellers, sellers of military uniforms, mung-bean pancake houses, pubs, tea rooms, dancers, restaurants, chief of mutual financing associations and usuries, and completely attained sovereign power” (Ma Hae-song 1956: 154). With the Korean War as momentum, the streets were flooded with women from permanent markets to peddlers. There might be various reasons for women to come out of their home boundaries and the main reason was to earn a livelihood for the family. Thus, womanpower developed and formed the keynote of society and home because of the War and society introduced the advance of women as follows: “Women have become industry workers at manufacturing factories, are fighting as clerks with pens, and are fighting bravely instead of young and middle-aged men either as agricultural workers or policewomen or teachers” (*Seoul sinmun*, January 1, 1952).

However, women’s advance to society and their experience due to the mobilization of labor confused the boundary between the front (males) and the rear (females), especially the men who had fought for women and children and the

11. Afterward, I referred to this book for the comparison of the labor population between 1949 and 1951.

identity of males and females. The fear of the confused identity of women caused a tendency to speak ill of women as symbols of extravagance and vanity, imagining them as impotent beings who did nothing during the War.

How much have women contributed to the country and victory spiritually or materially during wartime over the last year? They have done nothing spiritually. ... It is because we have seen their imprudent extravagance and slackness of official discipline. Then, how about their material contribution? They have done nothing materially, either. It is because we have not heard any topic they, as women of this country, contributed to the national business or fighting soldiers. (*Seoul sinmun*, October 17, 1951)

Remembering the War Once Again

As surveyed above, it is clear that women were one of the nuclei of the Korean War. Under wartime circumstances, women were called to be soldiers, comfort women, productive workers, and mothers of soldiers. Nevertheless, there is not much official data on the way women were mobilized to the War or how they led their lives during that time. Of course, there are innumerable historical data on the Korean War.

For example, the Bureau of TI & E, the Ministry of National Defense, published five volumes of war history called "*Korea in War*" post 1951, the year after the outbreak of the Korean War. They are composed of introduction, diary, archives, statistics, etc., and recorded in detail how the War had progressed from the viewpoint of that time. But no records on women can be found anywhere in the books. Such books on the Korean War published by national or civilian institutes and individual researchers after the publication of "*Korea in War*" are no exception. It can be said that these facts clearly show women are recorded and remembered as marginal figures of the War.

Besides, even a lot of remaining records are distorted and concealed. Above all, it is due to an impulse to erase shameful and dirty history. In particular, most of the records on sexual crimes of U.S. soldiers and comfort women called "*yanggongju*" ("Western princess," i.e., prostitute for Westerners) cannot be found anywhere. It is the result of reflecting the common idea in our society to always remember the U.S. Army as a "beneficent savior." However, this may be due to lingering shame of surviving through providing sexuality of women to

U.S. (U.N.) soldiers.

Nevertheless, I think it is necessary to record the “shame,” restore the marginalized part, and rewrite the history of the Korean War. Recently, I had an opportunity to have an interview with several widows who had survived the death of their husbands during the Korean War fifty years ago. One of their most common expressions was, “The deceased are comfortable in their heart.” This expression contains pity for their deceased husbands and the fetters suffered by “the survivors.” I would like to show that the pity and fetters they carry in their heart are part of the history of the Korean War. Therefore, it is time to write about “War and History of Women,” and I hope my research will be a small steppingstone towards that goal.

Lastly, I would like to suggest what is essential to this article but is not contained because of my lack of study. While writing this article, I felt it absolutely necessary to examine the behavior of so-called “women leaders” during the Korean War. They were recorded as “anti-communist fighters” and “typical models for Korean women to follow.” But I could not confirm they were “typical Korean women” although they were “anti-communist fighters.” In fact, this is a very important problem in the history of women’s movements. It will be a key to examining closely the reason their experiences have not sublimed as an organized movement of women although women experienced a lot and advanced their out of home boundary with the momentum of the Korean War.

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