

Article

The Public Knowledge of the *Jeongsindae*  
as Forcefully Mobilized  
“Comfort Women” in Korea\*

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## Introduction

Yoshida Seiji was stationed in Korea as a Japanese official of the Bureau of Labor of a local Japanese government (Yamaguchi Hyon) to help mobilize Korean workers and Korean “comfort women” for the Japanese military between 1942 and 1945. He later wrote two memoirs (1977 and 1989) in which he confessed his role in forcefully mobilizing Korean men and women for labor in Japan, and, in particular, kidnapping about 200 Korean women in Jeju Island to send them to Japanese military brothels in China. Yoshida also published a series of his articles with stories of slave-hunting Korean women in *Asahi shimbun*, a major Japanese progressive daily newspaper, in the early 1980s. However, based on his own research in Jeju Island, Hata (1999) argued that Yoshida’s claim had no evidence. Hata and Japanese neo-nationalists seem to believe that most Japanese and U.S. sympathizers of the redress movement for the victims of the “comfort women” system learned about the forced mobilization of many Asian women to Japanese military brothels mainly from the articles by Yoshida published in *the Asahi shimbun* during the given period (McCurry and McNeill 2015; Takashi 2015). They also seem to believe that most Koreans learned about the forced mobilization of many Korean women to Japanese military brothels from the 1989 Korean translation of Yoshida’s discredited book (Veki 2015).

However, Korean daily newspapers had frequently covered the fear of many Korean girls and their parents to be forcefully mobilized to Japanese military brothels well before the Korean-language translation of Yoshida’s book was published. Koreans used the term “jeongsindae” (volunteer labor corps) to refer to what the Japanese military called “comfort women” well before 1990. Veki (2015) selected all articles related to both the “jeongsindae” and “comfort women” published in four major Korean daily newspapers between 1945 and 1994. He eliminated all cases where the articles referred to non-sexual, wartime labor service. He counted 152 articles published only during the period

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between 1945 and 1989, and many more articles published between 1990 and 1994 as a result of the redress movement in Korea. Based on the findings, the author concluded that the “coercive and controversial nature” of Korean “comfort women’s” mobilization to Japanese military brothels in the name of the *jeongsindae* had been an important issue in Korea well before Yoshida Seiji’s Korean-language translation of the book was published there. Beki’s article suggests that the public in Korea perceived Korean women to have been forcefully mobilized to Japanese military brothels in the name of the *jeongsindae*. This perception had been built based on eyewitness and oral accounts of former Korean soldiers and civilian workers mobilized to war zones, who contacted Korean comfort women at Japanese military brothels and on their way home after the end of the war.

Japanese neo-nationalists (Hata 1999) and two scholars of Korean ancestry (Park 2013, 42-47; Soh 2008, 60-63) accused the leaders of the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan (hereafter, referred to as the Korean Council or KC), as well as Korean scholars, of conflating the *jeongsindae* with “comfort women.” In their view, *geunro jeongsindae* or *jeongsindae* (*teishintai* in Japanese) was a system that mobilized women’s labor corps to military factories applied to Japanese and Korean women on August 23, 1944 and after. They claimed that no Korean woman was mobilized as a member of the *jeongsindae* before August 1944, and that if they had been mobilized in the name of the *jeongsindae*, they must have been mobilized to Japanese military factories rather than to military brothels. I cite here Soh’s (2008, 59) criticism:

No documentary evidence exists that proves the *Chōngsindae* were used as comfort women. Nevertheless, some South Korean researchers believe that there must have been good grounds for the widespread perception that *Chōngsindae* meant comfort women. Notably, Chung Chin-sung, a sociologist of the postcolonial generation and a former co-representative of the Korean Council, continues to endorse the popular nationalist discourse about the comfort women as abused *chōngsindae*...One wonders when South Koreans will come to terms with the facts of the historical truth and finally abandon the ethnic nationalist mythology of *wianbu* = *chōngsindae* that has produced preposterous headlines such as “the Netherlands also had the *Chōngsindae*.” If South Korean activists and the media are serious about uncovering the truth about the comfort women, as they have long

demanded Japan do, it is also important that they self-critically reflect on their unthinking promotion of a comforting nationalist mythology.

The Japanese military government mobilized Korean women 12-40 years old for labor service on August 23, 1944 in the name of the *yeoja geunro jeongsindae* ordinance. However, Korean daily newspapers also reveal that many Korean women were forcefully mobilized for sexual slavery in the name of *yeoja jeongsindae* (women's labor corps), *jonggun ganhobu* (military nurses), or *cheonyeogongchul* (parents devoting an unmarried daughter to the Japanese military) well before 1944 (Chung 2016; Kim 2016, 29). In the late 1930s and early 1940s, Koreans associated the term the *jeongsindae* or the *yeoja jeongsindae* with “comfort women,” and they were not familiar with the term “comfort women” (*wianbu* in Korean and *ianfu* in Japanese), which was widely used in Japan at that time. Koreans used the term *jeongsindae* more often to refer to forcefully mobilized Korean “comfort women” than forcefully mobilized Korean women workers because the Japanese military used the term “teishintai” (the Japanese analog of the *jeongsindae*) more often to forcefully mobilize “comfort women” from Korea, its colony at the time.

The founders of the Korean Council seem to have named its organization “The Jeongsindae daechaek hyeopeuihoi” (the Association for the Resolution of the *Jeongsindae* Issue) especially because its two senior leaders, Yun Chong-Ok and Lee Hyo-Jae, who lived through the same colonial period, were very familiar with the term *jeongsindae* as referring to young Korean women who were forcefully mobilized to Japanese military brothels. Korean researchers have already indicated in Korean-language sources that the Japanese military used the *jeongsindae* as a mechanism for forcefully mobilizing Korean women for both military sexual slavery and non-sexual women's labor corps (Chung 2016, 18-19; Kang 1997, 17; Kim 2016, 29). As previously indicated, Veki (2015) also presented results of his analysis of articles focusing on the *jeongsindae*, referring to “comfort women,” included in four major Korean newspapers published between 1946 and 1994. However, never has been found any other historical document that proved the Japanese military's use of the *jeongsindae* or *cheonyeogongchul* as a mechanism to mobilize Korean women to military brothels, as the Japanese government has not disclosed relevant documents (Kang 1997).

In this paper, I intend to show two important things related to Korean

“comfort women” issues, using the testimonies given by 104 Korean “comfort women.” First, I intend to show that a large proportion of Korean women mobilized to Japanese military brothels, their parents, and their neighbors were aware of the meaning of the “*jeongsindae*,” “*cheonyeogongchul*,” or related terms used by the Japanese as the technique of the forceful mobilization of unmarried Korean women. Second, I also want to show that Japanese soldiers, officials, and recruiters of Korean “comfort women” often used the terms *jeongsindae* to characterize their forceful mobilization of Korean unmarried girls and women to Japanese military brothels. By showing these two facts, I intend to refute the criticism by C. Sarah Soh’s and Japanese neo-nationalists that Korean redress movement leaders and scholars conflated the *jeongsindae* with “comfort women” without factual evidence.

As already cited above, both “comfort women” scholars and activists in Korea are well aware that the *jeongsindae* or *cheonyeogongchul* is highly associated with the forced mobilization of young Korean girls and women to Japanese military brothels. Nevertheless, I have decided to write this article for two major reasons. First, no one has challenged Sara Soh’s criticism of Korean scholars and activities in her very influential book for conflating the *jeongsindae* with “comfort women.” Second, as recently as in 2014, Japanese neo-nationalists attacked the *Asahi shimbun* for telling lies regarding the forced mobilization of comfort women. One of the lies they claimed the *Asahi shimbun* told was to associate the *jeongsindae* with Korean “comfort women” in its previous articles (McCurry and McNeill 2015).

The Korean newspaper articles focusing on the forceful mobilization of Korean girls and women by the Japanese military during the Asian-Pacific War published in the post-war period are secondary sources largely based on reporters’ interviews with former Korean soldiers and/or Korean workers mobilized to the Japanese military to war zones. In contrast, Korean “comfort women” survivors’ testimonies include more first-hand information, indicating young Korean women’s and their parents’ perception of the *jeongsindae* and related terms as mechanisms of the forced mobilization of young Korean women to Japanese military brothels. Thus, they are closer to primary data that reflect the life experiences of the women who lived through the dark period in Korean history than newspaper articles published in the post-war period

## Data Sources

This paper is a part of a broader study, a book manuscript that focuses on the “comfort women” issue and the redress movement for Japanese military sexual slavery. For the book project, I use the testimonies given by 103 Korean “comfort women” included in eight volumes edited by the Korean Council and its sister organization, the Korean Research Institute for the Jeongsindae (hereafter, referred to as the Korean Research Institute or KRIC), as one of the major data sets. Six volumes of testimonies include personal narratives by 76 Korean “comfort women” who reported to the Korean Council or the Korean government, and who voluntarily gave testimonies. Two volumes include personal narratives by 27 Korean “comfort women” who worked at “comfort stations” located in China and were trapped and settled there. Members of the Research Institute conducted fieldwork in different Chinese cities and located former “comfort women” in the late 1990s and early 2000s before documenting their testimonies. The KRIC started the testimony project in 1992, using tape-recorded in-depth personal interviews with Korean “comfort women” survivors. The first volume was published in 1993, while the last one was published in 2004 (KC 2000a, 2000b, 2004; KC & KRIC 1993, 1997; KRIC 1995, 2003; KRIC & KC 1999). Many anthologies of surviving comfort women’s testimonies have been published in Korea and other countries. But the eight volumes of 103 testimonies comprise the largest comfort-women testimony collection available now. I have added to the 103 testimonies my own interview with one Korean comfort woman out of twenty interviews I conducted. Thus, the total number cases are 104.

Japanese neo-nationalists have rejected surviving comfort women’s testimonies as credible evidence. But their rejection is neither academically nor practically justified. Academically, oral history has long been accepted as an important component of historical research. Practically, victims’ testimonies have been accepted as the key factor to legal decisions. I want to remind Japanese neo-nationalists of the fact that Radhika Coomaraswamy (1996), a UN-appointed human rights lawyer, obtained testimonies by several Korean “comfort women” first to investigate the “comfort women” issue in 1995.

The interviewers captured information about each victim’s family background during their early years, the process of mobilization to a Japanese military brothel, description of brutal experiences at brothels, return trips home

after the end of the war, life at home, the process of reporting to the Korean Council and the relevant Korean government agency, and participation in the redress movement. They interviewed each victim four or to six times at different time periods for the sake of accuracy and consistency of information. With the exception of the Volume 5 of Comfort Women Testimonies (KC 2001b), the interviewers seem not to have asked questions specifically using the terms *jeongsindae*, *cheonyeogongchul*, or other related terms. Regardless, many Korean “comfort women” survivors who testified mentioned these terms because they clearly remembered hearing them and being fearful of getting mobilized from their villages, towns, or cities by Japanese officials in the late 1930s and early 1940s.

We used content analysis as my research technique in this article. During the process of reviewing the testimonies, I located every instance where informants mentioned that they heard the terms *jeongshindae*, *cheonyeogongchul*, *teishintai*, or similar Korean terms, used either by recruiters or in the form of news circulated in their villages before their mobilization. The news or rumors most likely circulated in the previous year or in the same year when each Korean “comfort woman” was mobilized to a Japanese military brothel. We checked their names, their places of residence, the years of the news about the *jeongsindae* mobilization, their ages, and their marital status. I tried to see how they, their parents, and their neighbors responded to the news or rumors to avoid getting mobilized as the *jeongsindae*.

## Quantitative Data Analyses of Personal Narratives

As shown in Table 1, 24 testimonies (25%) made references to *cheonyeogongchul*, the *chongshindae*, *teishintai* or related terms. As already pointed out, with the exception of testimonies included in Volume 5 (KC 2001b), the interviewers seem not to have specifically asked the informants this question. Thus, 25% is likely to have been an undercount. If they had asked questions specifically about these terms, more informants are likely to have made comments about hearing or being aware of the implications of these terms in relation to their forceful mobilization to Japanese military brothels.

**Table 1. Korean Comfort Women's Statements about the *Jeongsindae* or Related Terms in Their Testimonies by the Year of Their Mobilization to Military Brothels**

Year of News or Mobilization	Number	Source
1937	2	KC & KRIC 1993, 48 (1: Kim Duk-chin)-A KC & KRIC 1993, 169 (1: Lee Sun-ok)-A
1938	1	KC 2001a, 103 (4: Kim Young-ja)-A
1939	2	KC & KIRC 1997, 151 (2: Kim Chun-ja)-B
1940	1	KC 2000b, 82 (5: Sok Bok-soon)-C
1941	6	Our Interview with Kim Yun-shim-A
1942	5	KC & KRIC 1993, 225 (Lee Yong-nyo)-A KRIC & KC 1999, 194 (3: Choi Hwa-sun)-A KC 2004, 270 (6: Kim Bong-i)-A & B KC 2001a, 153 (4: Ch ung Yun-hong)-A KC 2004, 60 (6: Kim Hwa-ja)-A
1943	2	KC 2004, 129 (6: Kang Il-chul)-A KC 2004, 304 (6: Kim Sun-ak)-A
1944	4	KC & KRIC 1993, 229-30 (1: Kim Tae-sun)-A KC & KRIC 1993, 273 (1: Kang Dok-kyong)-B KC & KRIC 1997, 226-27 (2: Park Sun-i)-B KC & KRIC 1997, 239; 248 (2: Kim Eun-jin)-A+B
1945	1	KC & KRIC 1993, 259; 267 (1: Choi Myong-son)-B
Total	24	

**Sources:** The Korean Council 2000a, 2000b, 2004; the Korean Council and the Korean Research Institute 1993, 1997; The Korean Research Institute 1995, 2003; The Korean Research Institute and the Korean Council 1999

**Note:** A=*cheonyeogongchul*; B=*jeongsindae* or *teishintei*; C=the *bongsadan* (the service corps); *bogukdae* (the reserve forces)

Fifteen of them mentioned *cheonyeogongchul*, while ten made references to the *jeongsindae* or *teishintei*. One woman mentioned the *bogukdae* (KC & KRIC 1999, 294) while another woman made a reference to the *bongsadan* (KC 2001b, 81). The *jeongsindae*, the *bogukdae*, and the *bongsadan* have similar connotations, indicating a group of women's voluntary devotees to the Japanese empire. *Cheonyeogongchul* has a similar meaning to the three terms, but seems to emphasize **the obligation** of Korean parents to devote an unmarried daughter to the Japanese empire rather than a group of such women mobilized. Japanese and Korean recruiters of Korean girls and women in Korea, along with the Japanese colonial government's supporting groups (Japanese officials, police and military police officers, and soldiers in Korea), seem to have often used this term to put pressure on Korean parents to devote their daughters to the Japanese empire.



It is surprising to find that more Korean “comfort women” mentioned *cheonyeogongchul* than the *jeongsindae*, especially in the earlier years. As Veki (2015) has analyzed, the articles published in Korean newspapers in the post-war years referred to the *jeongsindae* exclusively to refer to Korean “comfort women.” However, until the first half of 1940, Korean “comfort women” and their parents seem to have been very familiar with the term *cheonyeogongchul* as a symbol of the Japanese military’s forceful mobilization of unmarried young Korean girls to Japanese military brothels, as more and more of the girls were forcefully mobilized in its name. As will be shown in Table 2, the word *cheonyeogongchul* was widely used in four southern provinces in Korea, Gyeongsangnam-do, Gyeongsangbuk-do, Jeollanam-do, and Jeollabuk-do, where Korean “comfort women” were selectively mobilized. The Japanese Government-General of Korea may have enforced the order of *cheonyeogongchul* through local administrators, especially in these provinces, to facilitate the mobilization of Korean girls and women to Japanese military brothels. Since the Japanese Government-General of Korea had already imposed many different types of *gongchuls* (this word basically means that people were obligated to provide or devote things to the Japanese government), such as the *gongchuls* of different agricultural products and copperwares, to Korean families, Koreans were familiar with the obligatory nature of *cheonyeogongchul* (Lee 1997). Although about 60% of Korean “comfort women” were mobilized partly through employment fraud, many of them were mobilized partly coercively. According to our analysis of eight volumes of testimonies, Japanese and Korean recruiters of Korean girls and their Japanese supporting groups initially emphasized the opportunity of Korean girls for employment as bait. However, recruiters later used physical coercion or threats reinforced by weapons to take Korean girls, in case they hesitated to accept the offer of employment. The Japanese Government-General of Korea seems to have created the *cheonyeogongchul* order to make Korean parents feel obligated to allow their daughters to be mobilized ostensibly to Japanese factories or hospitals, but actually to Japanese military brothels.

The first Korean “comfort woman” was shipped to a military brothel in Shanghai when the Japanese Navy initially established military brothels there, and the number began to increase rapidly from 1937 on (Chung 2001, 21), as the Japanese Army began to build “comfort stations” throughout China (Yoshimi 1995, 49). It was in this historical context that two Korean “comfort

women” made references to *cheonyeogongchul* in 1938 for the first time. Chung and Yeo (1996, 164; qtd. in Chung 2016, 12) pointed out that the Japanese military began to mobilize Korean men and women for the war in a large scale in the name of the *jeongsindae* for the first time in 1939. Data in Table 1 suggests that before the Japanese military mobilized Korean women workers for the imperial war in a large scale, the Japanese Government-General of Korea began to engage in mobilizing Korean women to Japanese military brothels, using Japanese officials, police officers, soldiers, and local administrators.

December 1941 was another turning point in Japan’s Imperial War because in the year the Japanese military took aggressive action against the United States, Great Britain, Holland, and their allies by attacking their colonies in Southeast Asian countries. The fact that five of the Korean “comfort women” interviewed for the Korean Council anthologies mentioned news pertaining to the term *cheonyeogongchul* or the *jeongsindae* in 1941 suggests that the Japanese military was getting ready for escalation of conflict against the United States and the Allied Forces and actively seeking “comfort women” from its Korean colony in anticipation. The increasing use of the term *jeongsindae*, compared to *cheonyeogongchul*, by Korean “comfort women” from 1941 on is also likely to have been closely related to the mobilization of many Korean men and women to different types of the *jeongsindae* in the year (Chung 2016, 12-13).

Table 2 classifies all 104 Korean “comfort women” and 24 of them who mentioned the *jeongsindae* or a related term in their testimonies by the province of their last residence at the time of their mobilization to Japanese military brothels. Thirty-four percent of Korean “comfort women” were mobilized from Gyeongsangnam-do, and another 23% were mobilized from Gyeongsangbuk-do. Thus, nearly 60% of them were recruited from the two southern provinces close to Japan. Since Busan was a major port city, a gateway to Japan, conveniently connecting with Shimonoseki, Japanese officials and political and military police officials in Korea seem to have tried to round up Korean girls and women, especially in this area (Chung 2001, 24-25). Many Korean “comfort women” originated from Busan and areas close to it, such as Jinju, Masan, Hapcheon, and Hadong. Many of them were recruited from Daegu, Gyeongju, and other areas in Gyeongsangbuk-do. Many Japanese soldiers and officials were stationed in Busan at that time, and two “comfort stations” were established there (see KC & KRIC 1993, 290). Thus, they were able to gather young Korean women rounded up in the areas adjacent to Busan and sent them

to Shimonoseki for their further distribution to China and other countries. Because of the convenience of their transportation, the second largest number of Korean “comfort women” (N=15) were rounded up in two neighboring provinces (Jeollanam-do and Jeollabuk-do).

**Table 2. Korean “Comfort Women’s” References to the *Jeongsindae*, *Cheonyeogongchul* or Related Terms by the Province of Residence at the Time of Mobilization to “Comfort Stations”**

Provinces	Comfort Women with Testimonies		Comfort Women with References to <i>Jeongsindae</i> , <i>Cheonyeogongchul</i> , or Related Terms	
	Number	%	Number	%
Gyeongsangnam-do	34	33	6	29
Gyeongsangbuk-do	23	22	7	25
Jeollanam-do	16	15	2	21
Chungcheong-do	11	10	3	4
Seoul City-Gyeonggi-do	8	8	5	7
North Korea	10	10	1	4
Others*	2	2	0	0
Total	104	100	24	100

**Sources:** The Korean Council 2000a, 2000b, 2004; the Korean Council and the Research Institute on the *Jeongsindae* 1993, 1997; the Korean Research Institute 1995, 2003; the Korean Research Institute and the Korean Council 1999

\* Japan 1 and Gangwon-do 1

Given these facts, we can expect most Korean “comfort women” who had knowledge of or heard rumors about the *jeongsindae* and *cheonyeogongchul* to have originated from Gyeongsang-do and Jeolla-do.<sup>1</sup> Data given in Table 2 support our expectation. About three-fourths of Korean “comfort women” who mentioned the *jeongsindae* or related terms originated from Gyeongsangnam-do, Gyeongsangbuk-do, Jeollanam-do, or Jeollabuk-do, the four southern

1. Note that the provinces Gyeongsang-do and Jeolla-do are divided into north and south, i.e., Gyeongsangnam-do (southern Gyeongsang-do), Gyeongsangbuk-do (northern Gyeongsang-do), Jeollanam-do (southern Jeolla-do), and Jeollabuk-do (northern Jeolla-do). “Do” means “province,” “nam” means “south,” and “buk” means “north.”

provinces in Korea. Most recruiters of Korean “comfort women” are likely to have visited Busan, Daegu, and other smaller cities in Gyeongsang-do and/or Jeolla-do to round up young Korean women. Young Korean women and their parents who resided in these four provinces seem to have been more familiar with the *jeongsindae* or *cheonyeogongchul* as a mechanism of forcefully mobilizing Korean women to Japanese military brothels than people in other provinces. However, they may have had more difficulties in preventing their own or their daughters’ forceful mobilization because recruiters, Japanese police and military officers, and soldiers worked more effectively there than in other provinces. We will find in the next section that qualitative data support this expectation.

Table 2 shows that ten of the 104 Korean “comfort women” (almost 10%) who gave testimonies lived in North Korea when they were mobilized to Japanese military brothels. Including those women who returned to North Korea after the end of the war, the proportion of Korean “comfort women” who originated from North Korea is much larger than 10% of all Korean comfort women mobilized. However, only one “comfort woman” from North Korea reported that she heard of *jeongsindae* or *cheonyeogongchul* as a method of mobilizing Korean women to Japanese military brothels. It suggests that Koreans in northern provinces were less familiar with *jeongsindae* or *cheonyeogongchul* as a mechanism of mobilizing Korean comfort women.

## Qualitative Data Analysis of Testimonies

In this section, I will first introduce passages from Korean “comfort women’s” testimonies that include references to *cheonyeogongchul* and the *jeongsindae*, and discuss their implications. Most of the passages related to *cheonyeogongchul* have similar themes; they show that “comfort women,” their parents, and their neighbors knew about recruiters’ efforts to forcefully mobilize Korean girls to send them to Japanese military brothels. Furthermore, these passages also demonstrate that the “comfort women” and their parents made great efforts to prevent them from being recruited or mobilized, but ultimately to no avail. The narratives pertaining to the *jeongsindae* are divided into three subsections which show the use of the *jeongsindae* by three different groups.

### *Cheonyeogongchul*

As previously noted, Veki (2014) found many articles that used the term *jeongsindae* to refer to Korean “comfort women” or the mobilization of Korean “comfort women.” However, our analysis of testimonies by 104 surviving Korean “comfort women” indicate that in the late 1930s and early 1940s, Koreans, especially those in Gyeongsang-do and Jeolla-do, were well aware that the Japanese colonial government mobilized young Korean girls to Japanese military brothels using the *cheonyeogongchul* draft notice as a technique of their forced mobilization. Because they were well aware of the colonial government’s effort to mobilize young Korean women, both Korean girls and their parents in the above-mentioned southern provinces made extreme efforts to avoid being mobilized. We cite three “comfort women’s” narratives in the following paragraphs.

Lee Sun-ok (an alias) was the first-born daughter and oldest of four children in a farming family in Yeongdeok, Gyeongsangbuk-do, Korea. Since her uncle on her father’s side was involved in the independence movement, her father and his brother were under constant surveillance by Japanese officials and police officers. When she turned seventeen, a rumor circulated that Japanese officials ordered each family to devote an unmarried daughter. Read the following narrative:

My father was very afraid that the Japanese colonial government would take me away from him for *cheonyeogonchul*. So he discussed with my uncle about how to protect me. They decided to report a fake marriage between me and a man named Mr. Park in another village who was divorced and much older than I. My uncle knew Mr. Park very well because they had studied in Japan and had also engaged in the independence movement together. Mr. Park agreed that he would allow me to get divorced on paper when I would find a man to marry in the future. After we submitted a fake marriage report, I wore my hair up and put a towel on my hair when walking outside to appear like a married woman. We told other people that I got married. (KC & KRIC 1993, 169)

Despite all their efforts, Lee Sun-ok was sent to a military brothel in China through employment fraud. When her family moved to another city, she chose to accept a fake job offer in Japan partly because she was tired of having to

pretend she was a married woman.

Kang Il-Chul, born and raised in Sangju, Gyeongsangbuk-do, was forcefully taken to a military brothel in China in 1943 at the age of 16. She was the youngest of 12 children in her family. She was arrested at home after she had hidden at her mother's friend's house to escape from the *cheonyeogongchul* order. She described how she was arrested by the recruiting team at her home in the following paragraph:

Our village head already spread the rumor. They did not tell us we would go as “comfort women,” but for “cheonyeogongchul.” I had hidden at my mother's friend's home. But, as the youngest child, I used to sleep with my mother, holding her bosom and touching her nipple. Therefore, I felt I could not live in my mother's friend's home any longer. When I cried there, thinking about my mother, she called my mother to get me back home. When I came back home, there was no adult in my house, which was located in a somewhat remote place. (KC 2004, 110-11)

A Japanese-Korean recruiting team, helped by an armed Japanese police officer and a Japanese soldier, rounded her up and took her to a freight truck. The Korean village head told her she would go to a factory to work as a textile weaver. According to the editor's footnote (KC 2004, 111), the police and the soldier left a sheet of paper with Kang's name in a room, which is likely to have been a formal draft notice of *cheonyeogongchul*.

Kim Bong-i lived in Gochang, Jeollabuk-do with her father. Her older brother had already been forcefully taken to Japan to work in a coal mine. She received the *cheonyeogongchul* draft notice to go to Japan to work in a factory in 1942 at age 16. She called it the *jeongsindae cheonyeogongchul* draft notice. She tried to avoid being drafted by hiding herself at home and moving around from place to place, but she was eventually caught outside her home. I introduce her narrative below:

I received a draft notice to go to Japan. I was running away and hiding myself at home. But I was caught in Jangseong. Frankly speaking, I thought the Korean guide was more vicious than the Japanese guy when they arrested me. In my memory, a red or yellow paper was mailed to my house. “Recruitment to a Japanese Factory” was written on the paper.... They would not say “wianbu gongchul.” We all thought it was a *jeongsindae*

*gongchul* draft notice....Many other girls tried to hide, but they were all caught and mobilized without much resistance....I was hiding at home, but I went to Jangseong to purchase medicine for my sick father, and I was caught....When I was being dragged by two guys outside, there were some people looking at us, but they did not do anything to stop them from dragging me. (KC 2004, 270-71)

Her narrative is also interesting because she used two related terms, the *jeongsindae* and *gongchul*, together (*jeongsindae gongchul*). The *jeongsindae* denotes women devoting themselves to comfort Japanese soldiers in the context of the “comfort women” system, while *gongchul* means the obligation to devote something. Thus, the combination of the two words strengthens the meaning of the *jeongsindae*. It also reflects the Japanese colonial authorities’ complete control over the lives of Koreans at that time. Her narrative also reflects the extent of the control Japanese authorities had over Koreans, since she noted that no Koreans intervened (or felt they could do so) even when seeing a young girl physically dragged by Japanese soldiers outside openly.

The above paragraphs from the testimonies given by three Korean “comfort women” seem to warrant the following suggestions regarding *cheonyeogongchul* as a draft notice for the forceful mobilization of Korean women to Japanese military brothels. First, when Japanese and/or Korean recruiters tried to recruit Korean women, they first used deceit of employment in Japan or China as bait since many young Korean women from poor families were looking for jobs. Second, when Korean women were reluctant to accept their offers of employment or when their parents opposed their daughters’ mobilization, Japanese soldiers and police officers in local areas who supported recruiters used the *cheonyeogongchul* draft notice to formally tell them they were obligated to accept the offer regardless of whether they wanted it or not. With this draft notice, the supporting group used force to take Korean women to military brothels. Local Japanese officials, helped by local village heads, located Korean families who had young daughters to meet the *cheonyeogongchul* order. Finally, young Korean women and their parents, especially those in the four southernmost provinces, were well aware of *cheonyeogongchul* as a technique of forcefully mobilizing young Korean women to Japanese military brothels. Thus, both young women and their parents made every effort to escape from the forceful mobilization. But they were helpless as the Japanese colonial



government had complete control over Korean families through its local administrators, supported by Japanese police and military police officers and Japanese soldiers.

Two Korean “comfort women” reported that they were mobilized to military brothels when they were deceived or chose to accept a job offer in Japan to help other Korean families which respectively received the *cheonyeogongchul* draft notice. I would like to introduce one of them. Hwang Geum-Ju was taken to a Japanese military brothel in Manchuria in 1941 at age 18. She reported that she volunteered to accept the offer of a three-year factory job in Japan to help her foster parents who had received the *cheonyeogongchul*<sup>2</sup> draft notice for the factory job. She told me that she chose to accept the *cheonyeogongchul* order for her adoptive parents because, she thought, it was she rather than one of her well-educated adoptive sisters that **needed a factory job in Japan.**<sup>3</sup> However, if she had known that *cheonyeogongchul* meant devoting a daughter to a Japanese military brothel for sexual services, she would not have volunteered to go to Japan on behalf of her adoptive sisters. Table 2 also indicates that, out of ten Korean “comfort women” originating from the northern part of Korea (Hamhung), Hwang Geum-Ju was the only woman who mentioned *cheonyeogongchul*. As already indicated in the previous section on quantitative analysis, it suggests that young Korean women and their parents in northern provinces were probably much less familiar with the association between the *jeongsindae* or *cheonyeogongchul* and sexual services to Japanese soldiers than those in the southeastern provinces of Gyeongsang-do and Jeolla-do. As noted above, Korean “comfort women” who originated from these four southern provinces and their parents had a greater tendency to identify the *jeongsindae* or *cheonyeogongchul* with forced sexual services to Japanese soldiers, and thus they tried to escape from the mobilization through early or disguised marriages or by hiding from Japanese authorities.

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2. According to her testimony included in Volume 1 of anthologies of testimonies, she did not use the term *cheonyeogongchul*.

3. My personal interviews with Hwang also indicate that she chose to go to Japan for a factory job on behalf of one of her foster sisters because she needed to make money with a factory job in Japan while her well-educated foster sisters had opportunities for much better jobs in Korea.



## The Association between the *Jeongsindae* (*Teishintai*) and “Comfort Women”

The testimonies including references to the *jeongsindae* or *teishintai* can be divided into three separate groups. One group of testimonies by five “comfort women” reflect the news or rumor of the *jeongsindae* mobilization of unmarried young women by the Japanese military, and their own and their parents’ fear of the mobilization and utmost efforts to escape from it, including a fake marriage and getting married at early ages. The relevant paragraphs from these testimonies include similar pieces of information introduced in the previous subsection in connection with *cheonyeogongchul*. Another group of testimonies by three women provides information about Japanese school teachers’ effort to persuade or even pressure female Korean students to join the *jeongsindae*. These three students became the victims of their Japanese teachers’ recruitment efforts. Since there was widespread public knowledge of the *jeongsindae* as a mechanism for mobilizing young Korean women to Japanese military brothels in Korea, the recruiters of “comfort women” had difficulty in persuading young Korean women to join the *jeongsindae* for meaningful jobs in Japan. However, Japanese teachers were in a better position to influence Korean female students to join than recruiters who were strangers. Thus, Japanese teachers played an important role in mobilizing their Korean students to military brothels in the name of the *jeongsindae*. The third group of testimonies reflects the Japanese recruiters’ and soldiers’ association between *teishintai* and “comfort women.”

We will start with Kim Bok-Dong’s story. She was the third of six daughters from a family in Masan, Gyeongsangnam-do, Korea (KC & KRIC 1995, 84-85). After completing the fourth grade of elementary school, her mother advised her to stop attending school and to stay at home to avoid being taken or tricked into going to a Japanese military brothel. Two of her sisters had gotten married at early ages to avoid being dragged away by Japanese officials. Since she was only 14 years old in 1941, she thought she would be safe from being forcefully mobilized to Japanese military brothels. However, one day, something terrible happened to her. Below is an excerpt from her narrative:

One day, our village head (*gujang* and *banjang*) came to my house with a Japanese man in a yellow uniform... The Japanese man spoke Korean well. They said to my mother, “You have to devote your daughter to *teishintai*.”

So bring her here now. Don't you think you have to devote a daughter to the nation (Japan) as you do not have a son. If you don't do it, you are a traitor and you cannot live here." When my mother asked them "What is *teishintai*," they replied, "They work in factories that make soldiers' uniforms, and they can make money. When they complete three years of work, they can come home. If they need to get married before that, they can come before. Don't worry." In my memory, when they told my mother to sign a piece of paper, my mother struggled to reject to sign. I could not reject going. In this way, I was forced to follow them. (KC & KRIC 1997, 85)

Kim was taken not to a factory, but to a "comfort station" in Guangdong, China. The above story indicates that the Japanese forcefully mobilized a Korean girl by threatening or at the very least intimidating her mother to devote her daughter to *teishintai*. It also shows that Korean families were well aware that *teishintai* was actually a misleading way of forcibly mobilizing their daughters to Japanese military brothels to serve Japanese soldiers, and that in order to protect their daughters, they married them out at early ages or kept them inside their homes. Nevertheless, Kim's mother could not protect her daughter from being taken against her will to a military brothel, because Japan had complete control over Korea through the Government-General of Korea and the Japanese Army in Korea.

Though some Korean women made more systematic efforts to protect themselves from being taken, many were mobilized to Japanese military brothels anyway. One such example is Kang Mu-Ja, another Masan resident. At the age of 13 (in 1940), she said that she hid in an earthen jar for rice when she heard a rumor that someone had come to her village to take young girls and unmarried women to military brothels. She heard that a few young women in the neighboring villages had been rounded up and taken to Manchuria, and her father learned that the Japanese would not take officially married women on the family registry. Her personal narrative continues:

When I turned 14, the rumor continued that they were forcefully taking unmarried women. I went to hide in our village's cave that was used as a cremation chamber and stayed there for 20 days with two other girls. While hiding, we slept in the room where the mortician who specialized in cremation lived. We heard the bones and bellies of dead bodies burning there at that time...However, my brother asked me to help my

grandmother to get rationed food at the military police station. He said that the officials told him only I could pick it up...My mother changed my hairstyle and put a white towel on my head to make me look like a married woman. I received rice, barley and two pairs of shoes for my brother and grandmother at the military police station. (KC & KRIC 1995, 44-45)

However, three days later, a Japanese police officer and three military police officers in yellow uniforms kicked in the door of her house and grabbed her. Along with 15 other women, she was taken to Busan where many more women joined her group. From there, she and about 35 Korean women were taken to Shimonoseki and then to Hiroshima, Japan. They were given work clothes and tennis shoes. The guiding soldiers said that the dresses given to them were “*teishintai* dresses” (KC & KRIC 1997, 50).

Choi Myung-Sun (an alias) had a very miserable life both after she was sent to Japan for sexual slavery and after she came back home. Ironically, her effort to avoid getting mobilized to the *jeongsindae*, which she rightly knew as women forced to provide sexual services to Japanese soldiers, was the major contributing factor to her miserable life in the two different time periods. In January 1945 when she was 19 years old, a Korean man told her that if she did not do anything she would be most likely to get mobilized to the *jeongsindae*. He advised her that if she went to Japan to work, she would make money and also avoid getting mobilized to the *jeongsindae*. Despite her mother's opposition, she accepted his advice and decided to go work in Japan. However, she was forcefully taken to a Japanese family by two Japanese men and forced to sexually serve a middle-aged Japanese officer as a concubine in his private home (KC & KRIC 1993, 258-61).

She continually begged the officer, his wife, and 20-year old son to send her back to Korea. One day, after two months of residence at the home, the son and wife apparently gave in to her begging and the son took her to a train station while the officer was out of the house. She thought she was going back to Korea, but the son delivered her to another Japanese man, who took her to a “comfort station” in Osaka, Japan. She had a brutal life at the “comfort station” in Osaka, forced to serve many Japanese soldiers every day, a far more terrible life than in the officer's home. She regretted ever having asked the officer and his family to send her back to Korea; even though her life at the officer's home was bad because she was forced to be a concubine, it was better than her life at the

“comfort station.” She contracted a venereal disease and could not treat it with medicine. A medical doctor decided to send her back to Korea for treatment. She returned to her home in Korea in July 1945, one month before the war was over (KC & KRIC 1993, 266-67).

When she arrived back in Korea, there was a rumor that they were mobilizing the *jeongsindae* in Korea. To protect her from the *jeongsindae* mobilization, her mother pushed her to marry a man living in the next house. The marriage arrangement happened so quickly that she did not even know what kind of job her husband had. Since she had not completely recovered from the venereal disease, her new husband became infected. This angered him, and he kicked her out. She went back to her mother’s home pregnant and delivered a baby there (KC & RIC 1993, 267-68).

The above sad life story of Choi indicates first and foremost how cruelly Japanese treated Koreans during the colonization period. It is likely that few Koreans know that young Korean women were mobilized during the colonization period not only to Japanese military brothels, but also to private Japanese homes. In Choi’s case, she was forced to be a concubine in a private home, and due to extraordinary cruelty on the part of the officer’s son and wife, she was then tricked into going to a “comfort station” instead of back home to Korea. Moreover, the story also clearly indicates that young Korean women and their parents knew that the *jeongsindae* was a deceptive mechanism for mobilizing Korean women for sexual services to Japanese soldiers in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Consequently, Korean women tried their best to avoid being mobilized to the *jeongsindae*.

Two testimonies include passages that indicate Japanese recruiters’ and Japanese soldiers’ references to *teishintai* at the time of forceful recruitments or while they were either en route to “comfort stations” or once they arrived at “comfort stations.” This information is very important because it proves that the Japanese military indeed tried to mobilize Korean “comfort women” using the same mechanism of the *jeongsindae* as they did in mobilizing young Korean women workers. Since the Japanese government has not released historical documents, the testimonies given by Korean “comfort women” based on their eyewitness accounts and communication with Japanese officials and soldiers should be accepted as an important source of data.

Sun-i was one of many victims mobilized to a “comfort station” induced by her Japanese teacher or principal who emphasized the opportunity for study

and making money in Japan if she joined the *jeongsindae* (KC & KRIC 1997, 225-26). She recollected what happened to her when she was in the sixth grade in August 1944:

Our homeroom teacher Hujita told us he would help us go to Japan for study. Because of my wish to go to Japan and to attend a girls' school there, I raised my hand. When I told my mother about going to Japan, she strongly rejected my idea. Many of my classmates raised their hands, but they later said that his promise to help us study in Japan was a lie and so they did not want to go. So I told the teacher I would not go either. I do not remember if my teacher clearly talked about “teishintai” at that time. About one month after that, the teacher, along with another man, visited my house and called my name. At that time, I was alone, as my parents were out for work. Scared, I tried to hide in the restroom, but they found me and told me to go with them. Foolishly, I followed them. I was fourteen years old in September 1944 when it occurred. (KC & KRIC 1999, 225-26)

She, along with other Korean women, was taken to Busan and then to a “comfort station” in Toyama-ken in Japan. She met other Korean “comfort women” who were already there. They told her she had joined *teishintai* to serve Japanese soldiers. She did not understand what that meant.

Park's story indicates that her teacher in Korea and the manager/owner of the “comfort station” in Japan used the *jeongsindae* as a mechanism of mobilizing Korean “comfort women.” Considering the fact that Park did not clearly remember if her teacher had mentioned the *jeongsindae* or not, Teacher Hujita may have emphasized the benefit of going to Japan without emphasizing the *jeongsindae*. But, according to the interviewer's search of the elementary school's records, Park, along with another student, was listed as having joined the *jeongsindae* (see KRIC and KC 1995, 335n3). Her teacher may not have emphasized the name of the *jeongsindae* because he already knew that young Korean women and their parents associated the *jeongsindae* with Korean “comfort women.” It is likely that Japanese teachers could have been more persuasive than recruiters who were strangers in Korean villages in persuading unmarried Korean girls to join the *jeongsindae* for sexual services to Japanese soldiers. That was why many Japanese teachers seem to have played an important role in mobilizing Korean students to Japanese military brothels by emphasizing the

association between the *jeongsindae* and good jobs and making money in Japan. However, even Japanese teachers seem to have had difficulty in persuading Korean students to join the *jeongsindae* around 1944 because by that time, most Korean young women and their parents had learned that it was used as a technique for deceptively mobilizing Korean women to Japanese military brothels.

Kim Chun-Ja, like many other Korean “comfort women” victims, was born into an extremely poor family and worked as a maid in different homes and places from the time she was very young. She visited a Korean employment agent in his fifties to find a stable job. The employment agent took her to Cheongjin in Hamgyeongbuk-do (a border city to China in present-day North Korea) and delivered her to another employment agent, a Korean woman, who worked as a recruiter of “comfort women” (KC & KRIC 1997, 150). She, along with a Japanese soldier, took Kim to China by crossing the Tumen River in a train. Kim introduced her communication with the soldier inside the train in the following paragraph:

I asked the soldier in Japanese where we were going. He said I was going to the military as *teishintai*. I asked him what is *teishintai*? He answered that there were many soldiers there and that I would have to sing and live closely with soldiers. I was scared and cried. He said that the soldiers would not hurt me, and that he was taking me to a place where I could eat enough and live comfortably. He said since I could sing well and looked pretty, there would be no problem. (KC & KRIC 1997, 151)

## Concluding Remarks

The Japanese military mobilized manpower necessary for the expanding its Imperial War—soldiers, para-military workers, other laborers, and “comfort women”—largely from Korea. While the mobilization of Korean women for sexual slavery started in 1932, the large-scale mobilization of Korean male and female workers started in 1937 (Chung and Yeo 1996). The Japanese military mobilized Korean female workers in the name of *yeoja geunro jeongsindae* or *jeongsindae*. In contrast, they called Asian women who provided sexual services for Japanese soldiers “comfort women,” “jagbu,” or “wianso chwicopbu” (Chung 2016, 15). However, they could not mobilize Korean women for sexual services

to Japanese soldiers by explicitly using those terms in Korea because it would have been impossible to convince Korean women to accept such demeaning and stigmatizing work. They seem to have used the term *jeongsindae*, which carried far less weight, to deceive Korean women into going to military brothels, before they used the same name for the mobilization of Korean women workers later.

Reviews of Korean newspaper and magazine articles mostly published in the post-war years (1946 and after), based on interviews with former Korean soldiers and workers mobilized to war zones, have supported the fact that many young Korean women were forcefully mobilized to Japanese military brothels in the name of the *jeongsindae*. As pointed out in the introduction of this paper, several authors have already pointed out that the Japanese military used the *jeongsindae* not only to refer to Korean women voluntary labor corps, but also to Korean military “comfort women.”

Our content analysis of 104 Korean comfort women’s testimonies reveals that many Korean comfort women were aware of the *jeongsindae* as the mechanism of forcefully mobilizing Korean comfort women, and that they and their parents made great effort to escape from the mobilization. Moreover, it also shows that recruiters of Korean comfort women and Japanese soldiers who transported Korean women to military brothels associated the *jeongsindae* with Korean comfort women. The fact that Japanese soldiers and Japanese officials used the Japanese word *teisintai* for the *jeongsindae* indicates that the Japanese military used the *jeongsindae* as a mechanism for forcefully mobilizing young Korean women to military brothels, as well as mobilizing Korean women for factory work. Since the Japanese military used the *jeongsindae* as a mechanism for mobilizing manpower from the Korean colony, the massive mobilization of young Korean women to Japanese military brothels scattered in China and other areas was inseparably linked to Japan’s manpower exploitation in a Korean colony.

In addition, the analysis also indicates that even more surviving Korean comfort women remembered *cheonyeogonguul* as a formal draft notice to Korean families to send one of their daughters for the Imperial War. Although recruiters told young Korean women that they would work in factories, they recruited them for sexual services at Japanese military brothels. While the Japanese military used a Japanese word, *teishintei*, to refer to the *jeongsindae*, no one seems to have used a Japanese word to refer to *cheonyeogongchul*. It



suggests that Japanese and Korean recruiters of young Korean women and their supporting groups (Japanese and Korean police officers and village heads) in Korea may have used *cheonyeogongchul* without using its Japanese word. The Japanese Government-General of Korea seems to have created the term *cheonyeogongchul* to put pressure on Korean parents to make their daughters available for mobilization to military brothels through local administrators and recruiters. Considering the awareness of *cheonyeogongchul* on the part of many Korean comfort women and their parents as a mechanism for forcefully mobilizing Korean comfort women, it is surprising that previous studies have not mentioned *cheonyeogongchul* as another mechanism of forcefully mobilizing young Korean women in Korea. We may need to analyze articles published in Korean dailies in post-war years using the key word of *cheonyeogongchul* to see how often this term was mentioned.

The above content analysis of testimonies by Korean comfort women refutes Sara Soh's claim that Korean comfort women scholars and activists conflate the *jeongsindae* with comfort women with no evidence. The eight volumes of Korean comfort women's testimonies published between 1993 and 2004 were available to Sara Soh before she published her 2008 book. If she had read these eight volumes closely, she would have learned that the Japanese military used the *jeongsindae*, *cheonyeogongchul*, or similar terms as a mechanism for forcefully mobilizing Korean "comfort women." Therefore, if she had read them, she likely would not have criticized Korean redress movement leaders and scholars for conflating *jeongsindae* with Korean "comfort women" with no evidence.

As is clear from the second paragraph of her comments cited in the beginning of this paper, Soh criticized Korean redress activists and scholars for identifying the *jeongsindae* with "comfort women" in general, including Chinese, other Asian, and even Dutch women. However, Korean redress movement leaders and Korean scholars have indicated that the Japanese military used the *jeongsindae* and related terms as a mechanism for mobilizing **Korean "comfort women" specifically, not all "comfort women."** It is important for Soh to remember that the Japanese military mobilized Korean "comfort women" to send them to "comfort stations" scattered in China and many other countries and islands, whereas it usually forcefully took other Asian women located in local areas for sexual slavery to "comfort stations" (Hayashi 2015, 113-17; Yoshimi 1995). Soh also needs to remember that the forceful mobilization of



Korean “comfort women” was part of a broader exploitation of manpower in Korea, which Japan felt justified in doing so because Korea was its colony during the Imperial War (Chung 2016, 10-12; Yun 1997). Although the literal meaning of the *jeongsindae* refers to voluntary labor corps, the fact remains that it is also closely associated with the suffering and sexual victimization of many young Korean women at the hands of Japan during the Asian-Pacific War.

Yoshimi Yoshiaki, Hayashi Hirofumi, and other members of Japan’s War Responsibility Center have discovered and disclosed about 1,000 historical documents many of which have proved the forceful mobilization of Asian women to Japanese military brothels by the Japanese military (Hayashi 2015,157). Yet, Japanese neo-nationalists have ignored these findings from Japanese-language historical data and have continued to argue that Asian comfort women participated in Japanese military brothels voluntarily or through human trafficking. Veki (2015) and Korean scholars have shown using Korean newspaper articles published between 1946 and 1980s that the Japanese military used the *jeongsindae* as a mechanism of forcefully mobilizing Korean comfort women to Japanese military brothels. This article based on 104 testimonies by Korean “comfort women” further demonstrates Korean comfort women’s and their parents’ awareness of the *jeongsindae* or *cheonyeogongchul* as a mechanism of forcefully mobilizing Korean comfort women. Significantly, their testimonies also show that Japanese soldiers also used *teishintai* to refer to forcefully mobilized Korean “comfort women.”

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## Abstract

The so-called “comfort women” issue includes two dozen controversial issues that are both practically and academically important. Two related important issues are: whether or not most Koreans were aware of the forceful mobilization of many young Korean women to Japanese military brothels in the post-war period (1946-1989); and whether or not the Japanese military used the *jeongsindae* (the Korean word for “voluntary labor corps”) as a mechanism for forcefully mobilizing young Korean “comfort women.” Korean redress movement readers and a few scholars have given affirmative answers to both questions, mainly using articles published in Korean daily newspapers in the post-war period. Using 104 testimonies given by Korean “comfort women” survivors, this paper intends to show that (1) Korean “comfort women,” their parents, and their neighbors were well aware of the forced mobilization of young Korean women in the name of the *jeongsindae* or *cheonyeogongchul* in the 1930s and early 1940s, and that therefore they made great efforts to escape from the forced mobilization, and (2) there is evidence that Japanese military used the *teishintai* (*jeongsindae*) as a mechanism to forcefully mobilize Korean “comfort women.” By showing these two facts, this paper intends to refute C. Sarah Soh’s claim that Korean redress movement leaders and Korean scholars conflated the *jeongsindae* with Korean “comfort women” with no factual evidence.

**Keywords:** the *jeongsindae*, *cheonyeogongchul*, the redress movement for the victims of Japanese military sexual slavery, the “comfort women” issue

