

## North Korean survivors

### A Sad Homecoming, Part 1 & Part 2

A documentary video produced by News Tapa <https://newstapa.org/eng>

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#### 1. A Sad Homecoming, “A Witness to the North Korean Survivors” – Part 1

What is the limit of human cruelty? We asked this question ourselves after listening to the testimony of former “comfort women” survivors from North Korea that a Japanese journalist Takashi Ito had recorded in 1999.

For over twenty years, Ito has covered stories of survivors of Japan’s war crimes from many different Asian countries. He could cover stories of survivors in North Korea, where South Koreans rarely have access to. The testimonies of North Korean “comfort women” survivors that Ito recorded in 1999, in particular, contain cruel war crimes committed by Japanese military that no one could have imagined.

▲ Mr. Ito video recorded testimonies of fourteen North Korean “comfort women” survivors, from 1992 to 2015.

According to North Korea’s *Committee for Measures on Compensation for Military “Comfort Women” and Pacific War Victims*, an estimate of “comfort women” survivors in North Korea was 218 as of October 2000. However, stories of those North Korean “comfort women” survivors had not been known to South Koreans. For the next two weeks, *Newstapa’s Witnesses* is releasing videos of North Korean “comfort women” testimonies that Ito recorded, in order to reveal details of the horrors at the Japanese military “comfort stations.”

A survivor Gyeongsang Lee (1917-2004)’s testimony in 1992 publicized the existence of “comfort women” survivors in North Korea for the first time. Lee was taken by a Japanese police officer and was forced to become a “comfort woman,” when she was only 12 years old.

“A Japanese man named Dogyo-san told me, ‘I will take a good care of you if you dedicate yourself to the Emperor of the Great Japanese Empire.’ Then this officer visited me for the next several days and made me serve as a sexual slave. I had just turned twelve then, a naïve child under the care of mom. How would I know what being a sexual slave ever meant? He forced me [to have sexual intercourse] and my vagina was totally wounded. I bled a lot on the floor, but soldiers kept coming in and forced me to serve them...” (Gyeongsang Lee)

▲ Late Gyeongsang Lee (1917-2004) was taken to a munitions factory in Changwon, Gyeongsang Nam-do, Korea, when she was 12.

Japanese military’s atrocities and tortures for “comfort women” were too inhumane to even describe. Gyeongsang Lee testified that she got pregnant at the age of 16. She said that Japanese soldiers brutally cut her abdomen, removing her fetus then her womb as well.

“Japanese soldiers talked to each other, ‘There is a baby in her. She is pregnant.’ ‘We need to use the bitch because she is still young and looks good. Just remove her womb.’” (Gyeongsang Lee)

Since Lee's first public testimony, many other survivors came forward to testify their experience as "comfort women" from everywhere in North Korea.

According to a report by North Korea's *Committee for Measures on Compensation for Military "Comfort Women" and Pacific War Victims* published in 2000, 70% of the "comfort women" survivors in North Korea had been taken in their teens, at such a young age. 96 of them (44%) were forcibly mobilized; 74 (34%) were lured by false promises of employment; and the rest were either sold due to debt or recruited to so-called "Korean Women's Volunteer Labour Corps" first and then became "comfort women." 43 of these survivors publicly testified.

"I was 13, just a kid. What would I know? I didn't know anything. Was he able to insert his penis? No. So he took out a dagger from his pocket, grabbed and threw me to the floor, and tore off [my vagina]. After that, I don't know if he did what he wanted. I just passed out. I cannot explain it unless I show you my scars." (Youngsook Kim, 1927-2010, was taken to a "comfort station" when she was 13)

▲ Late Young-sook Kim (1920-2010) was taken to a "comfort station" in Shenyang, China, when she was 13.

Some survivors testified that Japanese soldiers tortured "comfort women" for their recreation. Even after several decades passed since she was sexually tortured, Oksun Jeong (1920-1998) still had scars from torture on her breast and belly.

▲ Late Oksun Jeong (1920-1998) was taken to a Japanese military base in Hyesan City, Yanggang-do, when she was 14.

"I completely fainted when I was being tortured. How could you stay awake when they were tattooing you with poison? My skin's got worn out. These are marks where they pricked with a needle. Look at this. Twelve girls died on site then..." (Oksun Jeong)

In case women refused to serve as "comfort women," they would only end up being slaughtered without mercy by Japanese soldiers.

"One girl said, 'I'd rather die than being treated like this from you bastards! I would rather die.' A Japanese officer said, 'Oh I see!' Then he brought a straw bag and ordered soldiers to behead her. He ordered them to put her head in the straw bag and kept ordering, 'Cut her arms!' They cut her arms and put them in the bag. 'Cut her legs!' Then they put her legs in the bag and cut her body into pieces and put them into the bag. Seeing this, all the girls were screaming. Many girls fainted." (Gyeongsang Lee)

Countless "comfort women" were slaughtered by the madness of the Japanese military.

"They had gathered about 400 women. They were raped 40 times a night. The genitals of those young girls were broken open and bled. Some hundreds of girls died from bleeding. One time I didn't follow their orders. They stripped me except my underwear and burned my vagina with a heated iron rod. They burned me, asking why I didn't follow their direction. Then burned again, asking if I was going to obey them. So, my vagina got so sore and skin peeled off. Even then, dozens of soldiers came to rape me." (Oksun Jeong)

Japanese soldiers were so cruel and the treatments of the women were beyond brutal and inhumane that the word “bizarre” doesn’t describe the severity.

“One day they said some girls were not obeying them. They drove three hundred nails on a board and threw those girls on it. Their underwear was torn, and vagina was pricked with nails. Blood spouted out, just like noodles coming out from a noodle maker. The soldiers killed fifteen girls in this way and said, ‘You will be killed like this, if you don’t follow our orders. Naughty girls are worthless, even less so than dogs. I have no regret killing those naughty girls.’ My heart bleeds when I think about it.” (Oksun Jeong)

Sangok Lee (1926-2005) escaped from a “comfort station,” risking her life. She still has vivid memories of sexual tortures that she experienced and killing of her friends who had come from the same village.

“Tansil and Youngsuk, those girls had come from the same village as me. One day I heard someone groaning. I was not sure what happened, because the sound was coming from someone else’s room. Soon I found that they died and thought, ‘Oh, I also will die like this’ A few months passed like that.” (Sangok Lee)

▲ Sangok Lee (1926-2005) was taken to a Japanese military base in Suncheon, Pyeongannam-do, when she was 17.

Sangok Lee became sterile, due to after effect of her experience as a “comfort woman.” She lived alone unmarried until she died. And her wounds that she suffered for sixty years were not healed until she died in 2005.

“I don’t have any child. How could you live like this? I guess that you all have sons and daughters. I have lived all alone. I don’t have any other demand to ask. Compensate for the indignity that I had to suffer. Why can’t you? It’s been sixty years. Think about it, sixty years! Can you imagine how my heart bursts and how I envy other people when I see those people who live a normal life?” (Sangok Lee)

Just like in South Korea, those “comfort women” survivors in North Korea are passing away one by one. Don’t you think that these testimonies of “comfort women” survivors in North Korea remind us that we should solve the “comfort women” issue not for South Korea only, but for the Korean peninsula together in collaboration between South and North?

## 2. A Sad Homecoming, “A Witness to the North Korean Survivors” – Part 2

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“Eunwollu” is a one-story building in Bangjin-dong, Cheongjin-si, Hamgyeong Buk-do, North Korea. Today, it is used as a medical-clinic. However, it was used for a completely different purpose during the Japanese colonial era. Built in 1936, Eunwollu was a “comfort station” for the Japanese military until liberation. Currently, “Eunwollu” is the only remaining site of “comfort station” for the Japanese military, throughout North and South Korea.

Until 1999, there was another Japanese military “comfort station” called “Punghaeru” not far from “Eunwollu.” Both of these “comfort stations” were created by Duman Yun, a Korean civilian who served in the Japanese Military, following the direction of the Japanese Navy. They say that the Japanese soldiers visited “Eunwollu” and high-ranking officers visited “Punghaeru.”

▲ “Eunwollu” is located in Bangjin-dong, Cheongjin-si, Hamgyeongbuk-do, North Korea. Built in 1936, “Eunwollu” was the Japanese Military’s “comfort station” until liberation. Today, it is used as a medical clinic. Currently, “Eunwollu” is the only site remaining of the Japanese Military’s “comfort station” throughout the North and South.

The *Newstapa*’s *Witnesses* acquired videos about these two places and is going to release them. In addition to those of last week’s witness, four additional witnesses of North Korean Japanese military “comfort women” are going to be released. These are the videos of Japanese journalist Takashi Ito who visited North Korea twice in 1999 and 2015.

Evidentiary documents found in North Korea demonstrate that Japanese government and military were directly involved in the “comfort women” war crimes. According to the “Regarding Recruitment of Military Comfort Station Employees” prepared by the Legal Affairs Division of the Japanese Army in 1938, the military operated “comfort station” in accordance with local circumstances.

“What did these guys do? When they came to the reception desk, they first looked at the displayed photos of “comfort women” and checked the number, the location of the rooms, and the schedule. Then, they would go to the room with the number and line up. The guys waiting in the hallway would check the allocated time to each soldier, and if it’s over the time limit, they would get impatient and kick the door and make a fuss.”

Nakcheon Shin / resident, Bangjin-dong, Cheongjin-si, Hamgyeongbuk-do

This photo taken by the Allied Forces in 1944, vividly shows how brutally the Japanese military “comfort women” suffered from atrocities. The pregnant girl is Youngsim Park, a North Korean “comfort woman.” Takashi Ito interviewed her in 1999.

▲ Youngsim Park was captured by the Allied Forces after Japan’s surrender. The pregnant girl on the right is Youngsim Park.

The number of North Korean “comfort women” survivors was reported as 218. Before they were taken away, they were ordinary girls in colonial Korea who had jobs such as maids,

babysitters, and housekeepers. These ordinary girls taken to be “comfort women” for the Japanese military were treated like a kind of military supplies.

At the age of 17, Youngsim Park was taken to a Japanese “comfort station” in Nanjing, China, where she was forced to live as a “comfort woman” for three years. After that, she was brought to Singapore and stayed there for one year and Myanmar for two years. She had to spend six years in places like hell in pain. Resisting the brutality of the Japanese military resulted in greater pain and wound.

▲ Youngsim Park (1921-2006) was taken to a “comfort station” at the age of 17.

“A Japanese soldier tore [my belly] because I didn’t obey him. I was bleeding a lot. I went to a Chinese hospital to get stitches. The wound was about 50 cm long. When I think of the Japanese soldiers’ atrocities. Even if you are 17, you are still a baby. A baby. When I think of them, it won’t satisfy me even if I beat them to death.” (Youngsim Park)

▲ Geumnyeo Gwak (1924-2007) was taken to a “comfort station” at the age of 17.

“When I refused the officers hugging me, they pulled my hand and twisted it. What would a 16-year-old girl know? The womb was so small for them to penetrate that afterwards that I bled a lot and couldn’t walk. Although they did such a vicious thing to us, they did not apologize. All 20 of us were the same. They dragged the 16 and 17- year-old girls.” (Geumnyeo Gwak)

Japanese military “comfort women” were victimized by Japanese troops while being vaccinated against syphilis. The side effect of a highly toxic syphilis injection was infertility.

▲ Nongsuk Roh (1920- ?) was taken to a “comfort station” at the age of 16.

“The name of the injection was 606. They injected it to us because it prevents pregnancy. They injected it once or twice a month. When you get that shot, you will have to lie down for half an hour because it’ll knock you out. They come in military uniforms and give us injections. More soldiers came on Sundays than other days of the week. Sometimes, more than 30 came in one day.” (Nongsuk Roh)

North Korea’s *Investigation Committee of the Victims of Imperial Japan’s Occupation of Korea* says that the Japanese government and Japanese military set up “comfort stations” and forcibly dragged about 200,000 women from Asian countries, including Korea, to provide “sexual services” to the Japanese soldiers. During the Japanese colonial period, when Japan was engaged in war, “the Pacific War, 1930-1945,” “comfort stations” were established throughout the occupied areas in Asia. The 1942 work log of the Japanese Army’s deputy general manager recorded that more than 400 Japanese military “comfort stations” were built in China, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific.

▲ Sunok Yoo (1923- 2003) was taken to a “comfort station” at the age of 16.

“They didn’t let us go anywhere outside the “comfort station.” To demonstrate how they would kill us all if we don’t obey them, they would cut the heads of girls in front of us, toss them in our direction, boil the cut pieces in a cauldron, and force-fed us from it.” (Sunok Yoo)

There are abundant evidence and testimonies of the victims, the Japanese government is still insisting that there is no evidence of forcible taking away of the “comfort women” by the Japanese military. Also, the “comfort station” named “Punghaeru,” which was still standing

when Mr. Ito first visited the area in 1999, it had changed to a farming field 16 years later. “Eunwollu” has also noticeably been damaged.

North Korean survivors who lived a life full of bloody tears during the Japanese occupation, are passing away one by one, leaving painful testimonies behind. What is the reason why they are leaving these testimonies of the hellish experiences in the past? What is the task left for us?

“I have no other wishes. All I want is a compensation before we all die; and that must not come from private funds like Asian Women’s Fund, but from the Japanese government budget. It is the government’s responsibility. The people have nothing to do with this. Really, my heart is bursting again and again. I still don’t know what to do when I think of the moment when they tore my stomach.” (Youngsim Park)