

On the Recruitment of *Shakuhu* [barmaids] for “Comfort Stations” for the Military in the Expeditionary Army in Shanghai

Author: Governor of Gunma Prefecture

Date: January 19, 1938

File: Documents for Approval, Office of the Minister of Home Affairs (1938, Vol. 1)

Locations: Shanghai (China), Gunma Prefecture (Japan)

Keywords: Mobilization

Annotation by: Hye-in Han, Ph.D. Researcher, Sungkyunkwan University

Annotation Link:

http://contents.nahf.or.kr/search/itemResult.do?levelId=iswc.d_001_0040_0020&setId=221293&position=0

*Translated the original text with editing and added supplementary explanation.

Annotation:

This document is a notification (Bulletin no. 242) issued by the Governor of Gunma Prefecture to the Minister of Home Affairs, Minister of the Army, prefectural governors, Superintendent General of the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department, and so forth. The purpose of this document was to verify the validity of the statements of the “comfort women” brokers who claimed that they conducted a first-round recruitment of “comfort women” between the ages of 16 and 30, as instructed by the Expeditionary Army in Shanghai. At the time, the minimum legal age for licensed prostitutes was 18 in mainland Japan, and accordingly, it was against the criminal law to recruit women under 18 for prostitution. In response to the discrepancy, the Ministry of Home Affairs revised its policy and issued a new ordinance in 1938 to limit the eligibility for “comfort women” to only those who were over 21 years old and already involved in sex work. However, this ordinance was issued exclusively in mainland Japan whereas in colonial Korea, Korean women between the ages of 16 and 30 were forcibly recruited, as initially planned by the military.

Broker Ouchi’s statement referred to in the document is worth noticing. Ouchi stated that after the arrival of Japanese Army in China, the Medical Bureau raised a concern about the increasing spread of venereal diseases among the soldiers who visited Chinese prostitutes. In response to the pressing issue, the military authorities decided to install “comfort stations” for the troops, and the Secret Military Agency in Shanghai contacted Ouchi to allow him to undertake a recruitment of women. Ouchi added that his recruitment activity was endorsed by the prefectural authorities of the Hyogo Prefecture and Kansai region. Furthermore, the Intendance Department of the Army paid the fees charged by “comfort stations” using the budget allocated for “comfort” for the military.

This document is an important source that illustrates the forcible recruitment of women by the Japanese Army/administrative authorities against the law. Whereas the police in Gunma Prefecture made an inquiry to the military about the legality of the comfort women recruitment, other local governments permitted brokers to conduct recruitment activities in their jurisdiction.

Attached are reference materials including a contract, a written consent, a promissory note, and contract details (including the age range of 16 to 30).

Attachments:

- Report on the activities of Tōshichi Ouchi, a recruiting agent of “comfort women” for the

Japanese Army

- Contract, written consent, promissory note, contract details

Sources:

WAM Collection (Police_002)

Collection of the Asian Women's Fund, Vol. 1, pp. 11-21.

Sourcebook by Suzuki, Yamashita, and Tonomura, Vol. 1, pp. 127-130.

Japan Center for Asian Historical Records, A05032040800

Notes:

This document was attached to the larger report "On the Treatment of Women Traveling to China (from the director of the Police and Security Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs, February 18, 1938)."