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Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery in the Japanese Military during World War II, and: Japan's Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery and Prostitution during World War II and the US Occupation (review)

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Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery in the Japanese Military during World War II. By Yoshimi Yoshiaki. Columbia University Press, New York, 2000. 253 pages. \$24.50.

Japan's Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery and Prostitution during World War II and the US Occupation. By Yuki Tanaka. Routledge, London, 2002. xx, 212 pages. \$23.95, paper.

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For almost 58 years I have, in some form or another, been acquainted with the female sexual slavery practiced by the Japanese imperial military. The *ianfu*, or “comfort women” (a euphemism in both Japanese and English), first came to my attention when I was a Military Intelligence Service Language Officer in the U.S. Army. It was in the summer of 1945 at General Douglas MacArthur’s headquarters under the remains of the grandstand of the Santa Ana Racetrack in Manila when American forces were preparing for the invasion of Japan. ATIS (Allied Translator and Interpreter Section), of which I was one small part, was charged at that time with marshaling intelligence in order to attempt to evaluate the morale of the Japanese armed forces as we prepared our contemplated invasion of the Japanese mainland.

To that end, our Report No. 120, entitled *Amenities in the Japanese Armed Forces*, included a section on “Amusements” with a subsection on “Brothels.” Utilizing captured Japanese documents, the report discussed variously general regulations for brothels, business operations, hygiene, discipline, prices, etc. Although female sexual slavery for the Japanese military had begun decades earlier on the mainland of Asia, the specific locales identified in the ATIS report were the Philippines, Burma, Sumatra, and New Britain. For me personally, as a 20-year-old second lieutenant from a middle-class home in Ohio, this information was both eye-opening and memorable. (This report is briefly alluded to by Yuki Tanaka [p. 84], who I suspect did not understand the original purpose of compiling such a report.) Some ten years ago, the *ianfu mondai* (sex-slave problem) surfaced in Japan as a result of archival research by Yoshimi Yoshiaki in the files of the Defense Agency. Having retained over all the intervening years my copy of ATIS Report No. 120, I ultimately provided the *gaiatsu* (foreign pressure) that forced the Government of Japan to admit its role in the propagation of the *ianfu*.

In considering these two books for review, it seems important to understand at the outset both the human and humane factors at stake in the matter of Japan’s *ianfu*. It is shocking to report that the United Nations Commis-

sion on Human Rights meeting in Geneva on April 10, 2003, was once more asked to act in order to seek direct compensation for the victims of Japan's policy of enforced prostitution originally affecting an estimated 200,000 women of multiple nationalities of whom undoubtedly only a few thousand survive. However, as throughout the past decade, the Japanese government, in complete contrast to the German government, has flatly refused to consider any recompense for its myriad wartime atrocities. Relying on the San Francisco Peace Treaty, Japan, supported unstintingly by the United States, has contended that all wartime matters, no matter how heinous, were settled at that time. This adamant attitude has been argued not only in the United Nations but in Japanese, American, and other courts where suits have been pursued on behalf of the former *ianfu*. Unfortunately, none of these suits has succeeded in the courts of Japan, and a proposal in the Diet of a bill "to promote the settlement of the issue of the victims forced into becoming wartime sex slaves" has failed to secure the ruling party's support (*Asahi shinbun*, August 9, 2002).

Thus, perhaps the books by Yoshimi and Tanaka are *ex post facto*. A number of books, analogous to these two, recounting the awful plight of the *ianfu* began to appear in 1995 with George Hicks's *The Comfort Women*. All of these books, including the two under review, cover generally the same ground—forced and deceitful recruitment, institutionalization by the Japanese military, violent and utterly inhumane treatment. They vary perhaps only in the extent of their moral condemnation of the practice of sexual slavery. Accordingly, by now to recount the cruelties and bestial iniquities visited upon these enforced sexual laborers seems almost prurient. In that milieu, then, history gets understandably rather short shrift in the overheated exposition of a massive "sex industry" and in the fervent damning of it. What not only historians but the world at large profoundly need are thoughtfully interpretive explanations of the *ianfu* enterprise in the context of Japanese culture, society, and history.

Neither of these books deals with the *ianfu* in a larger historical context. Not only is Yoshimi's work a more scholarly approach than Tanaka's, but Tanaka draws heavily on Yoshimi's original archival research. Neither book, however, deals sufficiently with military prostitution in terms of either the history of prostitution in Japan or the general subservience of women in a traditionally warrior-military male-dominated society. What neither book explains is the seeming inability, even today, of the Japanese government or many Japanese people to comprehend why foreigners are so "upset" about the *ianfu*. And neither book fulfills its historian's responsibility to examine the problem of Japanese military sexual slavery in depth with care and detachment. Strangely, however, in an "Epilogue" that might well have been a prologue, Tanaka begins to grapple with some of the real issues in trying to understand female sexual slavery in the context of Japanese society and culture.

Yoshimi's book includes a bibliography while Tanaka's does not. Interestingly, neither Yoshimi writing in Japanese in 1995 nor Tanaka writing in English in 2002 indicates any knowledge of the very extensive literature in English, both scholarly and popular, which has been devoted to the *ianfu*. Nor, for example, does either author really utilize the extensive literature on the *karayuki-san* (Miss "Going to China"), the Japanese prostitutes who between 1870 and 1920 were without doubt a principal source of Japan's foreign exchange. These women, their procurers, their pimps, and their managers numbered in the thousands throughout Siberia, China, and particularly colonial Southeast Asia where their presence was welcomed and where their contributions to the local economy were extremely significant. This entire enterprise and the Japanese government's acquiescence in and tacit support of it is an obvious historical premise for the subsequent *ianfu*. Yoshimi has a single very brief mention of the *karayuki-san* while Tanaka devotes some six pages to them in the "Epilogue."

To his credit, Tanaka, at the end of his book, does articulate a connection between the *karayuki-san* and the *ianfu*. "In both cases serious criminal acts were involved. The source of *karayuki-san* was mainly impoverished families in the lower strata of Japanese society" (p. 173). However, on the same page Tanaka contends that "for political, diplomatic, security, medical and other reasons, the Japanese military authorities changed the supply source for the comfort women system from the homeland to Japan's colonies and occupied territories, and adopted methods of direct enslavement to secure the system" (p. 173). Of course, his own writing belies this statement since, in fact, the "supply source" had not changed—it had simply been greatly expanded. Tanaka, in his aggressive style, vehemently condemns the occupation forces for not pursuing the recruiters and purveyors of the *ianfu* as war criminals. However, he does not record that the Japanese themselves have never charged anyone for such activities nor, unlike the Korean, Filipino, Indonesian, and Dutch women, has any Japanese *ianfu* ever identified herself as such.

Neither author, in fact, deals in any detail with the role of Japanese women as *ianfu*. Interestingly, in this regard, according to Kamei Akiko, a former teacher, "In Japan there is a rape myth, which says that the victim of a rape is always to blame." And, speaking recently, a member of the Diet, Ota Seiichi, said in regard to a reported gang rape at a university in Tokyo, "Boys who commit rape are in good shape" (both quotations from the *New York Times*, June 29, 2003). Is it then possibly more comprehensible why the Japanese government continues its passive response to international condemnation of the *ianfu* heritage and why any Japanese women who were themselves *ianfu* have failed to reveal their past?

Interestingly, too, neither author mentions the Asian Women's Fund established in Japan in 1995 as a seeming response to international pressure on the Japanese government to make amends for the *ianfu*. The Asian

Women's Fund was very carefully structured to be funded by and administered by private groups and individuals with the government making an annual "contribution" of ¥300 million. The money collected including private donations since 1995 only amounts to just over four and a half million dollars. These funds were to be made available as "atonement" to the surviving *ianfu*. In fact, in seven years only 266 individuals in South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, and the Netherlands have taken money from the fund. The great majority of the surviving foreign *ianfu* and their respective governments have maintained that they must have direct payment from the Japanese government together with official apologies (*International Herald Tribune*, November 22, 2002).

In May 2003, the Asian Women's Fund announced that it would cease "atonement" payments and would devote the remaining money to current issues facing women, such as domestic violence. Further, what has never been publicly revealed is that money from the Asian Women's Fund has been used to support graduate students of a number of Japanese academics whose names appear as supporters of the Fund. Most of these same academics view Yoshimi and Tanaka with contempt and malign them as leftist traitors for their "scandalous" writing.

It is, I believe, a given that sexual slavery was a heinous practice and that women were thoroughly victimized by it. "Drugstore paperbacks" can and readily do describe the specific horrors of Japanese military prostitution. Nor, I believe, is the immorality of the system at issue. What is needed, therefore, is a comprehensive, insightful, contextual history of female sexual slavery in Japan with appropriate interpretation and analysis. Unfortunately, neither of these books fulfills that requirement. Rather, what both authors have written is history as polemics. There is a tremendous amount of heat in both books but not a great deal of light. Serious historians will have to wait for a dispassionate, scholarly treatment of the *ianfu mondai*.

The History of Anglo-Japanese Relations, 1600–2000, Volume II: The Political-Diplomatic Dimension, 1931–2000. Edited by Ian Nish and Yōichi Kibata. Palgrave, New York, 2001. xi, 317 pages. \$69.95.

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A century ago, Japan and Great Britain concluded the momentous Anglo-Japanese Alliance, the first alliance between a Western and a non-Western nation on an equal footing. This alliance served as the backbone of Japanese