The "Comfort Women" Controversy: History and Testimony

Yoshiko Nozaki

The "Comfort Women" Controversy: History and Testimony*

By Yoshiko Nozaki

[A] conference of historians, psychoanalysts, and artists, gathered to reflect on the relation of education to the Holocaust, watched the videotaped testimony of the woman in an attempt to better understand the era. A lively debate ensued. The testimony was not accurate, historians claimed. The number of chimneys was misrepresented. Historically, only one chimney was blown up, not all four. Since the memory of the testifying woman turned out to be, in this way, fallible, one could not accept--nor give credence to--her account of the events. It was utterly important to remain accurate, [lest] the revisionists in history discredit everything. A psychoanalyst . . . profoundly disagreed. "The woman was testifying," he insisted, "not to the number of the chimneys blown up, but to something else, more radical, more crucial: the reality of an unimaginable occurrence."
--Dori Laub[1]

Introduction

In recent years, women's testimonies have provided crucial evidence for challenging normative views of history. Testimony as such has been "an act of memory situated in time," "vital" to historical knowledge, as it "dislocate[d] established frameworks and shift[ed] paradigms" of the discipline.[2] The power of words has also been evident in current educational practices. Teachers working at different levels of education--from a classroom where twelfth grade students read I, Rigoberta Menchu[3] to a classroom at Yale where college students watched films of Holocaust survivors[4]-- have reported that the testimonial narratives of previously marginalized voices have powerful transformative effects upon the consciousness and actions of students.

The use of testimony in history, however, often brings with it tension, uncertainty, and conflict--be it epistemological, methodological, ethical, or otherwise--with respect to research and teaching practices. As one critic observes, I, Rigoberta Menchu "played a conspicuous role in the ideological conflicts that burst out in the field of education in the United States" in the late 1980s and early 1990s.[5] Clearly, history involves social and cultural struggles over interpretations of the past. Feminist historian Joan Scott has called this the "politics of history," as historical interpretations are "not fixed . . . but are rather dynamic, always in flux." It is important that historians to attend to the "conflictual processes that establish meanings . . . [and] the play of force involved in any society's construction and implementation of meanings."[6]

This article examines the Japanese controversy over the "comfort women" (ianfu) system during Japan's Asia-Pacific War (1931-1945) and attempts to include that history in school textbooks.[7] The testimonies given by former comfort women in the 1990s forever changed the paradigm of historical research on the subject and became the focus of charged debate among intellectuals of different disciplinary and ideological backgrounds, as well as the target of

Japanese neonationalist attacks.[8]

The existence of comfort women was ubiquitous knowledge in Japan from the late 1930s, despite censorship. In the 1990s, feminist movements inside and outside Japan, and above all the victims who broke silence and gave testimonies,[9] showed the direct role of the Japanese state and military in creating and maintaining a system of forced prostitution and systematic rape of women from colonized and occupied territories. When the voices of victims were reinforced by the research findings of Japanese scholars who unearthed documents proving the role of the Japanese military in maintaining the system, official denials melted away. By examining the process, through which the challenges to the normative interpretation were posed and the ways they were countered, this article provides a comparative perspective for understanding contemporary controversies over women's voices, testimony, and history generally.[10]

Challenges to the Meaning of Comfort Women in Postwar Japan

A number of reports, diaries, and memoirs published in Japan during and after World War II mentioned military comfort facilities on various war fronts and throughout territories occupied by Japanese imperial forces.[11] In these writings, the term ianfu (comfort women) was a euphemism for prostitutes who provided sex to men in service. Although the story had no place in Japan's official war history, it was told and retold privately as a nostalgic (and sometimes romantic) episode in men's memoirs and novels.

In the 1970s and 1980s, several publications appeared that took somewhat more critical views of the comfort women issue. One of the first was a book written by the non-fiction writer Senda Kako in 1973.[12] Senda, a former journalist, conducted extensive research and interviews, and from these he concluded that the women's situations had been "pitiful."[13] Senda's work was based almost wholly on sources and recollections of Japanese men who had served in the war--only a few Japanese former comfort women spoke of their experiences, and the two Korean former comfort women he interviewed remained silent. Senda's book became a best seller. The term he used for the women jugun-ianfu (comfort women serving in the war), would later become contentious, came to have a wide circulation.

Feminist approaches began to appear after the Japanese journalist and feminist Matsui Yayori (1934-2003) took up the issue. In 1984, Matsui published a short article in Asahi Shinbun, which marked the first time for any major newspaper to address the issue. Matsui's interviewee, a former comfort woman whose name was not disclosed, was a Korean living in Thailand. She spoke of her experience this way:

The life of comfort women was this--during the day doing laundry of soldiers' clothes, cleaning the barracks, and some heavy labor such as carrying ammunition, and at night being the plaything for the soldiers. There were days when I was made to serve scores of men beginning in the morning. When I resisted--even just a little--I was beaten by the supervisor, pulled by my hair, and dragged around half-naked. It was a subhuman life.[14]

Matsui's article triggered no significant public reaction. It was only after the successes of South Korean democratic and feminist movements in the late 1980s, freeing former comfort women to speak of their experiences for the first time, that the issue became international, forcing the Japanese government to recognize the comfort women as a significant part of Japan's unresolved war issues. Yun Chung-ok, a professor at Korea's Ewha Womans University, was an important catalyst in this development. In the late 1980's she met with Matsui to exchange

information about the comfort women, and in 1990 she wrote a series of reports on the issue for a Korean newspaper.[15] Yun's reports ignited and enraged the South Korean public, prompting calls for redress from the Japanese government. They also catalyzed Japanese women's groups and political parties, many of which began to call for a governmental inquiry into the issue as a war atrocity.

In a Diet session in June 1991, the Japanese government denied the involvement of the wartime state and its military in the matter--further enraging South Koreans. Former comfort woman Kim Hak-soon was so angry that she decided to "come out" as a way of forcing the Japanese government to confront the issue. She was the first Korean woman residing in South Korea to reveal herself in public as a former comfort woman.[16] In the fall of 1991, Kim testified before the Japanese public. Her testimony, translated, recorded, and later published, began with her half century of silence and the decision eventually to break that silence:

For these fifty years, I have lived, by bearing and again bearing [the unbearable]. For fifty years, I have had a heavy, painful feeling, but kept thinking in my heart about telling my experience some day. . . As I try to speak now, my heart pounds against my chest, because what happened in the past was something extremely unconscionable . . . Why does [the Japanese government] tell such a lie [to deny its knowledge of comfort women system]? Actually, I was made into a comfort woman, and I'm here alive.[17]

Kim's testimony was the most significant event in establishing a new interpretation of the comfort women system. Hearing her story on Japanese television, historian Yoshimi Yoshiaki went straight to the archives of the Self-Defense Agency (Boeicho), where he found evidence that conclusively demonstrated the involvement of the Japanese Imperial Army in organizing the comfort women system for its soldiers (though the nature of the comfort women system and the state/military involvement, including the use of force and coercion, still required further study). In 1992, he published his findings in major Japanese newspapers. Faced with documentary evidence from its own archives, the Japanese government had no choice but to acknowledge military involvement, and Prime Minister Miyazawa Kiichi officially apologized to South Korea.

In 1993, a Japanese government hearing for fifteen former comfort women in Seoul revealed that many women had been made to serve as comfort women involuntarily. Later that year, Chief Cabinet Secretary Kono Yohei made an official statement (danwa), essentially admitting that the Japanese Imperial Army had been directly and indirectly involved in the establishment and administration of comfort facilities. The government also acknowledged that coercion had been used in the recruitment and retention of the women, and called for historical research and education aimed at remembering the fact. The Kono statement became the basis for addressing the issue of comfort women in education, and by 1997 almost all school history textbooks and those in related subjects included a brief reference to comfort women.[18] One history textbook for junior high school read, "[M]any women, such as Korean women, were sent to the front as comfort women serving in the war."[19] Such statements, however bland, served as a legitimate window through which teachers and students could address the issue in classrooms.

Subsequent historical research has uncovered more disturbing details about the comfort women system.[20] Scholars estimate that between fifty thousand and two hundred thousand women were enslaved to provide sexual service to Japanese officers and soldiers. The majority of these women were Korean and Chinese (there were also some Japanese), but

they included women from many other countries, including Thailand, Taiwan, Indonesia, East Timor, Malaya, and Holland. Many non-Japanese women were minors, rounded up by deception or under conditions of debt slavery, and some were violently abducted.[21]

Prostitution for military personnel in war zones and occupied territories was widely practiced during and prior to World War II,[22] but Japan's comfort women system was unusual in the extreme forms of coercion and oppression imposed on women, including teenage girls brought from Korea and Taiwan. The evidence reveals that state and military authorities at the highest levels were extensively involved in the policymaking, establishment, and maintenance of the system, and in recruiting and transporting women across international borders.[23]

One result of both the Japanese government's apologies and of recent scholarship on comfort women was backlash from neonationalist groups. In particular, neonationalists objected strongly to both the government's admission of state involvement in the matter and to the inclusion of the issue in school textbooks. They have attacked politicians who support the government's apologies as well as historians' findings about comfort women. They have also targeted contradictions in the testimonies of comfort women in an effort to discredit their accounts.

Historical Debates:

Neonationalists vs. Progressive and Feminist Historians

Making and keeping the issue of comfort women controversial has been one of the most effective strategies pursued by neonationalists. In particular, they have focused on minor or technical details of the facts presented by women's testimonies and historical research, pointing out errors and the impossibility of verification.[24] For example, in the early 1990s, some school textbooks referred to the women in question as jugun-ianfu (comfort women serving in the war). Neonationalists, however, argued that jugun-ianfu was not the "historical term," meaning that it was not the term that was used officially (and unofficially) during the war. Therefore, they have insisted, the term must be deleted from school textbooks.[25]

There is a modicum of truth in the nationalist claim: the term jugun-ianfu was a postwar invention, gaining a wide currency with Senda's work. During the war, the military officially called the comfort facilities ianjo or ianshisetsu (ian means "comfort"), designating for the most part the military comfort facilities but sometimes referring to private brothels. For example, one of the key documents Yoshimi discovered in 1991 (one that led to Prime Minister Miyazawa's official apology in 1992) was subject indexed as "Gun Ianjo Jugyofu-to Boshu ni kansuru Ken" (Matters concerning the recruitment of women to work in military comfort stations).[26] The women were variously called as ianfu (comfort women), shugyofu (women of indecent occupation), shakufu (women serving sake), and tokushu-ianfu (special kind of comfort women), but not jugun-ianfu.[27]

Semantic issues aside, however, neonationalist efforts to undermine the history of the comfort women--and to erase it from school textbooks--seem manipulative at best. They argue, for example, that the term jugun, as part of a compound noun (e.g., jugun-kisha, the term for war correspondents; and jugun-kangofu, the term for war nurses), indicates the status of gunzoku, or civilian war workers (those officially on the payroll of the army and/or navy). The comfort women, they argue, were not in that category. Historians such as Yoshimi have refuted this argument by pointing out that the term jugun was (and is) commonly used to mean "going to the front," or "serving in the war," and as such it was not used in the same way as gunzoku. For example, most war correspondents

were not employed by the Japanese military (the army only came to have its own correspondents after 1942), but regardless of their employment status, they were (and are) usually called jugun-kisha.

Moreover, Yoshimi and others have pointed out the obvious fact that terms used in historical research (and education) are not necessarily the precise terms that were used during the period under study. (For example, people in the medieval period never called their time medieval.) In their view, the real problem with the use of the term jugun-ianfu in school textbooks is not that it was not officially used in wartime since the term became commonplace in recent years. Rather it that it is euphemistic. "Comfort" (ian) hardly convey a situation of the women that was, in fact, enslavement. The point is well taken. Although many scholars at present prefer using the term gun-ianfu (military comfort women) or Nihongun-ianfu (Japanese military comfort women) for its preciseness, what is critical, whatever term is used, is that explanation be provided.[28]

Another point of dispute has been over the types, agents, and extent of coercion. Neonationalists have made an issue of the term kyosei-renko (taking by force), a compound noun commonly used to refer to the Korean and Chinese men brought to Japan to labor in places such as coalmines and factories during the war. Neonationlists has made an issue of it since attacking the 1997 edition junior high school textbooks for their use of the term kyosei-renko in relation to the comfort women. By defining the term as an act of "something like slave hunting by the military and /or government authorities" (a narrower definition than most historians' usage signifying the involuntary nature on the part of the workers), they argue that no (documentary) evidence has been found to suggest that kyosei-renko took place in recruiting comfort women. They also argue that official documents indicate that the military and police instructed traffickers to follow the law and regulations in their recruitment of comfort women (procuring women for prostitution was legal, but regulated), and that the testimony of Yoshida Seiji, the only person who publicly acknowledged the violent means he and his co-workers used to recruit comfort women, lacks credibility in several key issues such as dates and places.[29]

The neonationalist arguments were (and are) misleading. First, no 1997 edition junior high history textbooks used the term kyosei-renko in describing the comfort women. The term kyoseiteki (forcibly) appeared in one text and the term renkoshite (took) appeared in another, but not kyosei-renko.[30]

Second, it is a illogical to suggest that no state or military force was used because no written official order has been discovered. While admitting that they have found no official documents that ordered the use of military or police force for the recruitment of women--in particular, in colonized regions such as Korea and Taiwan--Yoshimi and others emphasize the fact that many wartime official records were destroyed by the military at Japan's surrender. Besides, the state and its military had no need to use so explicit a language as "use force to round up women and send them to comfort facilities" to achieve its goals.[31]

In the absence of official document(s) sanctioning the use of force, progressive and feminist historians have presented other evidence to document the fact that the military and government authorities were directly involved in the procurement, shipping, and management of the comfort women, and were aware of traffickers' use of violence and deceptive tactics. Overwhelmng evidence shows that colonial authorities in essence condoned such traffickers' behavior as well as their trading very young girls in Korea and Taiwan.

In addition, detailed testimonies by former comfort women document cases in occupied territories, such as China and Southeast Asia, where government and military authorities themselves took women by force. Finally, coercion was widespread not only in the recruitment of women, but also in forcing them to stay and work in the comfort facilities.[32] Yoshimi and others suggest that the neonationalist focus on the term kyosei-renko is simply a smokescreen to divert (public) attention from the main issue: the coercive nature of the military comfort women system.

Progressive and feminist historians seem to be winning the empirical and analytical debate. But if the neonationalists have lost many points, they continue to circulate their views not only through that part of the media that they dominate such as the Sankei Shimbun, but throughout the mainstream mass media. And if progressive and feminist historians dominate the discussion in historical circles, neonationalists exhibit formidable strength in the popular arena where the controversy has attracted a large audience. For example, Kobayashi Yoshinori, a popular cartoonist who had once fought on behalf of some AIDS victims, has published a series of best-selling comics in magazines and volumes, promoting neonationalist arguments on the war. The ability of neonationalists to keep the issue controversial has led the public to feel that the issues remain unresolved.

Right-wing political pressures led a number of textbook publishers to remove references to comfort women from their 2002 edition junior high history textbooks. Out of eight texts, only one included the phrase comfort women (ianfu) and two others included the phrase comfort facility (ianshisetsu).[33] This trend continues as none of the 2006 edition textbook drafts refers to comfort women. One text mentions the issue, but only in a footnote touching on the recent development by which the unresolved issues of war have been brought to the Japanese court.[34]

A "Poststructuralist" Feminist Critique of "Positivism" in History

In the battles between neo nationalists and progressive/feminist historians, some critics have looked to "postmodern" approaches to replace empirical approaches to the issue of comfort women. In a provocative essay, noted Japanese feminist Ueno Chizuko criticizes as "positivist" (jissho-shugi) the arguments of both neonationalists and progressive/feminist historians.[35] Citing "poststructuralist" theories, Ueno maintains that the issue of comfort women is linked to fundamental questions about the methodology of historical studies. She asks: "[I]s a historical 'fact' such a simple thing that it looks the same to whoever looks at it?"[36]

According to Ueno, the positivist approach accepts written documents as the first and only legitimate source for the study of history (bunshoshiryo shijo-shugi). This has allowed neonationalists to discredit the testimonies of former comfort women on the grounds that no official documents have been found showing that the state and the military took women by force. In her view, progressive and feminist historians have erred in attempting to refute the nationalists by advancing the positivist study of history. Commenting on a televised debate on the issue, Ueno charges that:

Yoshimi Yoshiaki, a conscientious historian who has contributed most vigorously in discovering the historical materials concerning the issue of comfort women, driven into a corner by the questioning of nationalists such as Kobayashi Yoshinori, finally admitted that no written historical materials exist that prove in due form the involvement of the Japanese military. If one stands on the doctrine of the written historical material as the first and only source, one has no choice but to admit "no." It became more or less a shared understanding that the documents Yoshimi found and reported in 1992 can be indirect evidence for kyosei-renko (taking by

force), but not the historical source that substantiates it as a fact.[37]

At the heart of Ueno's interpretation is the suggestion that positivism "denies the 'evidentiary power' of the victims' testimonies," and, thus, discredits "the 'reality' [experienced and told by] the victims." Ueno holds that to negate the testimonies of the former comfort women is to trample their dignity underfoot. Instead, she argues for the importance of recognizing "a variety of histories," or "pluralistic histories," which would represent history from individuals' differing realities. This means that there is no necessity to choose just one history from the variety.[38]

Progressive Historians' Reply to Ueno

Ueno's argument created a stir among progressive and feminist historians. For example, Yoshimi responded that no serious Japanese historian today holds that written historical material is the first and only source for the study of history, still less that official state documents are the only legitimate historical sources. He also noted that it is common sense among historians that "the picture of history is not unitary even in cases where [historians] address the same object." Yoshimi cited the difference between two versions of a life history told by the same former comfort woman (a Resident Korean living in Okinawa). That difference, he suggested, is based on the differences between the interviewers' social locations and positions--one a Japanese feminist, and the other a Korean support group.[39]

Yoshimi maintains that historical facts need to be reconstructed utilizing diverse sources such as official and unofficial documents, testimonies, and other kinds of evidence; and that theories and methods of history are tools for historical analysis and reconstruction. In his view, a reconstructed history needs to be evaluated in terms of its persuasiveness and logical coherence--which for him is "verification."[40] Yoshimi questions whether Ueno's position that there are no "facts" or "truths" in history, only "realities reconstructed from given perspectives" ultimately suggests that one's viewpoint is the only thing that matters in studies of history. This, for Yoshimi, is highly problematic. As he puts it:

If so, . . . which "reality" to choose would be decided by determining which [viewpoint] to choose from the [various] "viewpoints" that construct it [history]. This would result in either agnosticism, or the situation of [choosing based on] beliefs and tastes, i.e., which viewpoint one believes or prefers.[41]

"At least, if it's scholarship," Yoshimi argues, "it should be questioned which reality, from among various 'realities' reconstructed, has persuasive power and which has a basis."

Yoshimi rejects Ueno's view that pointing out the exaggerations and mistakes in the victims' testimonies is to deny the power of testimonial evidence. It is natural that mistakes or inconsistencies occur in testimony concerning events half a century earlier, just as mistakes and inconsistencies, not to mention deliberate falsehoods and obfuscation sometimes found in official war documents, may be found in documentary evidence. For example, a woman testified that she had been forced to work in a military comfort facility in the late 1930s in Japan, but since no military comfort facilities are known to have existed inside Japan at that time, Yoshimi holds that it is difficult to take this particular testimony at face value.[42] In another example, a former comfort woman gave contradictory accounts—on one occasion, she stated that she had been taken by force, but on another occasion, she stated she had accepted the job to earn money. Yoshimi reminds us that the fact that the woman consented to be sent to the front (in this case Burma) does not absolve the military from responsibility for its brutal treatment of her within the comfort women system, leading her to

attempt to commit suicide by drowning. He states, "I would like [Ueno] to consider this kind of effort [required] for the reconstruction of the reality."[43]

Yoshimi's point highlights the fact that oral history involves careful piecing together and assessment of information given in multiple testimonies. This is all the more true when the evidence pertains to events of half a century earlier. While Yoshimi acknowledges the possibility of a (postmodernist) examination of testimonies as (contemporary) discursive practices, he insists that the current controversy over the comfort women issue is principally over the historical facts. Therefore, his efforts have been geared towards the reconstruction of those facts.

Other historians have joined the debate. I would like to consider the insights of one of them, Yasumaru Yoshio, a specialist on the history of Japanese thought. While finding some value in Ueno's argument, Yasumaru disagrees with her assessment of Yoshimi as a positivist. Yasumaru points out that Yoshimi began his study because he was deeply moved by the testimony of Kim Hak-soon, meaning that at the heart of his study are his sensibility and ethics. Having taken up the subject, Yoshimi has brought to bears his skills and knowledge as an historian.[44]

One important issue to Yasumaru is the activities of traffickers in the colonies who were active agents and mediators between the women and the military, and who played a major part in the everyday violence, including taking women by force or kidnapping them. Without their existence and systematic operations, Yasumaru argues, it would have been impossible for the state to collect such a large number of women. Extending Yasumaru's arguments, it is clear that historians and educators need to examine critically not only the direct role of the imperial state and military but also the dynamics of class, gender, race, and ethnicity that shaped the ideologies and praxis of colonial relations in order to grasp the milieu within which the traffickers committed everyday violence.

The Nationalist Appropriation of Postmodern Vocabulary

While the debate over the appropriate paradigm for historical research has continued within the progressive/feminist camp, some neonationalists have begun to speak a kind of postmodern discourse, with their own particular twist. They are calling for the construction of a Japanese history from "the Japanese perspective," stressing unity and coherence.

For example, Sakamoto Takao, a historian of Japanese political thought, has argued that no education is value-neutral and that the purpose of education, especially history education, is to foster "national consciousness." In his view, "history is a story," and the Japanese history taught in schools should be "a story of the formation of a nation, a people," which aims at the construction of a sense of national unity.[45]

Sakamoto here employs the discourse of a national history that is not necessarily based on verified facts drawn from studies of history, but one in which facts are "fittingly woven into the story" in order to enhance its reality. In Sakamoto's view, concepts such as "state" and "nation" are, in some sense, fictions. "However," he contends, human beings "cannot live without fictions," and "efforts" by human beings "to maintain the fictions" are needed. The vocabulary used here may have been borrowed from recent postmodern literature, but it curiously (and ironically) serves modernist ends, specifically the construction of a national unity by [re]instituting and privileging national history.[46]

Sakamoto's neonationalist postmodern discourse finds echoes among those in mass media and on the lecture circuit, indicating that it has gained

some currency in the public arena. In the fall of 1996, for example, Sakurai Yoshiko, a former television news anchor woman and current freelance journalist, gave a lecture at an in-service teacher training program held by the Yokohama Education Board for the promotion of international understanding.[47] Sakurai spoke on the comfort women issue and textbook questions. She began by stating that "all the textbooks . . . assume 'taken by force' as a major premise; however, . . it is my conviction that [the women] were not 'taken by force.'"[48]

The problem, in her view, was the "structure of the Japanese psyche," which was "self-tormenting." She then proceeded to argue for the concept of history as a story (monogatari) of a nation.

What I'd like to say is that history is a story…It is a story of individuals, and at the same time it should be a story of the respective nation. Therefore, … it should be natural that Japan has its own way of viewing [history]. It is natural that . . . China has its own view and Korea has its own view, and it is natural and reasonable that all three are separate [and different].[49]

For Sakurai, Japan's (hi)story needs to be told from the Japanese perspective, that is, a perspective through which the younger generation come to love the nation.

The new postmodern line put forth by the nationalists also seems to blur the line between "fact" and "fiction." In fact, Fujioka Nobukatsu, an educational scholar and long a central figure in the neonationalist attack on history textbooks, has even argued that the inclusion of "lies" in history books (and, by implication, textbooks) is acceptable for certain purposes, for instance, to make the story "colorful." Fujioka has disclosed that in the 1990s, when he was involved in authoring Takasugi Shinsaku, a series of history books for children (intended to aid their understanding of history lessons in schools),[50] he included some fictitious stories. As he puts it:

To write [a history] based only on verified historical truths makes . . . [it] insipid and dry. I changed my policy for the lack of an alternative--I had no choice but to write from my own imagination to a great extent.[51]

It seems that neonationalists are in the process of reformulating their discursive strategy to appropriate (selectively) certain postmodern concepts such as "history as story" to serve the purpose of creating an idealized history of a pure Japanese nation. It is a project that resonates with dominant wartime ideologies of empire.

As we have seen, one of the primary nationalist strategies has been to focus on the details of historical findings on comfort women, to point out errors or the impossibility of verifying certain claims, and on that basis suggest the impossibility of verifying any part of the history of comfort women. At the same time, they seek to relativize the epistemological status of any claim concerning historical facts and argue for a choice of stories from any number of "equally valid" stories. The notion of "history as story" serves as a license to construct any kind of story as history, including fictive stories with real names. This is a clever move for neonationalists, one that is worrisome for progressive/feminist historians. For, if neonationalists are unable to win the battle over empirical research and testimony, perhaps they can win with fictional narratives appealing to the national pride and patriotic spirit.

Conclusion

The testimonies of former comfort women that appeared in the early 1990s spurred intense controversy over the representation of wartime Japan's military comfort women system. The controversy has been intense and prolonged, not only because it reflects the political and ideological struggle(s) between progressives and neonationalists in Japan and the geopolitics and

diplomacy involving Japan and its neighbors,[52] but also because of the intellectual and moral challenges posed to the societies involved in general, and historians and educators specifically.[53]

In the conventional legal context, "testimony is provided, and is called for, when the facts upon which justice must pronounce its verdict are not clear, when historical accuracy is in doubt, and when both the truth and its supporting elements of evidence are called into question."[54] In other words, it settles the dispute. In contemporary society, testimony given by victims and the oppressed has been used in research and education to provide crucial evidence to document traumatic events, including the Second World War, the Holocaust, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and diverse war atrocities. In so doing, it has acquired another function—unsettling the (dominant, normative) truth.

Indeed, the testimonies of former comfort women have changed the interpretive framework for research on the issue and for what counts as truth. As a result, a much richer, detailed, and more critical understanding of the events and processes that defined the comfort women system becomes possible. At the same time, however, the emphasis placed by some proponents of the comfort women on the truth of their testimonies has backfired. Japanese neonationalists, by focusing on minor details and contradictions, have effectively made (and kept) controversial both the women's testimonies and historians' findings that draw both on testimonies and archival research. Progressive and feminist historians have fought back and won a number of empirical debates on the basis of expert knowledge, but neonationalists have succeeded in confusing public audiences, including many school teachers.

How should historians and educators use the voices and testimonies of comfort women, as well as those of other marginalized groups? It seems to me that we should strive for a sensitive, sensible, and critical approach to them. First, we should understand that oral testimony is an important and unique source of information, one that is particularly important if we are to gain access to the experience of victims, but that it is only one of many types of sources that historians and educators should consult. Like any other source, its value needs to be assessed rigorously, its internal consistency examined closely, and, when used as part of the factual narratives that historians construct, it should be used in conjunction with multiple official and unofficial documents—print or otherwise—to create a wider and deeper understanding of complex phenomena of the past. The testimony of the comfort women, where it can be verified and reinforced, is among the most compelling and important kinds of evidence available for documenting the women's experience and the interplay between official policies and the peoples of colonized and occupied territories under wartime conditions.

Second, gender is a critically important category for understanding what took place more than half a century ago and for grasping how it has been represented since.[55] In my view, the foremost significance of testimony lies in its power to provide a lived perspective, a lens through which historians and educators can (and should) reexamine and reinterpret every historical source available. We should look at history of the war through the eyes of comfort women.[56] It can change the meanings and interpretations of events by shedding a different light on other historical materials, and so it can yield new knowledge. In this case, the research illuminates how gender relations and ideology, embedded in nationalism, militarism, colonialism, and ethnocentrism, shaped history, and how statist and male perspectives on that history can be challenged. The women's testimonies help visualize a new, counter history of war and colonialism, providing rare insight into a range of issues as experienced and

remembered by an important group of women whose voices had been silenced for more than half a century.

Third, we should not conflate the problem of method with that of perspective. The evidence produced by a testimony, while often powerful and compelling, is by its nature partial and limited.[57] It is the historians' task to probe the relationship between "fragmentary evidence" and the lived perspective (or "holistic truth") to comprehend the full experience of comfort women and the role of the state in crafting the comfort women system.[58] To be sure, some testimony is difficult--or virtually impossible--to verify given the fact that the Japanese government and military deliberately destroyed the key documents at Japan's defeat.[59] However, the value of the perspective is not undermined by discrepancies and inconsistencies in individual accounts. Rather, taken as a group, the testimonies of comfort women from many countries constitute a powerful and coherent set of lenses to examine the nature of the comfort women system and the war. Incorporating the perspective(s) of the victims into historical research and education is not only a profoundly important intellectual act, it is also among the most important ethical and political responsibilities of historians and educators.

Finally, it is urgent to educate students and the public about the complex issues involved in the relationship between history and testimony, so that they can meet the intellectual and moral challenges that the history of comfort women and other sensitive historical issues pose for later generations. Postmodern debates can help to sensitize students and the public to become informed listeners and readers of testimonies and to effectively engage the controversies surrounding them. Those who hold classic, commonsensical notions of historical objectivity, and who emphasize teaching only "the facts", may remain vulnerable in contemporary debates over history and testimony, if only because they are less equipped to deal with attacks employing postmodern language as in the case of "history as story." Today's effective citizenship requires understanding of the nature, power, and limits of testimonies in constructing historical knowledge, as such knowledge is a major source of national identity.

*I would like to thank Hiro Inokuchi, Richard Minear, and Mark Selden for comments and suggestions.

Yoshiko Nozaki is an associate professor in the Department of Educational Leadership & Policy, the University at Buffalo (SUNY-Buffalo) and an Asia-Pacific Journal Associate. She is the author of War Memory, Nationalism, and Education in Postwar Japan, 1945-2007: The Japanese history textbook controversy and Ienaga Saburo's court challenges (http://www.amazon.com/dp/0415371473/?tag=theasipacjo0b-20) and numerous works on education and historical memory. She is co-author with Hiromitsu Inokuchi of What U.S. Middle School Students Bring to Global Education: Discourses on Japan, Formation of American Identities, and the Sociology of Knowledge and Curriculum (http://www.amazon.com/dp/9460913091/?tag=theasipacjo0b-20).

Notes

[1] Dori Laub, "Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Listening," in Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History (London: Routledge, 1992), 59-60.
[2] Allen Carey-Webb, "Transformative Voices," in Allen Carey-Webb and Stephen Benz, eds., Teaching and testimony: Rigoberta Menchu and the North American Classroom (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 7.
[3] See, for example, June Kuzmeskus, "Writing

Their Way to Compassionate Citizenship: Rigoberta Menchu and Activating High School Learners," in Carey-Webb and Benz, Teaching and Testimony, 123-131.

[4] Shoshana Felman, "Education and Crisis, Or the Vicissitudes of Teaching," in Felman and Laub, Testimony, 1-56.

[5] Mary Louise Pratt, "I, Rigoberta Menshu and the 'Culture Wars,'" in Arturo Arias, ed. The Rigoberta Menchu Controversy (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 30.

[6] Joan Scott, Gender and the Politics of History (NY: Columbia University Press, 1988), 5.

[7] In this article, I employ the term "comfort women" (hereafter without quotation marks) because it has been the term most widely used, though I am aware that the term was (and is) a euphemism. Scores of volumes and articles on the topic (written in Japanese, Korean, and English) have been published since the early 1990s. This article discusses the most important works comprising that literature.

[8] Historical controversy is not new in Japan. Since 1945, Japan has been the setting of a hard-fought struggle over the official history of World War II. See Yoshiko Nozaki and Hiromitsu Inokuchi, "Japanese Education, Nationalism, and Ienaga Saburo's Textbook Lawsuits," in Laura Hein and Mark Selden, eds., Censoring History: Citizenship and Memory in Japan, Germany, and the United States (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 2000), 96-126; and Yoshiko Nozaki, "Japanese Politics and the History Textbook Controversy, 1945-2001," in Edward Vickers and Alisa Jones, eds., History Education and National Identity in East Asia (London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2005), 275-305.

[9] For testimonies and accounts by former comfort women, see, for example, Maria Rosa Henson, A Filipina's Story of Prostitution and Slavery under the Japanese Military (Lanham: Rowan & Littlefield, 1999); and Korean Council for Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan, True Stories of the Korean Comfort Women, ed. Keith Howard (London: Cassell Academic, 1996).

[10] For other aspects of the controversy, see Yoshiko Nozaki, "Feminism, Nationalism, and the Japanese Textbook Controversy over 'Comfort Women,'" in France Winddance Twine and Kathleen M. Blee, eds., Feminism & Antiracism: International Struggles for Justice (NY: New York University Press, 2001), 170-189. See also Laura Hein, "Savage Irony: The Imaginative Power of the 'Military Comfort Women'" in the 1990s, Gender & History (1999), 11(2): 336-372.

[11] See, for example, Hyakusatsu ga Kataru "Ianjyo" Otoko no Honne: Ajia-zeniki ni "Inanjyo" ga Atta [The "comfort facility" and men's confessions told in one hundred books: There were "comfort facilities" all over Asia], ed. Takasaki Ryuji (Tokyo: Nashinokisha, 1994). Takasaki finds approximately one hundred diaries and memoirs that referred to having directly witnessed the comfort facilities and/or comfort women. Those published during the war were censored so that their references were oblique.

[12] Japanese and Korean names in this article follow East Asian name order (except author information for English publications).

[13] The first writer to take up the issue was Senda Kako, who published Jugun Ianfu [Military comfort women] (Tokyo: Futabasha, 1973). Senda also wrote several bestsellers on the topic in the 1970s. In Korea, several publications appeared in the 1970s. For further discussion, see Takasaki Soji, Hannichi Kanjyo [Anti-Japanese sentiments] (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1993), 128-129; and Kasahara Tokushi et al. eds. Rekishi no Jijitsu o do Ninteishi do Oshieruka [How to verify and teach the historical facts] (Tokyo: Kyoiku Shuppankai, 1997), 160-161.

[14] Matsui Yayori, "Kankoku-fujin no Ikita Michi" [The road a Korean woman took to live], Asahi Shinbun, evening edition (November 2, 1984), 5. At the time of Matsui's interview, the woman lived in Thailand. The article included a photo of her visiting her family in Korea in 1984, but did not mention her name.

[15] For Yun's activities, see George Hicks, The

Comfort Women: Japan's Brutal Regime of Enforced Prostitution in the Second World War (NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), 173-178.

[16] In the next few years, approximately two hundred Korean former comfort women followed in Kim's footsteps.

[17] Kaiho Shuppansha ed., Kim Hakusun-san no Shogen: "Jugun Ianfu Mondai" o Tou [The testimony of Kim Hak-soon: An inquiry into the issue of military comfort women] (Osaka: Kaiho Shuppansha, 1993), 3-4.

[18] For further discussion, see Nozaki, "Feminism, Nationalism, and the Japanese Textbook Controversy over 'Comfort Women.'"

[19] Haruo Sasayama et al., Chugaku Shakai: Rekishi [Junior High School Social Studies: History] (Tokyo: Kyoikushuppan, 1997), 261.

[20] Two excellent book length historical studies on comfort women have been published in English: Yoshimi Yoshiaki, Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery in the Japanese Military during World War II, S. O'Brien, Translator (NY: Columbia University Press, 2000) (Original work published 1995); and Yuki Tanaka, Japan's Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery and Prostitution during World War II and the US Occupation (London: Routledge, 2002).

[21] Yoshimi, Comfort Women, 29. No documents discovered to date reveal the proportions of nationalities or ethnic groups among comfort women.

[22] See, for example, Louise White, "Prostitution in Nairobi during World War II, 1939-45," in The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 147-184. See also Tanaka, Japan's Comfort Women, 84-132.

[23] Tanaka, Japan's Comfort Women, 180-181.

[24] In several cases, their criticisms of historical research turned out to be flawed due to their own lack of expert knowledge. Right-wing nationalists published numerous volumes and articles on the comfort women issue in the 1990s. For example, Uesugi Chitoshi, Kensho "Jugun Ianfu": Jugun Ianfu Mondai Nyumon [The verification of the "military comfort women": Introduction to the issue of military comfort women], revised and enlarged edition (Tokyo: Zenbosha, 1996).

[25] Neonationalists continue to employ this discourse. For example, in June 2005, Minister of Education and Science Nakayama Nariaki stated that the term jugun-ianfu did not exist at the time of the war, so it was good to see the school textbooks have eliminated the term.

[26] For the translation of the document, see Yoshimi, Comfort Women, 58.

[27] For the issue of the terms, see also Yoshiaki Yoshimi and Hiroshi Hayashi (eds.) Kyodo Kenkyu Nihongun-Ianfu [Joint research on Japanese military comfort women] (Tokyo: Otsukishoten, 1995).

[28] Yoshimi Yoshiaki and Kawada Fumiko, eds.,"Jugun ianfu" o meguru sanju no uso to shinjitsu [Thirty lies and truths surrounding "military comfort women"] (Tokyo: Otsuki Shoten, 1997), 9-10.

[29] For example, Yoshida Seiji, Chosenjin Ianfu to Nihonjin: Moto Shimonoseki Rohodoin Bucho no Shuki [Korean comfort women and the Japanese: Former Shimonoseki labor conscription manager's memoir] (Tokyo: Shin Jinbutsu Oraisha, 1977) and Watashi no Senso Hanzai: Chosenjin Kyosei Renko [My war crimes: Taking Koreans by force] (Tokyo: San'ichi Shobo, 1983). In these volumes, Yoshida described his use of deception and coercion in recruitment of Korean women for the comfort system as an officer at an employment bureau in Shimonoseki, Japan. Employment bureau offices during the war were involved in local labor conscription.

[30] Hiroshi Tanabe, Shinpen Atarashii Shakai: Rekishi [New social studies new edition: History] (Tokyo: Tokyoshoseki, 1997), 263; and Ko Atsuta et al., Chugaku Shakai: Rekishiteki Bunya [Junior high social studies: Hisorical area] (Osaka: Osakashosei, 1997), 261. See alsoYoshimi and Kawada, "Jugun ianfu," 63-65. Some high school textbooks published in previous years used the term in describing the comfort women; it appears that neonationalists targeted the junior high texts without reading them closely. See, for example,

Shozo Sakamoto et al., Koto Gakko Nihonshi: B [Senior high Japanese history: B] (Tokyo: Daiichigakushusha, 1995), 322.

[31] Yoshimi and Kawada, "Jugun ianfu," 22-24. Yoshimi notes that some non-Japanese official documents (the U.S. military documents in the case of Korea and the Dutch military documents in the case of Indonesia) refer to the fact that the women were taken forcibly by the Japanese authorities. See Yoshimi Yoshiaki, "'Jyugun Ianfu' Mondai to Rekishizo: Ueno Chizuko-shi ni Kotaeru" [The issue of "comfort women" and the view on history: Responding to Ueno Chizuko], in Nihon no Senso Sekinin Shiryo Senta, Simpozium Nashonarizumu, 125.

[32] Yoshimi and Kawada, "Jugun ianfu," 20-31.

[33] Kota Kodama et al., Watashitachi no Chugakushakai: Rekishiteki Bunya [Our social studies: historical area] (Tokyo: Nihonshoseki, 2002), 180; Hideo Kuroda et al., Shakaika Chugakko no Rekishi: Nihon no Ayumi to Sekai no Ugoki [Social studies history: Japan's steps and the world currents] (Tokyo: Teikokushoin, 2002), 221; and Yujiro Oguchi et al., Shin Chugakko Rekishi: Nihon no Rekishi to Sekai [New junior high history: Japanese history and the world] (Tokyo: Shimizushoin, 2002), 189. The textbooks also eliminated references to other Japanese war atrocities. See Nozaki, "Japanese Politics and History Textbook Controversy," 295.

[34] Controversy has erupted since mid 2004 over the 2006 edition textbooks to be published in the spring of 2006. For a brief report on the drafts, see Ishii Tateo, "Subete no Kyokasho kara 'Ianfu' ga Kieta [Comfort women disappeared from all the textbooks], Shukan Kinyobi, (April 22, 2005), 554: 12-13.

[35] Ueno Chizuko, "Kioku no Seijigaku: Kokumin, Kojin, Watashi" [The politics of memory: Nation, individuals, and I], Impaction, (1997), 103: 154-174. In Japan, jissho-shugi is a historical research paradigm that stresses verification by empirical evidence (historical sources), which may not be exactly the same thing as positivism in Western historical studies. The article is one of Ueno's first on the topic. In my view, while Ueno has a point, her characterization of progressive/feminist historians as bunshoshiryo shijo-shugi here is wrong, since they also stress the legitimacy and importance of oral testimony. In subsequent publications on the same topic, Ueno revised her description of the progressive and feminist historians slightly to present them in a more positive light. See also Chizuko Ueno, Nationalism and Gender, Beverley Yamamoto, Translator (Sydney: Trans Pacific Press, 2005).

[36] Ueno "Kioku no Seijigaku," 159.

[37] Ueno, "Kioku no Seijigaku," 159. Ueno's commentary lacks the precise knowledge exemplified by Yoshimi's research that proved "military involvement," but not "kyosei-renko" (taking by force). The issue of military involvement cannot be reduced to the question of kyosei-renko.

[38] Ueno, "Kioku no Seijigaku," 159-166. Ueno Chizuko, "Jenda-shi to Rekishigaku no Hoho" [Gender history and the methods of history], in Nihon no Senso Sekinin Shiryo Senta, ed., Simpozium Nashonarizumu to "Ianfu" Mondai (Tokyo: Aoki Shoten, 1998), 30.

[39] Yoshimi, "'Jyugun Ianfu' Mondai," 128-130.

[40] Ibid., 130.

[41] Ibid., 131.

[42] The first Japanese military comfort facility was built in Shanghai in 1931. The number increased after 1937 as the Japanese invasion expanded to other areas. Comfort facilities inside Japan developed in places such as Okinawa and Hokkaido in later years. See Yoshimi, Comfort Women, 44-57, 88-91.

[43] Yoshimi, "'Jyugun Ianfu' Mondai," 133.

[44] Yasumaru Yoshio, "'Ianfu' mondai to rekishigaku: Yasumaru Yoshio ni kiku" [The issue of "comfort women" and the studies of history: Interview with Yoshio Yasumaru], in Nihon no Senso Sekinin Shiryo Senta, Simpozium Nashonarizumu, 209.

[45] Sakamoto Takao, "Rekishi Kyokasho wa Ikani Kakarerubekika" [How should history textbooks be written?], Seiron (1997), 297:50. The nationalist effort to produce and sell their own

history textbook to high schools was unsuccessful in the 1980s, but it was intensified in the 1990s. Sakamoto's argument was made in the context of the debates among neonationalists over their history textbook project of the 1990s. Against some prominent nationalists who argued that history teaching in schools should be abolished altogether since it cannot be neutral, Sakamoto rearticulated the need for (nationalist) history with postmodern discourses.

[46] For a good analysis of Sakamoto's argument, see Iwasaki Minoru "Bokyaku no tameno 'kokumin no monogatari': 'Rairekiron' no raireki o kangaeru" ["A story for a nation" for the purpose of oblivion: Thoughts on the origin of the "origin" theory], in Komori Yoichi and Takahashi Tetsuya, eds., Nashonaru Hisutori o Koete (Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1998), 175-193.

[47] Sakurai, who was previously involved in some progressive causes, has positioned herself in the neonationalist camp in the comfort women v.

[48] Sakurai Yoshiko, "Janarisuto Sakurai Yoshiko ga Mita Nihon, Gakko, Kodomo" [Japan, schools and children in the eyes of journalist Yoshiko Sakurai], lecture given at the Heisei 8-nendo Kyoiku Kadai Kenshukai, the Yokohama City School Board (October 3, 1996).

[49] Ibid., 13.

[50] The book title is the name of a Japanese samurai hero in the Meiji Restoration of 1968.

[51] See also Shinji Takashima, "Kingendaishi Kyoiku 'Kaikaku' Undo no Mondaiten 4 [The problems of the 'reform' movement of teaching modern and contemporary history], Senso Sekinin Kenkyu, (1998), 19: 92. Fujioka argues that the "lies" should be within a limit of "common sense." It follows that the real question might be what kinds of "lies" are actually inserted. Interestingly, one lie he included was very phallocentric. The (hi)story states that when the hero was born, his parents and grandparents were extremely happy to see the baby was a boy, a successor of the family, and included the line that "[his father] made really sure that the baby in the bath water…had a penis." See Fujioka Nobukatsu, "Ronso kingendaishi kyoiku no kaikaku, 21: Rekishi jinbutsu shirizu 'Takasugi Shinsaku' o kaite, Meiji-ishin to buhsi 2" [The debate on the reform of modern and contemporary history education, no. 21: On writing about 'Takasugi Shinsaku' for the historical figure series, the Meiji Restoration and samurai, no. 2], Gendai Kyoiku Kagaku (1997), 494: 112-113. For a discussion of masculinist tendency of Fujioka and his followers, see also Hein, "Savage Irony," 360-364.

[52] For analysis of the politics of the controversy, see Nozaki, "Feminism, Nationalism, and the Japanese Textbook Controversy over 'Comfort Women'"; and Nozaki, "Japanese politics and the history textbook controversy, 1945-2001."

[53] See also Daqing Yang, "The Challenges of the Nanjing Massacre: Reflections on Historical Inquiry," in Joshua A. Fogel, ed., The Nanjing Massacre in History and Historiography, 133-179.

[54] Felman, "Education and Crisis," 6.

[55] See also Scott, Gender and the Politics of History, 28-50.

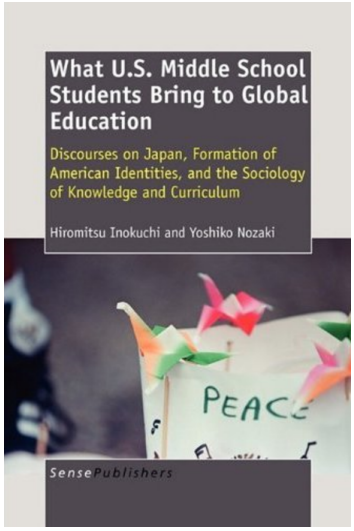
[56] Long ago, feminist historian Gerda Lerner asserted that "The central question raised by women's history is: what would history be like if it were seen through the eyes of women and ordered by values they define?" Lerner, The Majority Finds Its Past: Placing Women in History, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 162.

[57] See Elizabeth Ellsworth, Teaching Positions: Difference, Pedagogy, and the Power of Address (New York: Teachers College Press, 1997). It is also important to understand that the victims themselves may have difficulties making sense of what happened to them. See Lawrence L. Langer, Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).

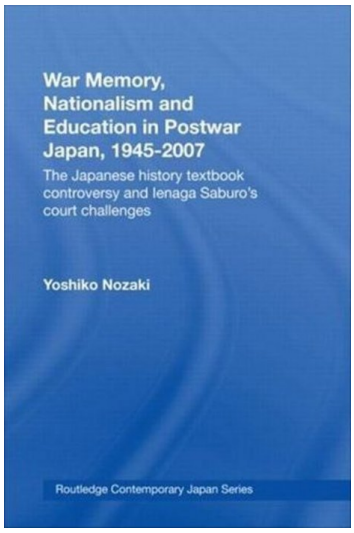
[58] Yang, "The Challenges of the Nanjing Massacre," 144.

[59] In addition, the Japanese government has not yet declassified a large volume of wartime documents.

Click a cover to order.



(http://www.amazon.com/dp/9460913091/?tag=theasipacjo0b-20)



(http://www.amazon.com/dp/0415371473/?tag=theasipacjo0b-20)

Click a cover to order.