

South Korean Scholar Says Comfort Women Were Not Sex Slaves

Tsutomu Nishioka

A professor at South Korea's Seoul National University in his Internet lecture has rightly claimed: "As comfort women were public prostitutes, the sex slave theory is wrong. A theory giving the number of Korean comfort women at 200,000 is also groundless. The number may be at most 5,000." The lecture has attracted many accesses and much interest. It has not come under fire from mass media.

Since late last year's Japan-South Korea agreement on comfort women, Japan's image in South Korean society has been changing. Nearly 80% of surviving former comfort women have expressed willingness to receive money from a Japan-funded foundation. Behind these developments, the influence of the Korean Council for Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan and other South Korean activist groups have been weakening.

Groundless coercive recruitment theory

The Internet lecture has been released by Lee Yong Hoon, a professor at the Faculty of Economics of Seoul National University. Prof. Lee is specialized in Korean economic history. He has pioneered the so-called colonial modernization theory claiming that the Korean economy grew under Japanese colonial rule. Prof. Lee is also one of South Korean scholars who have alleged South Korean history textbooks as biased to the left and led movements for their improvement.

Prof. Lee delivered a total of 12 modern Korean history lectures titled "Prof. Lee Yong Hoon's Country of Fantasy" on an Internet television channel presided by Chong Kyu Jae, a conservative polemic. The last lecture was on comfort station women, which lasted more than two hours and was uploaded on the Internet on August 22 and 23, divided into three segments. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ng45SOF0kmM>)

In the lecture, Prof. Lee concluded comfort women as public prostitutes for military forces, scholastically quoting various documents including a diary of a manager of a comfort station for Japanese forces and testimony by a former comfort woman who saved 25,000 yen. Women usually became comfort women through human trafficking (in which parents took money for their daughters) and

employment fraud, he said. Some people's claim that women were abusively abducted by military forces or police is based mostly on dictations and lacks authenticity as objective information, he said.

Korean comfort women estimated at 5,000 at most

Prof. Lee explained that unless comfort women were stationed at a battlefield front, their applications for quitting were mostly accepted. In the following explanation, he denied the theory that comfort women were sex slaves:

“How should women at the comfort stations be defined? Many scholars have accepted the claim that they were sex slaves. A ground for the theory was that they lacked freedom of movement, were placed under confinement, were subjected to violence on a daily basis and were not given due rewards. However, a comprehensive analysis of multiple documents indicates that these descriptions are mostly groundless.”

Prof. Lee also denied a theory giving the number of Korean comfort women at 200,000.

“If there were 200,000 Korean comfort women, the total number of comfort women including Japanese and Chinese must have been several hundreds of thousands. Given the then number of Japanese troops at 2.5 million, the theory is ridiculous.”

“Numbers must be given under strict standards. Given a breakdown of comfort women by race, the number of condoms provided in 1942 and the number of comfort women required by soldiers, the number of Korean comfort women can be reasonably estimated at some 5,000 at most.”

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