

Testimony

Shin-Do Song
Born in Korea, 1922–2017



Shin-Do Song at the 10th Asian Solidarity Conference
Seoul, Korea
August 13, 2011

*“My case may have been broken in court.
But my heart is not broken yet.”*

Shin-Do Song was born in Nonsan, a farming village in South Chungcheong province of South Korea. Her first marriage was at fifteen. Her second ended in abandonment. Shin-Do was hurt many times, but her spirit remained intact. When she was forced to marry a man eleven years her senior, Shin-Do fled her husband’s home only to be turned away by her mother.

Then, tricked by a false job offer to work in a factory, she was forced into a life of Japanese military sexual slavery.¹ She was sent to several “comfort stations” in China and lost hearing in one ear due to frequent slapping by Japanese soldiers.²

These “comfort stations” were established and operated by the Japanese military in their occupied territories from the 1930s through the end of WWII in 1945. Hundreds of thousands of women and girls from across Asia were forced into Japanese military sexual slavery during these years.

After the war, Shin-Do married a Japanese soldier and followed him to Japan. Upon arrival, he abandoned her, telling her to earn a living as a prostitute servicing American soldiers. Shin-Do found other work, but as a Korean, she faced severe ethnic discrimination in Japan. In despair, she tried to take her own life by jumping in front of a train.

A fellow Korean Japanese person saved her.

Shin-Do broke her silence in 1992 and devoted the rest of her life to fighting back. In 1993, she filed a lawsuit against the Japanese government. Although the Tokyo District Court recognized misconduct by the state, they dismissed her claim based on the ground that Shin-Do’s suffering could not be covered by the State Redress Law because the law took effect in 1947, meaning that events prior to that date cannot be applied. The Japanese military sexual slavery system that destroyed Shin-Do’s life ended in 1945. Despite this ruling, she appealed all the way to Japan’s Supreme Court, which dismissed her case in 2003, holding that Japan had no legal obligation to pay Shin-Do for her suffering because the twenty-year statute of limitations for such a claim had expired.³ When she heard the final decision, she said, “My case may have been broken in court. But my heart is not broken yet.”

Photo credit: Woo Jong Ryu

Sources: See footnotes

1 Myungsuk Yun, *Korean Military Comfort Women and Japanese Comfort Women System*, 『조선인 군위안부와 일본군 위안소제도』, (South Korea, Ehaksa, 2015), 317–322.

2 Seoul Metropolitan Government and Seoul National University Human Rights Center, *Taken, Abandoned, Now Standing Before Us*, 『끌려가다, 버려지다, 우리 앞에 서다 I』, (South Korea, 2018), 1:224–231.

3 Available from <https://kls.law.columbia.edu/content/lawsuits-brought-against-japan-former-korean-comfort-women>.

