

Testimony

Soon-Duk Kim
Born in Korea, 1921-2004



Soon-Duk Kim in 1996

“I suffer even today from nightmares. But I will tell my story again and again because the atrocities of the Japanese government must not be forgotten. They must not do this again to my grandchildren in the future.”¹

Soon-Duk Kim was born to a low-income family in Uiryong in South Gyeongsang province in the southern part of Korea. In 1937, at age fifteen, she was tricked into Japanese military sexual slavery and sent to a “comfort station” in Shanghai instead of making money at the promised factory. The Japanese Imperial Armed Forces established and operated “comfort stations” 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.

“The daughters from poor families were forced into Japanese military sexual slavery.” She added, “What I heard was that if I didn’t want to go, they would take my older sister or younger sister. I had no choice. I had to go.”

It took Soon-Duk a lot of courage to break her silence because her family members and relatives were strongly opposed to it. They told her that although speaking out might make Soon-Duk feel better, telling her story would bring shame and would also shock their children. Despite their dissuasion, Soon-Duk broke her silence. She suffered from insomnia that continued even after she came forward.

“Because I was aware of the stigmatization towards Japanese military sex slaves, I tried very hard to live a life against the stigmatization. I never drank or smoked. I even stayed with my husband who was very abusive.”

After Soon-Duk broke her silence, she went on international speaking tours to various countries, including Japan, Canada, and the United States. On July 24, 2001, Soon-Duk visited Rep. Lane Evans (D-IL) who introduced the House Concurrent Resolution 195 on that same day. She was a gifted artist of several paintings depicting her past experiences as a Japanese military sex slave. Her paintings include *Stolen Away*, *Unbloomed Flower*, and *Inside the Boat I was Being Dragged Away*.

“I want to say that as a daughter of Chosun [old name for Korea], I did not live a life of shame.”

Photo credit: Toshikuni Doi

Sources: *Living With Memory*, DVD, directed by Toshukani Doi, (Japan: 2015).

Noreen Shanaha, “The NI Interview: Kim Soon-duk,” *New Internationalist*, May 5, 1999.

See footnote

¹ Hee Soon Kwon from the Korean Council presented *The Military Sexual Slavery Issue and Asian Peace* at “The First East Asian Women’s Forum,” October 20–22, 1994, held in Japan.