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SOUTH KOREAN MOVEMENTS AGAINST MILITARIZED SEXUAL LABOR

Katharine H. S. Moon

As the 20th century draws to a close, South Korean survivors of Japanese military sexual slavery (“comfort system” or *chongsindae*) and activists on their behalf have been noted as some of the most persuasive and omnipresent advocates of women’s human rights at international meetings and conferences. Within South Korea as well, graphic accounts of sexual brutality in wartime have become household news items. In 1992, a television drama series, “Eye of the Dawn,” which depicted Korean resistance to Japanese colonial rule, not only included portraits of young women and girls being forcibly rounded up for sexual use in battlefronts, but also made the story’s heroine a *chongsindae* survivor. She became a spy against the Japanese and therefore a nationalist and patriot. Globally, the *chongsindae* issue, as a political struggle regarding women’s sex work, is probably the first to receive so much widespread publicity since the international (mostly Western) debates and policy measures ensuing from the scare of White Slavery in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Numerous academic, literary, and other works on the issue have been rolling hot off the presses,¹ and even

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1. For example, Chungmoo Choi, ed., *The Comfort Women: Colonialism, War, and Sex*, a special issue of *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997); and Nora Okja Keller, *Comfort Woman* (New York: Viking-Penguin, 1997). See also Pyon Yongju, *Murmuring*, 16 mm, 98 min. (Seoul: Docu-Factory Vista, 1995); and Noriko Sekiguchi, *Senso Daughters: Daughters of War*, video, 54 min. (New York: First Run Icarus, 1990).

women's fashion magazines have been reporting periodically on this newly unearthed history.²

This is not to say that the *chongsindae* movement (CM) is a success story pure and simple; it is not. Its major demands—official reparation and apology to survivors—still have not been met by the Japanese government, and such demands were not supported by the South Korean government.³ Yet, in terms of awareness raising, presenting formal petitions to governments and international institutions, coalition building, and obtaining media coverage, the CM has achieved enormous visibility within just a few years.

The CM, however, is not the first women's movement in South Korea to protest and redress sexual exploitation and abuse of Korean women by foreign men. In the 1970s, Korean women activists, some of whom are now fighting for the *chongsindae* survivors, protested vehemently against the Japanese government's and Japanese society's participation in *kisaeng* tourism (sex tourism) in Korea.⁴ Also, since the mid-1980s, a group of Korean women and men have sought to recognize and publicize the plight of U.S. military camptown (*kijich'on*) prostitutes as victims of debt bondage and objects of foreign domination. Yet, these movements never generated or received the kind of public recognition and support, both domestic and international, that the *chongsindae* movement has garnered.

Moreover, the CM and the *kijich'on* movement (KM) originally began together as part of a larger Asian women's human rights movement against the sexual exploitation of women. Professor Yun Chong Ok's ground-breaking research on the former *chongsindae* women was first publicly presented at the International Seminar on Women and Tourism (held in Seoul and on Cheju Island in April 1988). A *kijich'on* woman also gave her own testimony about her ordeals as a sex worker. The stated intent of the conference conveners and participants was to challenge traditional conceptions of women's

2. See *Marie Claire* (French edition), October 1996, pp. 60–68.

3. The Report of the United Nations Special Rapporteur includes the official positions of the South and North Korean governments. The South Korean Ministry of Justice stated that it is very "difficult to determine whether the Government of Japan actually had a legal responsibility to compensate for crimes committed 50 years ago." This stance is in opposition to that of the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan (hereafter Korean Council), the North Korean government, the Special Rapporteur, the International Commission of Jurists, and such NGOs as International Education Development. See Radhika Coomaraswamy, *Report on the Mission to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Republic of Korea, and Japan on the Issue of Military Sexual Slavery in Wartime: Addendum: Report of the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women* (New York: United Nations Commission on Human Rights, Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, Working Group on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, 1996), E/CN.4/1996/53/Add.1.

4. Korea Church Women United (KCWU), *Kisaeng Tourism: A Nation-Wide Survey Report on Conditions in Four Areas: Seoul, Pusan, Cheju, Kyongju*, Research Issue Material, no. 3 (Seoul: KCWU, 1984).

chastity and the socioeconomic conditions that foster the sexual abuse of women's bodies and labor. Representatives from the Philippines, United States, Canada, England, Japan, Taiwan, Thailand, and South Korea were present. The conference participants aimed to share information on related issues and problems from different parts of the world, especially Asia, to forge women's solidarity as activists and criticize the role of governments and businesses in fostering the trade in women's sex work.⁵

Additionally, at the outset of the CM, the leaders had invited Yu Pong Rim and Faye Moon, founders of the counseling center for camptown sex workers, My Sister's Place, to join forces and support the CM as a cause against militarism and the violation of women's human rights. On the surface, the founders of both movements shared values and concerns that might have made them likely alliance partners in a larger women's movement: both were opposed to the sexual exploitation and abuse of women and motivated by their nationalism and Christian sensibilities. However, the two were unable to forge a real partnership and have since gone their separate ways (see discussion below).

This article compares the ideology, leadership, and organization of the two movements in the context of changing civil society in South Korea since the late 1980s in order to account for what Chunghee Sarah Soh characterizes as the CM's "remarkable success in making the 'military comfort women' problem a universal moral issue of women's human rights"⁶ and the KM's relatively localized and less recognized status. The two movements are appropriate for comparative analysis because of (1) the violence, social stigma, and alienation inflicted on both groups of women by foreign troops and Korean society (Koreans have even used the same euphemism—*wianbu*, or comfort women—to identify them); (2) the common activist environment and leadership from which they took root; (3) the anti-foreign nationalism they espouse; and (4) the impact each has had on the other.

The *Chongsindae* Movement and the *Kijich'on* Movement

The CM has generally refused to acknowledge the plight of U.S. camptown prostitutes as being parallel to that of *chongsindae* survivors, based on the view that the *kijich'on* women voluntarily service(d) soldiers whereas the latter did not. However, I argue that there are significant similarities. First, the lasting effects of such sexual labor in terms of bodily damage, social alienation, loss of dignity, shame, and loneliness resonate in both groups of

5. See KCWU, *Women and Tourism*, International Seminar Report (Seoul: KCWU, 1988).

6. Chunghee Sarah Soh, "The Korean 'Comfort Women': Movement for Redress," *Asian Survey* 36:12 (December 1996), p. 1238.

women. Chong Chin Song, professor of sociology and leader of the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan (hereafter Korean Council), describes the personal consequences of *chongsindae* life that are common for the survivors: After having returned to Korea,

[t]hey bore guilty consciences, simply because of the knowledge that they had been prostitutes. They suffered from the prejudice and discrimination of their relatives and friends. Many still had venereal disease or from time to time suffered its recurrence. . . . Many women subsequently found that they were barren, and many still suffer from . . . womb infections, high blood pressure, stomach trouble, heart trouble, nervous breakdowns, mental illness and so on. The psychological aftermath is far more serious than the breakdowns or mental disorders, . . . haunted by delusions of persecution, shame and inferiority. They tend to retain a distrust and hatred of men. . . . People around the women tend to despise them.⁷

The statement above can be applied verbatim to the plight of U.S. camp-town women. Most women, especially of the older generations, suffer from a severe sense of pariah status; they rarely venture into what they call “normal” Korean society (outside the camptowns) and often feel paranoid that others are condemning them. Most hide their *kijich'on* lives from their own families, though most send money home. When they do try to return to their families, they are more often than not rejected. Kim Yang Hyang, in the documentary film *The Women Outside*, recounts her rejection by family members. When she went back to her hometown after having worked in the camptown bars, one of her cousins yelled at her, “Don’t come around our place.”⁸ Those with Amerasian offspring also suffer the indignities of racism and ethnocentrism directed at their children from the general Korean population. The children are stigmatized and harassed in schools, particularly, those of African-American–Korean parentage. In 1992, I met “Sonha’s Mom” (age 35) and her sister (age 30) in Anjongni, the camptown next to Camp Humphreys. Both were offspring of a Korean woman (from the Korean War era) and two different African-American men. Their mother had been a camptown prostitute, as they themselves were. They tried to hide their “secrets” from their (Korean) extended family. Though their skin color and facial features revealed their part-African parentage, they were fully Korean in speech, mannerisms, and customs. Yet, they rarely ventured outside the shantytown of Anjongni into the larger Korean society.⁹

7. Keith Howard, ed., *True Stories of the Korean Comfort Women* (London: Cassell, 1995), p. 24.

8. J. T. Takagi and Hye Jung Park, *The Women Outside*, video, 52 mm (New York: Third World Newsreel, 1995). The subject of this documentary film is U.S.-Korea military prostitution.

9. These observations and those below of “Bakery Auntie” come from my field research conducted in Korea during 1991–92.

Many have also suffered from bouts of depression, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), and unwanted pregnancies. Although the Korean government systematically has established health clinics in or near most major U.S. camptowns (run by the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs) since the early 1970s, the clinics only check and treat women for STDs, not for general health.¹⁰ When the women confront health problems, they are often too poor to get proper medical treatment. Mental health problems seem to be the most difficult for the women to overcome. In addition to the social stigma and alienation, many women struggle with physical and emotional abuse by their bar owners/managers/pimps and their American customers. "Bakery Auntie," who was 67 when I met her in 1992 at My Sister's Place, the counseling/advocacy center in Uijongbu, remained continuously distrustful of and nervous around other people. She had had a history of severe physical and psychological abuse by her pimps during her several decades as a *kijich'on* prostitute and had difficulty relating to other people without downgrading herself; one of her greatest fears was that she might die alone. The most extreme cases of violence perpetrated on *kijich'on* women by managers/pimps or U.S. soldiers have resulted in the death of the woman; the case of Yun Kumi, who had been brutally beaten, mutilated, and murdered by Private Kenneth Markle, has been the most widely published one in recent years.¹¹

In some cases, the *chongsindae* woman and the *kijich'on* woman might be the very same person. Staffworkers at My Sister's Place noted that a few of the elderly prostitutes they had gotten to know revealed information about Japan in wartime that regular civilians would not be familiar with. Bakery Auntie is one such person: she had lived in different parts of Japan during the war and had "told stories" to the staffworkers about the Japanese. Given that they had already become "fallen women" in their own eyes, feared that their past might be uncovered, and were poor and unmarriageable upon return to Korea, it is not an unlikely possibility that some former *chongsindae* women fell into sexual labor for the U.S. military.

There are other significant parallels. Both groups of women come from the lower classes and were uneducated or undereducated; among the *kijich'on* women of the 1950s to the 1970s, those with junior high school degrees were considered highly educated. Chungmoo Choi points out that "[m]any of the *chongsindae* were chosen in order to protect their brothers and fathers from being conscripted into the Japanese military or to keep their families from losing tenant rights."¹² Similarly, accounts abound of camp-

10. See Katharine H. S. Moon, *Sex Among Allies: Military Prostitution in U.S.-Korea Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), Chapters 4 and 6.

11. *Rainbow Center Newsletter* (Flushing, N.Y.), no. 3 (January 1994).

12. Chungmoo Choi, "Korean Women in a Culture of Inequality," in *Korea Briefing*, ed. Donald Clark (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1992), p. 104.

town women working in the bars in order to support impoverished families, ailing parents, and the university fees of their siblings.¹³ In both groups of women, poverty and low-class status, lack of education, and their youth (teens to early 20s) added to their vulnerability to being “recruited” and deceived by flesh traffickers.

The key difference in terms of entry into sexual labor between the two groups is that many *chongsindae* women routinely were rounded up and systematically kidnapped into military prostitution whereas *kijich'on* women, as a collective, were not. However, some camptown women were kidnapped by common criminals, and other forms of coercive procurement, such as fraudulent promises by traffickers for well-paying jobs and skills-training, applied to both groups of women. And in both the *chongsindae* and *kijich'on* systems, rape was often used as a way to “initiate” women into sexual labor.

Furthermore, *kijich'on* women have not been as mobile or “free” as people commonly have assumed. They are beholden to their club owner/manager/pimp through what human rights activists call the debt bondage system, whereby they accrue debts to their clubs and must work to pay them off before they can leave. The system is premised on exploitation because club owners will often rent a room and purchase furniture, clothing, cosmetics, and music systems—all deemed necessary for the woman to attract GIs—before the new woman even arrives at his/her club but charge her with the debt at usurious rates. Illegal job placement agencies also charge women with a “referral fee” for putting her into a new bar and will expect her to pay.¹⁴ In most cases, the women do not have the funds and will borrow from the new employer, who will in turn raise her debts. If a woman tries to leave the club without having paid the debt, the manager/owner will send out thugs, “slicky boys,”¹⁵ to bring her back. In 1988, *Mal Magazine* reported that on the average, the sex workers’ club debts ranged between one and four million won (\$1,462 and \$5,847, respectively, based on 1988 rates).¹⁶

In some of the older *kijich'on* housing compounds for the camptown women, men or women were placed at the entrance/exit to monitor their movement. In some of these rooms, as those I had seen in Songsan, “pimp holes” had been cut out of walls in the prostitutes’ rooms so that a “monitor” could make sure that the club received payment from the GI for the sex he received and simultaneously prevent the woman from making plans to escape. Soh

13. Moon, *Sex Among Allies*, Chapter 1.

14. See Sandra Sturdevant and Brenda Stolfus, eds., *Let the Good Times Roll: Prostitution and the U.S. Military in Asia* (New York: New Press, 1993) for the personal accounts of camptown life, including the debt system, by former U.S. camptown sex workers in Asia.

15. See Diana S. Lee and Grace Yoonkyung Lee, *Camp Arirang*, video, 28 min. (New York: Third World Newsreel, 1995), a documentary film on U.S.-Korea military prostitution.

16. *Mal Magazine*, vol. 26 (August 1988), p. 108.

points out that "police ordinances of imperial Japan permitted licensed prostitutes the freedom to cease their trade even if the proprietor did not countersign their applications."¹⁷ Ironically, such "freedom" has not applied to the *kijich'on* women living in a sovereign country. The Korean National Police has helped sustain and legitimate GI-oriented prostitution by usually taking the side of the club owner/manager when women have tried to run away.¹⁸

People who learn about the *chongsindae* system often are appalled by the level of organization and bureaucratic paper work that helped regulate the sexual behavior of Japanese soldiers and the female sex slaves. But it is imperative to understand that the *kijich'on* system is highly regulated and sustained by official policies and practices of the U.S. military and the Korean government. Although *kijich'on* women work out of private businesses, all such nightclubs, bars, and tea houses catering to U.S. military personnel must be licensed by the Korea Special Tourist Association, which is an arm of the Korean Ministry of Transportation. Moreover, in order to work in the bars, a woman must register her name, address, and other vital information with the local police and the local VD clinic. She must go to the clinic, operated by the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, for regular gynecological and blood examinations in order to keep her VD card valid. The card in turn serves as a work permit. The U.S. military also keeps extensive files on *kijich'on* bar workers as a way to "track" the "source" of STDs that their men may contract.¹⁹ Some U.S. military commands in the 1950s and 1960s even conducted their own gynecological checks on prostitutes as a way to check the spread of venereal disease. In the 1970s, some commands provided medical supplies to Korean VD clinics to assist in the regulation of sex workers.²⁰

Not only are there striking parallels in the exploitation and suffering experienced by both groups of women, but also, both social movements grew out of the leaders' Christian concern for these women who were physically, emotionally, and socially compromised. The 1988 international seminar on Women and Tourism was organized by Korea Church Women United, an umbrella organization for Christian women's activism, that has supported both movements. Yu Pong Rim and Faye Moon, founders of My Sister's Place, began their outreach work in the U.S. camptowns as part of their missionary work. Yu had studied theology at a Korean seminary and Moon, the wife of dissident activist Rev. Moon Dong Hwan, had a background in social work and counseling. Both women came to understand the lives of *kijich'on* sex workers by talking to them in the VD clinics and trying to befriend them on a casual basis. They tried to offer Bible study classes as well. The *chong-*

17. Soh, "The Korean 'Comfort Women,'" p. 1238.

18. Moon, *Sex Among Allies*, Chapters 1 and 6.

19. *Ibid.*, Chapter 6.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 99-100.

sindae movement organizers also have had coalitional ties to churchwomen's groups. In May 1988, women's organizations from seven different denominations in Korea wrote a protest letter to KQED TV, a station catering to Korean immigrants in Los Angeles, against its misinformed characterization of Korean "comfort women" in one of their programs. They claimed their position not only as "proud daughters of the Korean nation" but also as "Christian women who proclaim Jesus Christ as our savior."²¹

The early leaders of both movements shared ideological views as well, namely, that patriarchy, imperialism, and militarism were responsible for creating systems of militarized sex work. As Prof. Yun Chong Ok argued,

[s]o long as there is no change in the sexual consciousness both of men, who do not realise that they are being controlled by using women's sex, or of women, who have internalised the 'ideal of chastity' imposed upon them, there will be no end to the danger of sex being used again as an expedient means of control.²²

Shin Hei Soo, another prominent leader of the CM, argued in her 1991 Ph.D. dissertation that Korea's economic "miracle" developed in tandem with and partly owing to the sex industry in which Korean businesses and government encouraged male employees to indulge. She viewed this sociological phenomenon as a function of South Korea's dependent status in the world economy.²³ Some leaders of the KM also have blamed U.S. imperialism and U.S.-led capitalism for the plight and abuse of the *kijich'on* women. In their view, South Korea is a colony of the United States, and the plight of the women represents the oppressed plight of the Korean people.²⁴

The feminism and anti-militarism of the leaders of both groups also were linked to their understanding of nationalism—that the suffering and abuse inflicted on Korean women by foreigners is a manifestation of Korea's weakness or lack of sovereignty. Nationalism serves as the CM's key instrument of mobilization and publicity inside Korea. In terms of organizational alliances, the Korean Association of Pacific War Victims and Bereaved Families, a group specifically seeking personal war damages and official Japanese accountability, increasingly has become a main coalition partner. It is not a

21. "Protest Letter regarding KQED-TV's May 5, 1988, Depiction of the Chongsindae Issue in the Broadcast of *The World in War*" (in Korean), reprinted in *Chongsindae munje charyojip* [Resources on the *chongsindae* issue, I], ed. Korean Council (Seoul: Korean Council, 1991), p. 47.

22. George Hicks, *The Comfort Women: Japan's Brutal Regime of Enforced Prostitution in the Second World War* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1994), p. 174.

23. Hei Soo Shin, "Women's Sexual Services and Economic Development: The Political Economy of the Entertainment Industry and South Korean Dependent Development" (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 1991).

24. *My Sister's Place, Kijichon ui choguk* [The homeland of camptowns] (Tongduch'on, Korea: My Sister's Place, 1991), pp. 4–6.

self-identified human rights organization and is not mobilized for the specific purpose of promoting women's rights and issues.

Moreover, the CM leaders themselves share the anti-Japanese resentment harbored by many other Koreans. In spring 1992, when I visited the office of the Korean Council, one of the board members, a long-time Christian activist, exclaimed in Korean, "Do you know what I pray for each day? That Japan be destroyed!" The two founders and main leaders of the movement, Yun Chong Ok and Yi Hyo Chae, come from a generation that experienced the colonial oppressions of the past, and they are similar in age to most *chongsindae* survivors. Yi and Yun have both pointed out that they could have been victims too, generating empathy for the survivors and universalizing these women's experiences as a victimization that could have happened to an entire generation of Korean women. Yi has stated unequivocally that the *chongsindae* system "can only be defined as a crime of genocide against the Korean people."²⁵ In this light, the survivors represent not only the degradation of the Korean people but also the collective wish to reclaim national sovereignty and integrity.

In one of their first declarations on the Korean government's responsibility in this matter, the CM's leaders in May 1990 questioned the rationale for then-President Roh Tae Woo's visit to Japan scheduled for later that month and charged him with the task of getting the movement's demands met. In this public letter, the cosigners framed their grievance and call for redress in purely nationalistic terms, reminding readers of Japan's past imperialistic abuses in Korea and its current "unprincipled foreign policy behavior." Although the purpose of the statement was to pressure the Korean leader to become an advocate for the former victims, the reference to the *chongsindae* survivors appears only toward the end of the document, after the grievances about colonial rule, lack of real Korean sovereignty, and discrimination against Korean minorities living in Japan.²⁶

Similarly, the KM views the current presence of foreign troops as an affront to Korean sovereignty and therefore opposes the permanent presence of the U.S. forces. The leaders perceive the Status of Forces Agreement between the two countries to be an unequal treaty and advocate revisions to enable the South Korean government to exercise more sovereignty, especially in terms of legal jurisdiction over crimes committed by U.S. military personnel on Korean soil. After the brutal murder of Yun Kumi, the KM helped establish the National Campaign for the Eradication of Crimes by U.S. Troops in Korea in 1993. In fact, a former leading staff member at My Sis-

25. *Los Angeles Times*, November 23, 1994.

26. KCWU, Korean Women's Associations United, and Council of Representatives of Female University Students, *Statement: Women's Position on President Roh Tae Woo's Visit to Japan* (in Korean), Seoul, May 18, 1990, reprinted in *Chongsindae munje charyojip*, pp. 48-49.

ter's Place is now a top official at this organization. The KM leaders also view the presence of the troops as a way to keep the North and South divided. Almost all of the original leaders also are fervent advocates of reunification (which they hope will happen sooner rather than later).²⁷

Despite these commonalities, what began with the possibility of cooperation and mutual support on behalf of women's dignity, welfare, and governmental accountability quickly soured. Shortly after the initial meetings to forge the *chongsindae* movement, Yu and Moon broke away from the CM leaders because the latter were generally not willing to accept *kijich'on* women's needs and interests as legitimate.²⁸ Why were the two groups unable to become coalitional partners?

Differences in Ideology, Leadership, and Organization

The parting of ways reflects significant ideological differences regarding sexual norms, nationalism, and political activism between the two groups. First, despite Yun Chong Ok's call in the starting phase of the CM for Koreans to "completely change the social conceptions of women's sexuality" in order to stop the marginalization of "fallen women," the CM retained a traditional understanding of acceptable female sexual behavior. Many of the leaders and survivors emphasized that the former "comfort women" were innocent victims whereas *kijich'on* women were not. *Chongsindae* survivors were insistent that their cause not be linked to that of *kijich'on* women,²⁹ emphasizing that their identities as sex slaves were not to be equated with those of "willing whores." In the CM's view, the *chongsindae* survivors represent in body and mind the most humiliating, degrading, and painful colonial oppressions that were *imposed* on Korean people, not voluntary adventures into the world of sex. On the other hand, the KM leaders have viewed the situation of the majority of *kijich'on* women as the outcome of economic coercion (in addition to physical coercion for some), and therefore not a matter of exercising one's own free will. Yu Pong Rim told me in a conversation in the winter of 1991 that when she addresses audiences in order to raise their awareness of *kijich'on* women's lives, she poses out loud, "Did any of you ever dream you would become a *kijich'on* prostitute when you were little? Do you think the *kijich'on* women did?"³⁰ The inability to agree on who constitutes a rightful

27. For views on nationalism, U.S. imperialism and crimes against Koreans, and reunification, see My Sister's Place, True Love Shelter, Korea Church Women United, et al., *Great Army, Great Father: Report on the Human Rights Violations of Women and Children by U.S. Forces in Korea* (Seoul: 1995), pp. 13–25, 35–48, and 81–82.

28. Yu Pong Rim, author interview, Tongduch'on, December 1991.

29. *Choson Daily News* reporter, author interview, Boston, July 1994.

30. Yu Pong Rim interview, 1991.

victim of militarized sexual abuse was the major cause of the *kijich'on* movement leaders' initial dissociation with the *chongsindae* movement.

This difference might also pose other practical problems for the camptown sex workers themselves. If there are *chongsindae* survivors who also are *kijich'on* survivors, they would not be in a position to step forth and demand justice and compensation for the first identity and existence because the second would compromise their moral legitimacy. The conflict over who constitutes a "legitimate victim," then, involves a conflict over identities. The public discourse on the *chongsindae* has tended to identify all the victims and survivors as a group, including non-Koreans. It has emphasized their innocence and enslaved status, although there are differences among them including time spent in bondage, the value that the Japanese placed on their race/ethnicity, and exposure to the dangers of battle. But because their suffering was so great both during and after the war and because one cannot and should not quantify the amount of suffering from rape and abuse in order to legitimate people's claim to moral and legal redress, those who seek accountability focus on the institutions and authorities that created and supported the *chongsindae* as a system. But in regard to the camptown sex workers, the common inclination is to overlook or ignore the system of sexual labor, debt bondage, violence, and human degradation and rather focus on the question of the camptown woman's "choice." I would argue here that although there are women who walked into the camptowns without having been kidnapped or otherwise physically coerced, and also those who were sexually curious about the goings-on with American soldiers, this does not mean that they agreed to debt bondage, beatings, and murder. Regardless of the individual causes of entry into sexual labor, those who oversee and regulate the system must be held morally and legally accountable for violating basic human rights.

Nationalism provides another source of conflict. The CM takes a traditional anti-colonial stance. Its goal is to reveal and right the wrongs of the past. Its moral basis stems from victimization by an aggressor and the fact that the entire nation, not only a portion of the population, had been subjugated. Social movement theorists note that such movements are constructed actively by their leaders, participants, and target groups through communication, interaction with counter-groups, and consciousness-raising.³¹ They particularly emphasize the importance of the social and ideological context in which the "frame alignment"³² of social movements takes place, particularly

31. Bert Klandermans, "The Social Construction of Protest and Multiorganizational Fields," in *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, eds. Aldon Morris and Carol Mueller (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 86.

32. David Snow, E. Burke Rochford, Jr., et al., "Frame Alignment Processes, Micro-Mobilization and Movement Participation," *American Sociological Review* 51:4 (August 1986), pp. 464-81.

the “nature of the belief system held by potential participants” and the “extent to which the framing effort resonates within the ‘life world’ of potential participants.”³³ In this light, the CM’s appeal to nationalism within South Korea rather than women’s human rights makes sense. With the newly found impetus for democratization coming only in the late 1980s and the first civilian president in over 30 years assuming office in 1993—about the same time that the CM was picking up speed—South Korean society lacked the legal, institutional, and discursive infrastructure to address human rights in general and women’s human rights in particular. Moreover, the kind of human rights violations that Koreans were familiar with were those involving state repression of basic civil liberties and imprisonment and/or torture of dissidents. But all Koreans, young and old, were familiar with the history of Japanese colonialism. When I asked a leader of the CM in 1992 why the causes of the *chongsindae* women and *kijich’on* women were not being linked and a larger women’s human rights movement was not being forged, she candidly replied that there wasn’t “enough anti-Americanism” to fuel such a joint movement, whereas for the former alone there was enough “anti-Japanism.”³⁴

Relatedly, there is a significant difference in the symbolic value of the two groups of women. Whereas *chongsindae* women symbolize the loss of Korean sovereignty and therefore a nation’s powerlessness, the *kijich’on* women represent active attempts by the Korean government since the end of the Korean War to protect its national security by helping to institutionalize and regulate *kijich’on* prostitution.³⁵ If the moral and legal burden of the *chongsindae* system falls on the Japanese people and government, then the moral and legal burden of the *kijich’on* system falls on Koreans, the Korean government, and the U.S. military.

Owing partly to these differences, the KM’s understanding of nationalism is more complicated. For the KM leaders and staffers, it is not only a foreign government (military) that serves as the oppressor of women but also the Korean government, especially the former military regimes, that sought U.S. protection and tutelage. Whereas the *chongsindae* movement’s criticism of the Korean government has been limited to its relative inaction on their behalf, the *kijich’on* activists have characterized the Korean government as a

33. Klandermans, “Social Construction of Protest,” p. 80.

34. CM leader, author interview, Seoul, winter 1992.

35. The public discourse in Korea on the *chongsindae* emphasizes Koreans’ helpless and unwitting sacrifice of young women to Japanese colonizers. However, Youn-ok Song points out that the practice of trafficking in girls and women for prostitution outside Korea was already well-established in Korea during the 1920s, such that “[t]o be a victim of this trafficking became an ordinary misfortune.” See Youn-ok Song, “Japanese Colonial Rule and State-Managed Prostitution: Korea’s Licensed Prostitutes,” in *The Comfort Women: Colonialism, War, and Sex*, p. 202.

pimp because it has facilitated the sale of women to U.S. soldier-clients who historically have brought with them valuable foreign exchange and military commitment. Anti-government sentiments have been part and parcel of the KM's version of nationalism. Moreover, whereas anti-Americanism rose since the Kwangju Massacre of 1980 (and the belief by many Koreans that the U.S. allowed it to happen) and the radicalization of the student movement in that decade, the majority of Koreans still support the maintenance of U.S. forces, especially in light of the nuclear weapons development North Korea has undertaken in the 1990s. Although it is difficult to quantify how much anti-foreign sentiment is required for a nationalist movement to pick up speed, it seems that the *kijich'on* movement faces a shortage in that area.

The difference between the two movements in terms of nationalist ideology and political views in general also is a result of the different activist careers of the two movements' leaders. The CM leaders generally are middle-aged or older; the two cofounders, Yun Chong Ok and Lee Hyo Chae, are both in their 70s. Many of the CM leaders can be characterized as middle class and moderate in political views as compared to the KM leaders. They tend to be academics, as Yun and Lee have been (at the elite women's university, Ewha, in Seoul) as well as two other leaders, Shin Hei Soo and Chong Chin Song. For the most part, the CM leaders were not outspoken political activists during the heated anti-government protest era of the 1980s. In contrast, almost all of the early leaders of the KM came of political age through their participation in the street protests and battles with the police during the 1980s. Most were in their late teens or early 20s when they became involved and still maintain close affiliation with college students, who regularly come to serve as teachers and assistants at the *kijich'on* counseling centers. Several of them have served time in prison for their anti-government beliefs and/or actions. In general, they can be characterized as more militant and radical in political ideology and activism than their counterparts in the CM. Moreover, their socioeconomic status is more diverse; they come from less recognized colleges and universities, as well as elite institutions like Ewha, whereas Ewha graduates have occupied a critical mass of the *chongsindae* leadership since the beginning. And one of the most outspoken *kijich'on* activists is Kim Yon Ja, a former sex worker and madam of 25 years, whereas no *chongsindae* survivor has risen to leadership status in the CM. These differences help explain the lack of cooperation between the two movements' leadership and the difficulty of the KM in gaining general public support.

Last, the difference in the two movements' organizational purpose and activities helps account for the difference in the visibility and publicization between the two causes. The CM began as a movement to document past abuses and demand legal and historical (through education) redress on behalf of the survivors, whereas the KM began as an effort to aid and counsel sex

workers. Accordingly, one of the first organizational actions that the CM leaders took was to establish a research committee in Seoul, initially under the auspices of the Church and Society Committee of Korea Church Women United (July 1988) and then independently as the Research Committee on the *Chongsindae* (July 1990).³⁶ In comparison, the KM organizers rented a small room in the camp/shantytown of Songsan in Uijongbu (home of the U.S. I Corps Group) and opened their doors to any *kijich'on* woman seeking shelter, companionship, a common meal, or English lessons. They called this gathering “My Sister’s Place.” These organizational choices make sense given that the CM began as a movement in search of victims and evidence of abuse and that the KM faced a situation where tens of thousands of women visibly walked the streets, used their broken English to hustle drinks, and often suffered physical beatings by their bar owners and/or clients. Digging out information and past victims was crucial to the survival of the *chongsindae* movement, while offering physical and emotional aid to those in need was immediately relevant to the *kijich'on* movement.

The academic aspect of the *chongsindae* movement—research and documentation—has become one of its biggest assets because it has offered credibility to the movement’s claims and helped outsiders to evaluate facts as well as ideological and emotional motivations. Moreover, the research has helped generate interest among academics, both domestically and internationally, to conduct their own research about Japan’s World War II past.³⁷ Their findings in turn have helped strengthen the cause of the *chongsindae* movement. In comparison, the *kijich'on* movement has been weak in the area of research and documentation. Besides the different emphasis in mission—aiding sex workers in their current situation—the *kijich'on* activists and civilian researchers in general (even if they are U.S. citizens) lack access to policy papers, reports and other documents in the U.S. military establishment’s possession that might offer proof of institutional and governmental responsibility for some aspects of the military prostitution system in Korea. Without documentation, it is difficult to prove who is responsible for what kinds of abusive or exploitive outcomes in these women’s lives and therefore could be held legally, financially, and morally accountable.

Contemporary Developments in Civil Society

Scholarship on civil society in South Korea highlights the proliferation of interest groups and civic movements and the decline of leftist-oriented and

36. Korean Council, *Chongsindae munje charyojip*, p. 42.

37. For example, see T. Tanaka, *Hidden Horrors: Japanese War Crimes in World War Two* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1996).

militant activism since the late 1980s.³⁸ These developments apply to the women's movement as well. First, women's issues and organizations have proliferated in the last decade—growing beyond the two recurring issues that have been the focus since the 1970s, labor rights and revision of the Family Law—to include, among others, nondiscrimination in college entrance examinations, domestic violence, equal employment opportunities, ratification of the U.N. Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, and the changing of citizenship requirements from patrilineage to bi-lineage. Within the *kijich'on* movement itself, activists have splintered off to create new groups, owing to leadership conflicts, different perceptions of the problem, and the fact that it is relatively easy to start a civic group in the 1990s as compared to the years under authoritarianism. Although Yu Pong Rim and Faye Moon were the only activists to set up a counseling center and begin to educate the larger population about *kijich'on* life back in 1986, numerous local churches and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have since begun to minister to the women, often in conflict with secular groups. For some, “saving” these women from sin is key; for others, kicking out U.S. troops is the only real solution. Still others tend to the needs of Amerasian children in the camptowns. And there is dissension here as well, with some believing that what is best for the children is to get them adopted by Americans or Europeans (so that they can leave behind the social stigma they face in Korea) and others believing that changing Korean mentality regarding race, sex, and class will ultimately be in the children's best interest. Saeumto, another counseling/advocacy center, was formed after its founders were unable to reconcile differences over organizational leadership styles and goals with the heads of the original center in Tongduch'on, My Sister's Place. The *chong-sindae* movement, by contrast, has remained centralized and intact, with the Korean Council serving as the authority on and clearinghouse for movement activities. The lesson seems to be that while the democratization of civic movements introduces new civic actors into political life and helps generate different perspectives and possible solutions to particular social concerns, it creates problems for the development and growth of fledgling causes if it happens too early because consolidation of personnel, resources, and goals cannot occur.

Second, the decline of radical activism in Korea means that radical groups no longer have a powerful platform of protest and resistance and must increasingly go it alone or appeal to more mainstream organizations and audiences. The KM appears to be in this transitional state: in December 1996,

38. For example, see Sunhyuk Kim, “Civil Society in South Korea: From Grand Democracy Movements to Petty Interest Groups?” *Journal of Northeast Asian Studies* 15:2 (Summer 1996); and *ibid.*, “State and Civil Society in South Korea's Democratic Consolidation: Is the Battle Really Over?” *Asian Survey* 37:12 (December 1997).

movement leaders organized the first "cultural festival" around the *kijich'on* issue and invited musicians, documentary filmmakers, critics, and a diverse audience to the two-day affair. Given the general democratization in artistic and cultural life in the past decade, such programs might help advance the recognition of *kijich'on* issues more widely. The festival indeed attracted individuals who were not directly connected or concerned with the *kijich'on* issue but who walked away with increased awareness and sympathy for the movement.³⁹

There is another aspect in the development of contemporary civil society that is less studied but is certain to influence significantly the success or failure of civic movements in the future: the international connection. The CM's early move to identify itself as a movement for women's human rights and lobby the U.N. and international NGOs to take up their cause is directly responsible for its successes. The Korean Council tirelessly persuaded the U.N. Commission on Human Rights to address the issue of war crimes and official Japanese reparation. The commission's 1996 *Report of the Special Rapporteur* unequivocally identified the *chongsindae* system as a war crime and a crime against humanity and echoed the council's demands for Japanese apology, compensation, and historical documentation.⁴⁰

Elisabeth Friedman has noted that "[w]omen's human rights activists have come to recognize the power of [the] international human rights framework, which lends legitimacy to political demands, since it is already accepted by most governments and brings with it established protocols."⁴¹ Charlotte Bunch, a long-time leader of the international women's human rights movement and director of the Center for Women's Global Leadership at Rutgers University, has stated that "the international pressure has made the Tokyo government come as far as it has."⁴² I believe that without such international structures and discourse intent upon protecting and promoting women's human rights, the *chongsindae* movement, despite its diligent organizing efforts and moral fervor, would have remained a national or regional movement for war reparations.

In contrast, the *kijich'on* movement never inserted itself within the official U.N. machinery but relied mostly on those individuals and NGOs from abroad that expressed some interest in understanding and publicizing the issue. As a result, the international contacts and activities of the KM have remained mostly regional and in the purview of a loose coalition of anti-

39. *Saeumto Newsletter*, no. 3 (February 15, 1997).

40. See Coomaraswamy, *Report on the Mission*.

41. Elisabeth Friedman, "Women's Human Rights: The Emergence of a Movement," in *Women's Rights, Human Rights: International Feminist Perspectives*, eds. Julie Peters and Andrea Wolper (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 19.

42. *Los Angeles Times*, November 23, 1994.

militarism activists. In addition, the KM lost a vital international partner in its cause after the 1992 closing of U.S. naval bases in the Philippines. Until then, Filipino women's groups had been some of the most active protesters against U.S. bases and militarized prostitution.

Conclusion

Not only have the *chongsindae* and *kijich'on* movements found little room for cooperation, they have essentially lost the opportunity to promote an expanded understanding of human rights that incorporates issues around human trafficking and sexual exploitation and violence into the mainstream of the women's movement in Korea. The CM, as the more visible and internationally recognized one, has in the short run overshadowed rather than shed light on the *kijich'on* problem. In February 1997, An Ilsun, activist and author of a recent novel on *kijich'on* life, stated, "There is hardly any interest in Korea regarding this *kijich'on* issue."⁴³ The staff members of Saeumto regretfully stated that the *chongsindae* movement has had no positive influence on the *kijich'on* movement.⁴⁴ They pointed out that, for example, no official support from the CM had been expressed when the *kijich'on* women's advocates mobilized Koreans both in and outside the camptowns to protest the brutal murder of Yun Kumi in 1993.

In an article that appeared earlier in this journal, Soh emphasized that Japanese "'ethnonationalism' . . . augur[s] ill for a pro-human rights verdict on the pending 'comfort women' lawsuits."⁴⁵ But it should be stressed here that South Koreans' own version of ethnonationalism, which emphasizes "innocence" (moral chastity) as a requirement for claiming women's human rights also bodes ill for the promotion of pro-human rights ideology and institutional frameworks within their country. For an individual to keep alive the notion that she is not morally tainted because she did not willingly have sex with foreign soldiers and because she had been "innocent" about sex prior to *chongsindae* sex work may be psychologically empowering. However, a movement's and a society's promotion of the cause based on the notion that *chongsindae* survivors can demand reparations, claim their honor, and command the respect of the nation because they were virgin victims of war crimes forges a tenuous ground for women's human rights. After all, social norms about the appropriate age (and marriage status) for sexual activity change. Moreover, the emphasis on sexual innocence sets too high a threshold for the public's understanding and advocacy of women's human rights by

43. An Ilsun is the author of *Ppaetbol* (Seoul: Konggan Media Publishing Co., 1995), telephone conversation, February 1997.

44. Saeumto staff members, facsimile communication to author, February 18, 1997.

45. Soh, "The Korean 'Comfort Women,'" p. 1240.

tending to count only the most egregious and extreme abuses as legitimate cases for redress. In turn, an exclusive, rather than inclusive, interpretation of human rights may develop. *Kijich'on* activists have been facing this challenge. They support the CM's goals and have full sympathy for the *chongsindae* "grandmothers" but cannot ride on the CM's coattails, since those very survivors and leaders dissociate themselves from the *kijich'on* people.

At a conference on "Men, Women, and War" held in March 1997 in Londonderry, Northern Ireland, I asked Prof. Yun if the Korean Council has any plans for the future direction of the *chongsindae* movement cum human rights movement if and when the Japanese government meets their demands. She replied, "Well, that's a difficult question"—and shook her head sideways. Understandably, the focus is on getting Japan to respond favorably. But there was no sense of what might or should come after. What comes after, though, is a pressing question, given the momentum of attention to women's human rights issues and the voicing, after generations of silence, of women's victimization through militarization. Eyerman and Jamison note that the "cognitive praxis of social movements is an important source of new societal images and the transformation of societal identities."⁴⁶ The *chongsindae* movement has indeed pried open the doors of opportunity for expanding and advancing new "societal images and identities" that can inform women's human rights; the loss would be in not building upon the movement's efforts and standing by for another few decades for the lives and cause of *kijich'on* women to be unearthed and shaped anew. We should not ask then why history repeats itself.

46. Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, *Social Movements: A Cognitive Approach* (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), p. 166.