

Testimony

Hak-Soon Kim

A Korean born in China, 1924–1997



Hak-Soon Kim on August 14, 1991

“I’m Hak-Soon Kim, forcibly taken as a ‘comfort woman’ for the Japanese military.”

“일본 군대 ‘위안부’로 강제로 끌려갔던 김학순입니다.”

On August 14, 1991, Hak-Soon Kim testified publicly about her experience before and during WWII, becoming the first survivor of the Japanese military sexual slavery system to speak out, exposing past crimes and demanding justice.

Her public testimony inspired hundreds of survivors from countries including South Korea, North Korea, China, Taiwan, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Australia to come forward with their own stories of suffering and abuse, leading to Professor Yoshimi Yoshiaki’s 1992 announcement of his discovery of hard evidence that the Imperial Japanese Army

had established and run “comfort stations” against the victims’ will.

From the 1930s to the end of World War II in 1945, the Japanese Imperial Armed Forces established and operated numerous “comfort stations” for Japanese soldiers in the territories they occupied. Hundreds of thousands of women and girls from throughout Asia were forced into this military sexual slavery.

“I am the very evidence.”

Hak-Soon Kim was born in 1924 in Jilin (吉林), Manchuria. Yet before Hak-Soon turned 100 days old*, her father died. Her family had moved to Jilin from Pyongyang, modern-day North Korea’s capital city, to escape the aggressive Japanese control over the Korean peninsula. When Hak-Soon turned two, her mother returned to her parents’ home in Korea. Her maternal grandparents were barely able to support themselves, so when Hak-Soon was thirteen, her mother remarried in order to ease the family’s financial situation. Hak-Soon had overwhelming difficulty suddenly accepting a man she’d never met as her stepfather and living with him. To avoid living with her stepfather, at the age of fifteen, Hak-Soon asked to be sent to a *kisaeng* academy, where girls were trained to become courtesans through education in music, poetry, and dance. Even though she completed the two-year program, Hak-Soon was unable to work in Korea because the minimum age required to work in Korea as a *kisaeng* was nineteen. Her stepfather told Hak-Soon that she could work in China. Upon hearing this, she headed to China with him.

It was 1941 and the world was at war. When they arrived Beijing, Hak-Soon, then seventeen, was abducted by a Japanese soldier, taken to a “comfort station” in the back of a truck, and forced into military sexual slavery.

Hak-Soon never stopped caring for others who had been affected by poverty. In her will, she left her life savings, twenty million *won* (US\$17,900) to the needy.

“I do not want the crimes I suffered repeated onto others.”

**Baek-il* (백일), or a baby’s first 100 days, is an important milestone in Korean culture.



Photo credit: Chul Kyu Chang

Sources: Korea Chongshindae's Institute and The Korean Council, *True Stories of the Korean Comfort Women*, 『강제로 끌려간 조선인 군위안부들』, (South Korea: 한울 Hanul, 1993), 1:31–44.

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