

# Testimony

Suzuko Shirota

Born in Japan, 1921-1993



*“I still can vividly remember the people who lived with me then. Please build the pagoda for the souls.”*

Although it’s a pen name, Suzuko Shirota was the only Japanese “comfort woman” who publicly testified to her experience through her memoir *In Praise of Mary* (『マリアの賛歌』), published in 1971.

Her mother died when she was fourteen, and three years later, her father sold her into prostitution to pay off his gambling debt. Suzuko was then sold and taken to a “comfort station” in Taiwan with Korean, Okinawan, and other Japanese women and girls. The Japanese Imperial Armed Forces established and operated “comfort stations” throughout their occupied territories from the 1930s through the end of WWII. Hundreds of thousands of women and girls from across Asia were forced into Japanese military sexual slavery during these years.

“I became, in name and reality, a slave,” she recounted in her memoir. She continued, “On Saturdays and Sundays, there would be a line, and men would compete to get in. It was a meat market, with no feeling or emotion. Each woman would have to take ten or fifteen men.”

After WWII, she worked at a brothel where U.S. troops in Japan came frequently.

“At any rate, I felt like I existed to be used by men for profit and for fun, that’s a woman’s lot, I just felt like my body was a throwaway object.”

Later, out of desperation, Suzuko tried to take her own life. However, she committed to live after a visit to her mother’s grave, where she learned that her sister had committed suicide. In 1955, she finally found a safe place to live at a women’s shelter. Even then, she often saw fellow “comfort station” inmates in her tormented dreams. Suzuko eventually requested a monument for all “comfort women.” In 1986, a stone memorial remembering and honoring the victims of Japanese military sexual slavery was installed at the Kanita Women’s Village in Chiba, Japan. On the stone memorial, the words ‘噫從軍慰安婦’ (to military “comfort women”) are engraved.

“There should be no war under any circumstances.”

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Photo credit: Kwang Song Lee

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