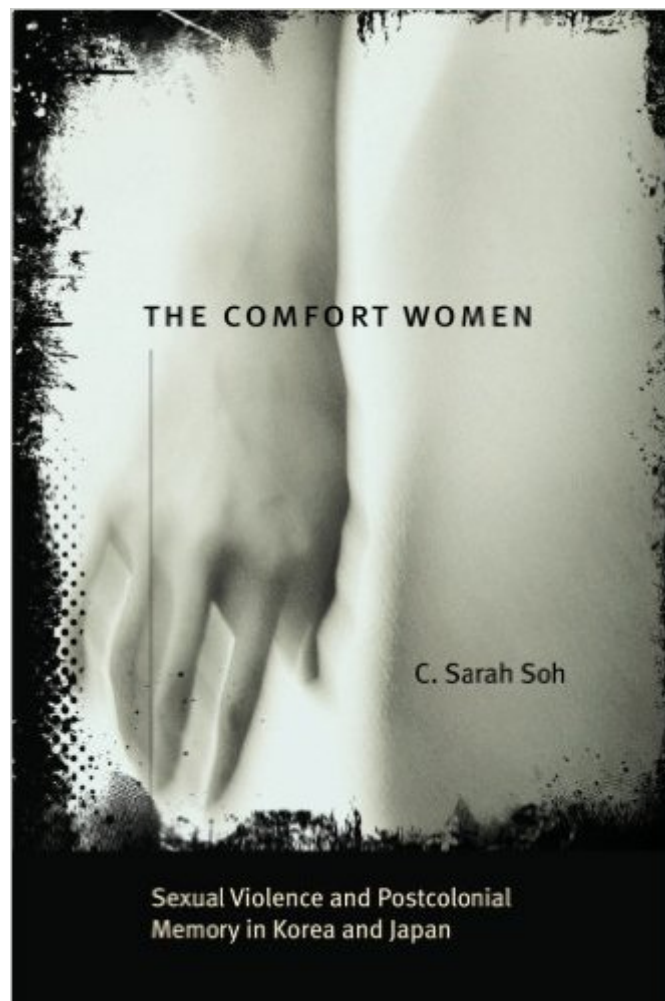


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The Comfort Women: Sexual Violence And Postcolonial Memory In Korea And Japan (Worlds Of Desire: The Chicago Series On Sexuality, Gender, And Culture)



Synopsis

In an era marked by atrocities perpetrated on a grand scale, the tragedy of the so-called comfort women—mostly Korean women forced into prostitution by the Japanese army—endures as one of the darkest events of World War II. These women have usually been labeled victims of a war crime, a simplistic view that makes it easy to pin blame on the policies of imperial Japan and therefore easier to consign the episode to a war-torn past. In this revelatory study, C. Sarah Soh provocatively disputes this master narrative. Soh reveals that the forces of Japanese colonialism and Korean patriarchy together shaped the fate of Korean comfort women—a double bind made strikingly apparent in the cases of women cast into sexual slavery after fleeing abuse at home. Other victims were press-ganged into prostitution, sometimes with the help of Korean procurers. Drawing on historical research and interviews with survivors, Soh tells the stories of these women from girlhood through their subjugation and beyond to their efforts to overcome the traumas of their past. Finally, Soh examines the array of factors—from South Korean nationalist politics to the aims of the international women's human rights movement—that have contributed to the incomplete view of the tragedy that still dominates today.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

... and most definitely NOT for casual readers or those who are not willing to re-examine their preconceived ideas and views of the wartime comfort women. This work is likewise ill-suited for those who aren't serious readers of history. C. Sarah Soh, as a native Korean who was fortunate to

receive formal education both in her homeland and abroad, has produced a masterful examination of a controversial issue involving Korea and Japan which people from both countries have long oversimplified. Koreans generally believe that Imperial Japan's leadership ordered, planned, and executed the gunpoint kidnapping of thousands of Korean females and summarily shipped them like chattel to frontline brothels. Japanese people - at least those who know this issue - either agree that the Koreans were largely victimized, or claim that this is a gross fabrication and that the comfort women were essentially willing prostitutes. Professor Soh cites several examples, such as interviews with survivors, to show that the truth is far more complex. Some survivors stated they were not forcibly taken by Japanese troops. Others are shown to have bought their way to freedom with earnings - earnings??? Yes. Hence the question - if the comfort women were slaves, they wouldn't have had wages. Then what were they: slaves or prostitutes or something else? Additionally, Professor Soh does the reader a huge service by detailing the sociocultural contexts of 1930s-1940s Korea and Japan. Information on views on sex, women, and the sexism that characterized pre-modern Korean and Japanese societies is provided, thus presenting the reader with a better understanding of what facilitated the existence of "sex care work" in both societies.

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