

## Japan-born Korean director continues pursuing 'comfort women' stories

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Park Soo-nam (Mainichi)

"It could have been me," says 82-year-old director Park Soo-nam, a second-generation Korean resident of Japan -- also known as "Zainichi" -- about her latest work "The Silence," which captures the experiences of former "comfort women" who visited Japan in 1994.

Born in Mie Prefecture and raised during the height of World War II, Park learned in school that she had to support the war for the Emperor. She says she can see the overlap between her upbringing and that of the comfort women, who are not that different from her in age.

It was after the war ended that she became aware of racial discrimination. Park began her creative activities with a collection of her correspondence with a Zainichi Korean minor on death row, which she made into the book "Tsumi to shi to ai to" (Crime and death and love and) in 1963.

"Digging up the experience of Koreans in Japan that has been erased from history is my life's work," she says.

Park was also involved in gathering information about Korean survivors of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. It was when she realized, "Even people who couldn't express what they had experienced in

words could convey what they felt in their silence and the twinkle in their eyes," that she began filming her subjects.

Her coverage of former comfort women started from a 1989 interview with the late Bae Bong-gi in Okinawa, who had been taken from the Korean Peninsula to the island during the war. The interview became the basis for Park's 1991 film "Song of Arirang: Voices from Okinawa." In 2012, Park released the film "Life is a Treasure: 'Gyokusai' Stories in the Battle of Okinawa" telling of the forced "gyokusai," dying without surrendering, of comfort women and laborers from the Korean Peninsula when U.S. forces landed on the island in 1945.

"The Silence," released in 2017, is Park's third work about comfort women, and turned into a piece that looks back on her own journey as well as the battles fought by former comfort women starting in the 1990s. Many young people wrote down their impressions of the film at the theater, and an encore showing is scheduled in Tokyo.

"Seeing the former comfort women who broke the silence and stood up (for themselves), what should we be doing? I would like even just one more Japanese person to ponder that question."

Song of Arirang Production Committee, which put out the documentary, can be reached to organize private showings at 090-6867-3843 (in Japanese).