
Comfort Women:

Perpetuating Violence on Korean Women by the Occupying Armies

Ji-Hyun Lee

Class of 2018, Psychology

This paper examines prostitution in a militarized context on the Korean peninsula. While sexual violence like rape and forced prostitution is not uncommon in war zones, the case of the Korean peninsula offers a distinct narrative. Not only was Korea a stronghold of neo-Confucianism, a more authoritarian version of Confucianism, but the constant threat of colonization and occupation by surrounding powers significantly affected the psyche of the national psyche. Thus this paper attempts to trace neo-Confucian policy toward women as heavily influenced by the traumas of modernity: The Korean government passively handing over its female citizens into institutionalized prostitution ('comfort stations') under the military regulations of Japan and the U.S. while actively discriminating against these sex workers in the society. In this context, reassessing policies toward reparations for these comfort women becomes addressing the violence inscribed on female bodies that transcends single nationality. It reveals and recommends deconstruction of the victim-shaming culture prevalent in masculinized, even misogynistic states. It further calls for an international recognition and remembrance of these women as vocal exposés of war crimes against women.

On December 28, 2015, Korean President Park Geun-hye and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe reached a final and irrefutable official agreement on the issue of comfort women, receiving positive response from the White House. The term 'comfort women' is a euphemistic reference to the young women involuntarily recruited from Japanese colonies and occupied territories into forced prostitution to serve the Japanese soldiers. An estimated 200,000 adolescent girls from Korea, Taiwan, China, Philippines, Malaysia, East Timor, Indonesia, and Java were forced into systemized prostitution, which was created and regulated by the Japanese military (Argibay 378; E. T. Kim 223; Hung 183). Many Korean comfort women who were able to return to their country faced immense social pressure—both external and internal—to keep silent, and experienced severe discrimination if their pasts were revealed. In the most recent agreement, the Korean government promised to remove remembrance statues and never bring the issue out in the international circle in exchange for 8.3 million dollars from the Japanese government (Choe).

Although the system of coerced institutionalized prostitution aimed to serve the Japanese military during Japan's colonization, the system remained in Korea following the colonial exit. Such development prompts inquiry into the extreme victimization of women in Korea. The

Korean War (1950) occurred almost immediately after the liberation from Japanese annexation. As an infantile democracy with neighboring Communist countries, South Korea relied heavily on the U.S. military for protection and economic stability. Substantial economic gain was made through prostitution near army bases. For this reason, the Korean government endorsed and aided the U.S. government in regulating the women (Lee 454). The women participating in prostitution, derogatively called 'Western Princesses' (*yanggongju*) or 'Western Whores' (*yanggalboe*) (Lee 454; Hong 51), and their mixed-race children faced great social discrimination and institutionalized violence by the military. The callousness of Korean society toward these marginalized women is an interplay between the authoritarian Confucian system and the long, turbulent Korean history of violence perpetrated against women. The precepts of Confucianism allowed the repeated victimization of Korean women by occupying armies, a reality that has continuing repercussions even in the present day, as well as the assignment of blame to these women for their involvement by patriarchal Korean society.

Female History and Ruling Ideology of the Pre-Modern Korean Peninsula

The mass victimization of Korean females, including the failure of the government to initially protect

these women from foreign soldiers and then to provide rehabilitative services to treat their post-war traumas, traces its history back to the Mongol invasion of Koryo in 1231. The subsequent Koryo-Mongol Treaty of 1270 essentially placed Koryo as Mongol's protectorate. The Yuan Dynasty forced Koryo kings to marry its princesses and send Koryo women (*kongnyeo*, literally translated as 'tribute women'), in addition to tributes, to Mongol. The practice of conscripting women continued until the Yuan Dynasty fell in 1368 (Y.C. Kim 73). Foreign invasions and war crimes continued in the Choson Dynasty (1392-1910) by Japan in 1592 and Manchuria in 1627 and 1636. In these invasions, many women, like their Koryo predecessors, were raped and abducted. They were had greater social pressure to maintain their chastity as Confucian ethics became the ruling order of conduct in Choson. Essentially, Confucian society provided these women only two options during wartime: commit suicide or submit to foreign soldiers (Y.C. Kim 105).

Confucian ethics, developed and established in the Choson Dynasty as the fundamental sociopolitical order, significantly reduced women's rights by defining male-female relationships as 'superior man, inferior woman' (*namjonyeobi*) (Slote and De Vos 192). In accordance with Confucian ethics, Choson women had reduced economic and social freedoms in their rights to remarry, inheritance, and family decision-making compared to their Koryo predecessors (Y.C. Kim 48; Slote and De Vos 82). As dictated by Confucian ideals, a woman's place was inside the home (*anche*), as delineated by the well-known Korean adage 'a house falls when a hen cries.' Her primary duties were to perform filial duty to her parents and in-laws, as well as provide for her husband, who belonged to the outside public (*sarangche*) (Y.C. Kim 86; Yoo 22). The idea of female purity and constant threat of divorce regulated women's lives. The three major rules of conduct for women (*Samjong chido*) established that a woman must follow her father before marriage, her husband in her married years, and her son after the husband passed away. Such emphasis on patriarchy (Y.C. Kim 89) arose because family honor and prosperity depended on sons, especially first born sons who could become civil servants to secure familial wealth and prestige. Thus, daughters were considered unimportant, since they were expected to eventually leave the house and completely belong to their in-laws (*chulgawein*) (Y.C. Kim 93; Slote and De Vos 196). Although there have been exceptions, most women could only gain recognition by being a virtuous woman (*yeolmyeo*) who perfectly fit strict Confucian ideals (Y.C.

Kim 104; Kim and Pettid 51; Yoo 39). Even scholarly or social achievements performed by women were praised for their contribution to Confucianist virtues, which reinforced social hierarchies of gender (Y.C. Kim 50-1; Kim and Pettid 53; Han and Ling 67). In assigning strict gender roles, Confucian ethics prevented genuine societal understanding of gender. Ultimately, it reduced women to a domestic role, which trapped them in the virtuous/loose stereotype as determined by the Confucian patriarchy.

Japanese Annexation and the Institution of Comfort Women

The colonial hierarchy under Japanese rule (1910-1945) further stigmatized Korean women. Since traditional Choson society dictated that women were lower in status than men and Koreans were under colonial rule, Korean women filled the role of the lowest in the caste (Chung 485). One of the most detrimental effects a colonized body faces is the strict distinction between the ruling and the ruled. In order to secure its power and influence, the ruling body consciously renders the ruled as inferior by reconstructing social hierarchy and, in more extreme cases, annihilating culture. The colonized body, rendered sub-human and thus without human dignity, becomes inhumane. That is, the colonized are encouraged to behave inhumanely and the very behavior defines the scope of their savagery. This distinction is important because such trauma of colonization looks at the Korean female body—especially the body of a prostitute—as presented primarily by its reduced, almost expendable status redefined by internalized imperialist logic, in addition to prolonged Confucian discrimination.

Psychologically, the experience of significant cultural trauma further established general practice of female expendability. Cultural trauma, according to Petschauer and Isaenko (2002), "directly or indirectly attacks what constitutes a culture, of which there are some essential yet vulnerable elements: body/space practices, religion, histories, language, state organizations, and economics" (Stamm et al. 2003). The destruction of the Confucian lifestyle and precepts by the modernizing effects of the Japanese rule disturbed the very structure of Korean society. Japan, like its Western imperialist counterparts, destroyed the local economic, political, and cultural system to establish easy commercial, labor, and resources markets. The economy became dismantled with the shipment of most Korean agricultural products to Japanese markets and deployment of young men to the Japanese army. This resulted in a severe economic depression,

which left people overwhelmed as they tried to fend for their lives. Korean women's restricted social role outside of the house, pressure to perform filial duty, and inferior status in the social hierarchy encouraged many parents to agree to sell their daughters or expel them out of the house to reduce their financial burdens. Okgil Kim, a victim of this circumstance, recounts how she begged her mother to sell her to perform filial duty (Chung 486), a fate commonly shared by other Korean women.

From the Japanese perspective, the comfort women were useful and necessary commodities. The Japanese military began recruiting comfort women in 1937 in order to maintain stability in occupied areas by preventing the rape of the locals, to control the spread of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), and to prohibit the exchange of military information for sexual favors performed by women in occupied territories (Hung 184). The military initially began its recruitment among Japanese professional prostitutes. It later expanded forced coercion to Japan's occupied territories and colonies to procure involuntary comfort women as the number of enlisted men increased (Hung 185). The recruitment occurred through the means of deception, purchase from the destitute families, and abduction (Argibay 377-8). The Japanese military saw prostitution as an indispensable tool to boost morale and release combat-related stress in the military. Thus, Japan's abuse of comfort women was "seen as a necessary antidote to war's cruel effects on its participants" (Hung 184). As Yoshimi Yoshiaki maintains, this abuse reflects the "androcentric martial atmosphere already accustomed to licensed prostitution" (Lee 459). The lower status of the victims in the Japanese colonial hierarchy further reinforced the view of seeing the victims as objects instead of fellow human beings with equal rights.

The Japanese military government collaborated with Korean accomplices to conduct the extensive recruitment process on the Korean peninsula. The undermined role of Korean accomplices in recruiting the comfort women reflects a tendency to focus on the female victim rather than on the male perpetrators and/or collaborators in sex crimes. The responsibility of the perpetrators in committing sex crimes is further diffused partly because it is difficult to know the tangible scope of Korean non-military involvement. Additionally, there is always the possibility that the accomplices acquiesced with the Japanese orders upon the threat of poverty, torture and death. The underemphasized importance of Koreans in the recruitment process partially explains the lack of reparations, as specific perpetrators were unknown. In addition

to the limited means to punish the accomplices, some Japanese nationalists claim that comfort women did not exist, arguing that only prostitutes who voluntarily followed the military existed. (E. T. Kim 230; Wingfield-Hayes).

The comfort women, despite their sufferings, could not speak out about their abuse due to Confucian constraints. Okgil Kim's memoir allows a glimpse of the horror the victims faced: her enslavement led to the contraction of severe STDs that left her permanently crippled in her adolescence (Chung 486). Although Kim lived to tell her story, many comfort women did not have the same opportunity, as the Japanese slaughtered many of them to hide the military involvement with the institutionalized and involuntary prostitution (Lee 460; Chung 485). The survivors were only fortunate in the sense that they could return home. They, however, could not speak about their experiences due to severe repercussions issued by both the state and society (Chung 485). The first exposé on Korean and Japanese comfort women, published in 1978 by Senda Kako, garnered a large amount of sales but failed to spark significant public acknowledgement or discussion. Most comfort women wished to remain anonymous until a Korean survivor, Kim Hak-sun, made a vocal outcry in 1991 (Hung 187; Chung 485). The prevailing Confucian ethics, which "emphasize female purity, the concept of pure Korean race coupled with masculinist nationalist identity of the female body with national boundary" (Cheng 28), clearly marginalized these women, stigmatizing them as loose and even treacherous. As nationalized bodies, violated women had to negotiate their identities as women and national citizens. At least a part of the continued outrage against the crime by the Korean society, therefore, derives its anger more from trespassing of the national borders and less toward the atrocity against the women. Christianity and other spiritual practices gave these women identities beyond being framed as young, helpless girls. Yet, religious discourse effectively placed the women in the loose/virtuous dichotomy—a parallel to the Whore/Madonna dichotomy—now strengthened by the divine authority (Cheng 17). The history prior to the Japanese atrocity provides greater depth in understanding societal reactions of Koreans to the victims' sufferings.

Western Princesses': U.S. Occupation and Hypermasculinized Korea

One of the most detrimental and prolonged legacies of Japanese colonization was the establishment of licensed prostitution in designated areas (*gongchangje*) (Lee 465; Soh

173). The custom originated from Japanese regulatory policy in red-light districts in the 1920s (Chung 485). In Choson, Korea, there existed social entertainers called Kisaeng, who, while generally disparaged for their lower class status and willingness to perform sexual favors, occupied a special place in the loose and virtuous Confucianist dichotomy. As masters of various arts ranging from music and literature to dance and calligraphy, they had the greatest freedom to access public events (Yoo 30) and displayed intelligence on par with their male patrons (Y.C. Kim 140). However, their role as a licensed prostitutes obscured their identities as accomplished artisans, branding them only as prostitutes. Through various laws regulating licensed prostitution and other related businesses, in addition to mandatory STD checkups (Lee 458), the system became firmly entrenched by the 1930s, despite the anti-prostitution sentiment and strikes by the Kisaeng unions.

The U.S. military adopted the Japanese legacy and regulated it for its own purposes. The U.S. practice differs from the Japanese in that recruitment and prostitution was not forced upon gullible female bodies (Soh 174). Along with the term 'U.S. comfort women' (*migun wianbu*), derogatory terms like 'Western princesses/whores' were commonly used to refer to the women engaged in prostitution near the military bases ('camptowns'). Most women, even professional prostitutes, who provided sexual services to the U. S. military post-Korean War did so due to stark poverty, filial duty, and lack of government provision after the termination of legalized prostitution. The South Korean Interim Legislative Assembly, upon pressure from various women's rights organizations, passed Public Act No. 7 on November 11, 1945 to prohibit prostitution. However, the Women's Bureau, while being tasked to be in charge of post-prohibition measures, did not provide social relief for the then jobless prostitutes (Lee 467). The unlicensed prostitutes, faced with stark poverty and no means of securing a respectable position in society, relocated to different locations throughout the country to start their own private practices. They eventually gathered near army bases, as it was more affluent than war-torn Korea. Public Act No. 7 implied that both the prostitute and the client were punishable; however, the U.S. soldiers regularly escaped punishment. Although it was the soldiers who created prostitution as a part of military, the women had to address the soaring STD rates through regular and often humiliating treatments (Lee 463) until they ceased to be infectious. The Korean government complied with the U.S. military to control the women by implicitly coercing them to permanently

reside in camptowns and undergo STD treatments. By strictly prohibiting prostitution in Korean society, but not punishing the convicted women for engaging in prostitution, the government implicitly encouraged prostitution in camptowns. The comfort women in these towns were completely dependent on the U.S. military. As a result of financial dependence and social stigmatization, comfort women were unable to return to Korean society.

The South Korean government not only tolerated the ongoing practice of comfort women, but also endorsed it as an inevitable path for economic gain, U.S. military support (Soh 174; Lee 464; Hong 55), and modernization akin to Western development. Both the state and the society suppress the women's voices by focusing on the 'miracle of the Han River,' an unprecedented economic growth in the 1970s through rapid industrialization and modernization. The government recast the women as "patriots" and "servants of the nation" (Han and Ling 69). The nationalistic labels seem to suggest that the women voluntarily engaged in prostitution for the nation. Thus, the government attempted to silence the women by incorporating them to the rapidly growing modern South Korea.

If the South Korean government employed nationalist and Confucianist discourse to justify the existence of the comfort women in a way that maintains Korean nationalist masculinity, the U.S. used Public Act No. 7 to endorse its supposed "moral superiority over Japan" (Lee 468). The military launched an intensive sexual education program that encouraged the use of contraceptives, not out of consideration for the prostitutes, but to reduce soaring STD rates among American soldiers. They encouraged the soldiers to abstain from sex through a patriarchal military narrative that perpetuated the Whore-Madonna dichotomy, but with a colonial twist: the men should maintain their virtues out of respect for their female relations (their mothers, daughters, sweethearts, etc.) by not falling prey to the prostitutes, who were dangerous, harmful "enemies that could subvert military effort" (Lee 472). The comfort women thus had nowhere to turn; the Korean society and state treated them like pariahs and the U.S. military they financially depended on considered them enemies.

The actions of the Korean state and the U.S. occupying forces reflect a new Orientalist paradigm that exacerbate prevailing traumas. The West establishes and maintains its image as masculine savior over the countries they Orientalize—that is, perceive as the Other — by feminizing them. This occurs in two different ways: "First, the Other is emasculated by its lack of industrial/

democratic/Western manhood. Secondly, the Other is exiled and prostituted through its women” (Han and Ling 61). The West, despite its exploitation of “poor, illiterate, young” women around military bases, comes to save the feminized region because the lack of Western ideals have made the men too weak and immature to save their women (Han and Ling 61). The Korean state, despite its newfound hypermasculinity, which developed in opposition to Western penetration, depended on the West. It is susceptible to discriminatory misconceptions of women through internalized misogyny and deep-rooted Confucianism.

Korea offers an extreme case of male emasculation as a result of colonization. The division of opposing ideology in the Korean peninsula further called for the presence of foreign powers on Korean soil and the propagation of its emasculated identity. Choi (1993) observed that in the Korean psyche, there exists the belief that Korean liberation is gained, not earned (Cheng 68). This belief, which developed with colonization and grew with the U.S. liberation of Korea in 1950s, undermined the dichotomy of assigned gender roles/spaces by casting Korean men as dependent and effeminate. Furthermore, it signified the broadening rupture in male authority due to the loss of male subjectivity in a rapidly changing society (Abelmann 189). This patriarchal loss of authority and male subjectivity has been analyzed in three movies (Abelmann 201). Made in the 1960s, these movies show main characters who have damaged their patriarchal authority through the loss of economic abilities (*Romansu Ppappa*), lack of education and understanding of the changing world (*Pak Seobang*), and marriage that involved spouses from different social classes (*Pong'ori Samnyong'i*). The military dictatorship of the 1960s sought to end this national anemia through masculinized Western capitalism. The denunciation of “soft hands” (feminine) for “work hard and sweat” (masculine) culture (Han and Ling 65) found its justification through traditional Confucian political thought. Just like parents caring for their children, the state must possess the best interest of the society, which meant preserving and improving the prestige and respect of the people. The Korean state embodied the role of masculinized patriarchy to rally the nation into catching up to the developed West. As the state’s role was similar to that of a father’s, the state was granted full “license to pursue economic development at all costs” (Han and Ling 65). Associating the state with patriarchy inevitably led to the hyperfeminization of the society as a whole as demanded by the hypermasculinized state to do its manly work (Hong 54).

Hypermasculinization, even only in part, inevitably calls for the reduction of female achievement and freedom. In Korea, hypermasculinization translates to a “nation of man and by man” (Cheng 12). In this patriarchal model, the feminine society must obey and make any sacrifices to provide for the masculine state as typified by the traditional Confucianist mother. The state, while ruling over ‘feminine’ society, depends on its very labor to bolster the traditional firstborn son—i.e., corporations. Continuing to mirror traditional Confucian family roles at the national level, the state allowed society to emanate its maternal power. A traditional Confucian mother could attain some authority only by conforming to Confucian ethics, which determined that she work diligently and uncomplainingly to support her ‘noble’ husband and children, especially her sons (Slote and De Vos 197-198). The women, after being thoroughly incorporated into the patrilineal system, had the permission to display self-interest in overt fashion because “the end product was inextricably linked to her husband’s family’s well-being” (Slote and De Vos 198). Therefore, the presence of U.S. comfort women (*migun wianbu*) can be understood as the society--encouraged under a Confucianist patrilineal system as an unofficial ruling matrimony--displaying hostility and aggression toward the ‘loose’ daughters who belonged to the foreign ‘household’ (i.e., camptowns) in order to protect the interests of the father-state and son-corporations.

Another result of casting the Confucian family at the state level was the nationalist development that “legitimized discrepancies in resource allocation according to age, gender, and kinship” (Han and Ling 11). The society favors first sons, symbolized as corporations essential to catch up with other developed countries, followed by college students who will have white-collar jobs. The female laborer, although making 27 percent of the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 1994, often found her place only in backbreaking blue-collar jobs (Han and Ling 68; Hong 54). Moon (1997) shows that the U.S. military base contributed to 25 percent of Korean Gross National Product (GNP) during the 1960s. The U.S. comfort women and other adult entertainers contributed to over half of the camptown economy (Lee 454). Women also faced more difficulty organizing labor unions due to greater surveillance on them, perhaps because they defied the gender stereotype of women being docile maidens (Han and Ling 69). The Confucian narrative--which already rendered women’s place outside of the home nonexistent--now fused with gendered ideology. It openly demanded female sacrific-

es (and stigmatized them if they did not or could not comply) for economic advancements and removed any outlet for negotiations. The government's depiction of the victims as both shameless prostitutes and patriotic laborers clearly shows the distortion of the comfort women problem in order to conveniently serve the nation.

Prevailing Confucian ethics also impacted the society at an individual and gendered level. It continued to demand that women supported their husbands and educated their children to get white-collar jobs in order to advance through the social hierarchy (Abelmann 202). Despite women's newfound pass to make economic transactions, or perhaps because of it, women faced the dual task of maintaining the home in place of a lost male subjectivity and tending to the husband's bruised ego. The U.S. comfort women were perceived to earn money through collaborating with invading masculine foreign bodies and thus, forfeited the role of consoling emasculated Korean men. Their economic autonomy, despite their loose status, further ostracized them from Korean society. They lost public sympathy and were considered a disgrace to the newfound nationalist Korea. The state and the society openly supported the U.S. installment of venereal disease treatment in these women (Lee 464-5) as essential for democratization of the nation. The Korean nation as a whole clearly identified these women as the other who existed, but must be blighted in order for South Korea to achieve true democratization. If they garnered any sympathy, it came from a feeling of moral superiority by those who belonged to the proper society and were physically removed from the women's living quarters within the U.S. army bases in Korea.

The misdirected misogyny justified in Confucian ethics, nurtured and intensified through cultural trauma, is apparent in a review of Heinz Insu Fenkl's autobiographical novel. The author writes, "Supported first by his wife and Insu's mother, and later by his daughter Haesuni, who herself becomes incorporated into the sex work economy of the camptown as the "hostess" of the bar at the base" (Hong 58), Insu's uncle-in-law—"Hyongbu"—tells folktales that reflect "braggadocio" (Hong 58) derived from the dissonance between hypermasculinized national ideals and the effeminate male self who lacks the means to live up to the ideals. Despite such undermined status of the patriarchy, the hypermasculinized state and Korea's longstanding Confucian tradition crafted a culture that made it "hard to pin blame on the failings of individual men" (Abelmann 190). The problems of domestic violence and male inability to provide

for the family were seen as the result of an undermined collective identity and humiliated patriarchy. Such social culture resonates with Korean accomplices in the Japanese comfort women recruitment period, as it erased individual responsibility of the Korean perpetrators.

Ghost Whisperers: Call for Reparations

The recent final agreement between South Korea and Japan cannot help but make one wonder if the countries involved in the intricate web of institutionalized prostitution understand, let alone acknowledge, what has been violated in the victims. Jean Amery, recounting his experience of torture by the Nazis, tries to assess the process of torture as the process of losing "trust in the world" with the first blow (Amery 28) and transforming the victim into mere flesh (Amery 33). It is the process which renders the victim unable to regain trust in the world. Instead, "one who was martyred is a defenseless prisoner of fear" (Amery 39). Martyr is defined by Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary as "1. A person who voluntarily suffers death as the penalty of witnessing to and refusing to renounce a religion. 2. A person who sacrifices something of great value and especially life itself for the sake of principle." Perhaps Amery's use of the term refers to the fact that every victim tortured inevitably becomes a martyr for being associated with a cause. The cause these women have been martyred for was to glorify the patriarchal system that endorsed them to collaborate with the occupying powers. Even so, the patriarchal powers stigmatized the women for forgoing Confucian female virtues whether they accepted or defied the martyrdom imposed on them:

The power of the torturer under which the tortured moans, is nothing other than the triumph of the survivor over the one who is plunged from the world into agony and death. (Amery 39)

The women's survival and advocacy to publicize the atrocity do not make them triumphant despite their success in advancing both female and victims' rights in Korea. Rather, their victimhood is forever emphasized. The victims bear witness to the power of the torturer and his accomplices by delineating the atrocity.

The Japanese comfort women issue would have been forgotten had it not been for the brave women who gave accounts and filed lawsuits against the Japanese war crimes. Due to their lack of political authority, however, the victims and supporting groups had to rely on the government to negotiate with Japan (Hung 190-1). But in its nationalistic and masculinized focus, the South Korean government has failed to clarify and deliver the repara-

tions that the women seek. The negotiations have been ongoing since 1965, and have sparked various attempts at redress—most famously the quasi-government directed Asian Women’s Fund in 1995 by the Japanese government. Despite its initial intent of redress, the Fund has been criticized for offering monetary compensations in place of an official apology (Hung 191; T. E. Kim 235). The Japanese government continues to remain reluctant to admit direct military involvement (Hung 188) despite the international verdict and urging (Argibay 383; Hung 188), thus, rendering its apologies virtually meaningless.

Moreover, the women’s status as survivors is continuously reduced and propagandized by the involved states and governments. The Confucian narrative provides justifications for the state to manipulate their victimhood for political purposes. The long-held belief that women must be submissive and compliant pressure the comfort women to surrender their agency to the strong, masculine government to negotiate for their cause. Continuously presenting these women as young girls and/or victimized grandmothers further reduces the dynamic identities they have developed alongside being survivors and advocates—for instance, church leaders or loving grandmothers (Chung 486). The recent negotiation reflects the diminution of violence and brutalization suffered by all victims of Japanese military prostitution by failing to convey the survivors’ call for justice. The Park-Abe agreement not only shows the continuous undermining of women’s voices by the state, but also implies the very real possibility of these accounts remaining obsolete in the general psyche after all the victims pass away. More worrisome is the development in Japan’s rising nationalism, which proposes that the Japanese colonialization has been acts of liberating Asia from white imperialists. Some extremists claim that the Japanese atrocities committed along the way did not really exist, and if they did, were unfortunate sacrifices to Japan’s heroic endeavor (Wingfield-Hayes). This is why the U.S. “applauds” (Kheel) Japan for the Park-Abe agreement, despite it posing a significant threat to restoring the voice of victims. The states, whether through nationalist denials or political agenda, are moving in the direction of permanent silence of the already-aged, former comfort women. More daunting fights await for the U.S. comfort women. While some efforts have been made, such as the women filing lawsuits against the Korean government in the 2014, they did not result in continuous national attention as garnered by the victims of the Japanese. The deep-rooted Confucianist hypermasculinity that underlies

Korean state prevents the state from complying with the victims’ request for reparations. It would seem a national embarrassment for Korean state and the society if it is publicized that they coerced the women to engage in prostitution. Such logic had previously robbed the Japanese victims’ voices away until 1991 and continues to do so for the women victimized by the U.S. institution. The Korean government cannot as easily rally national support for pursuing justice for the U.S. comfort women as they could with the Japanese victims. Making proper reparations to these women would mean admittance of past wrongs that the government actively collaborated to craft, thereby resulting in the government ‘losing face.’ The Korean society, in which the women also belong, presents further diffusion of responsibility. The entire society shares responsibility for the atrocity of which it must bear to burden of continuous remembrance, a work many are unwilling to partake in. The media and social narrative continue to overlook the victims as a whole by focusing on the Japanese brutality instead of the victims. Even worse, no public recognition by the U.S. has been made in accounts of the victims. The May Act officially prohibits prostitution within reasonable distance from the U.S. areas of operations (Lee 462). The victims have paved thorny steps in search of justice, “challenging their formerly subjugated roles” (Hung 204) despite constant efforts to reduce their voices to ghost whispers. It is only through their vocal efforts the involved culprits could gain any right to redress historical wrongs and move forward. The involved governments must break free from the distorted patriarchal nationalistic paradigm and work to restore the voices of these women. That would be the only way of making the correct reparations in order to achieve true political forgiveness on Japan’s—and in the future, the U.S. and Korea’s—part.

Works Cited

Abelmann, Nancy. “Gendering Displacement: Man, Masculinity, And The Nation.” *The Melodrama of Mobility: Women, Talk And Class In Contemporary South Korea*. Hawai’i: University of Hawai’i Press, 2003.

Amery, Jean. “Torture.” At *The Mind’s Limits: Contemplations By A Survivor On Auschwitz And Its Realities*. Trans. Sidney Rosenfield and Stella P. Rosenfield. Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1980. Web. 10 Jan. 2016

Argibay, Carmen M. “Sexual Slavery And The Comfort

- Women Of World War II.” *Berkeley Journal of International Law* 21.2 (2003):375-389. Web. 16 Jan. 2016.
- Chung, Heesung. “Spirituality of Trans-Borders: A Narrative of Transformation Of A Korean Sex Slave.” *Pastoral Psychology* 59.4 (2010): 483-494. Academic Search Elite. Web. 8 Jan. 2016.
- Han, Jongwoo, and L.H.M. Ling. “Authoritarianism In The Hypermasculinized State: Hybridity, Patriarchy, And Capitalism In Korea.” *International Studies Quarterly* 42.1 (1998): 53. Academic Search Elite. Web. 12 Jan. 2016.
- Hong, Grace Kyungwon. “Ghosts Of Camptown.” *Melus* 39.3 (2014): 49-67. Academic Search Elite. Web. 15 Jan. 2016.
- Hung, Christine J. “For Those Who Had No Voice: The Multifaceted Fight For Redress By And For The Comfort Women.” *Asian American Law Journal* 15.6 (2008). Academic Search Elite. Web. 5 Jan. 2016.
- Kim, E. Tammy. “Performing Social Reparation: “Comfort Women” And The Path To Political Forgiveness.” *Women & performance* 16.2 (2006): 221. Web. 12 Jan. 2016.
- Kim, Youngmin, and Pettid, Michael J., eds. *Women and Confucianism in Choson Korea: New Perspectives*. New York: State University of New York Press, 2011.
- Kim, Yung-Chung, ed. *Women Of Korea: A History From Ancient Times to 1945*. Trans. Yung-Chung Kim. Seoul, Korea:Ewha Womens University Press, 1976.
- Lee, Na Young. “The Construction Of Military Prostitution In South Korea During The U.S. Military Rule, 1945-1948.” *Feminist Studies* 33.3 (2007): 453-481. Academic Search Elite. Web. 14 Jan. 2016.
- Sea-ling, Cheng. “Assuming Manhood: Prostitution And Patriotic Passions in Korea.” *East Asia: An International Quarterly* 18.4 (2000): 40. Academic Search Elite. Web. 12 Jan. 2016.
- Slote, Walter H., and De Vos, George A., eds. *Confucianism And The Family*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1998.
- Soh, Chunghee, Sarah. “Women’s Sexual Labor And State In Korean History.” *Journal Of Women’s History* 15. 4 (2004):170-177. Academic Search Elite. Web. 15 Jan. 2016.
- Stamm, B. Hudnall, et al. “Considering A Theory Of Cultural Trauma And Loss.” *Journal Of Loss & Trauma* 9.1 (2004): 89-111. Academic Search Elite. Web. 13 Jan. 2016.
- Choe, Sang-Hun. “Japan and South Korea Settle Disputes over Wartime ‘Comfort Women.’” *New York Times*. New York Times., 28 Dec. 2015. Web. 29 Dec. 2015. <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/29/world/asia/comfort-women-south-korea-japan.html>
- “Martyr.” Merriam-Webster.com. Merriam-Webster.com. Web. 14 Jan. 2016. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/martyr>
- Wingfield-Hayes, Rupert. “Japan Revisionists Deny WW2 Sex Slave Atrocities.” *British Broadcasting Corporation*. British Broadcasting Corporation, 3 Aug. 2015. Web. 12 Jan. 2016. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-33754932>
- Kheel, Rebecca. “US Applauds Japan-South Korea ‘Comfort Women’ Agreement.” *The Hill*. The Hill, 28 Dec 2015. 14 Jan. 2016. <http://thehill.com/policy/national-security/264331-administration-supports-japan-south-korea-comfort-women-agreement>

