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HOW COMFORT WOMEN SPEAK

The Politics and Social Norms in the Narrations of Comfort Women's Experiences

Comfort Women Memorial [1]

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INTRODUCTION

IN 1924, KIM Hak-Soon was born in Jilin, Manchuria. When she was three months old, her father died. Her mother brought her back to Korea and soon remarried. When Kim was fifteen, her mother sent her to another family as a foster child. When she was seventeen, her stepfather brought her with him on a business trip to China. During this trip, a group of Japanese soldiers kidnapped Kim and transported her to a comfort station to be a sex slave for the next five years. When she encountered a Korean man, she seized this opportunity and pled with him to assist her to escape. She ended up marrying him, and returned to Korea in 1945. After the war, Kim became a widow and soon remarried a man who insulted and beat her, and blamed her for having a "disgraceful past." After her son passed away in an accident, she left her husband and bounced between different menial jobs, struggling to survive. Throughout her life, pain and shame caused her to conceal her traumatic past.[1] Finally, on December 6, 1991, Kim became the first comfort woman to step forward and file a lawsuit against the Japanese government, bringing to light the comfort women's enslavement by the Japanese army during the war and their continued suffering after the war.

In the 1930s, two philosophies guided Japan's society: fascism and militarism. Spurred by its successes in the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese wars, Japan founded the Manchukuo regime in China in March of 1932. Two decades earlier, in 1910, Japan had also officially incorporated Korea into its empire. Not satisfied with these new territories, Japan aimed to continue its empire-building process as a means of establishing its authority on the world's political stage.[2] By 1935, Japan had begun its "holy war" with China, mobilizing its entire nation and significantly increasing its number of soldiers overseas. As a way to relieve these soldiers' tensions during war, the Imperial Army and Navy overseas demanded that Tokyo create a channel for them to quickly and easily access sex slaves.[3] As a result, from 1932 to 1945, the Japanese Imperial Army drafted around two hundred thousand East Asian women into military sexual slavery,[4] euphemistically referred to as "comfort women," or in Japanese as *ianfu*.[5]

Because of the lack of documentation, we do not know the exact demographic makeup of comfort women. However, from the existing documentation and research conducted, Chinese and Korean comfort women seem to have made up the majority of the comfort women scholars and the majority of the comfort women population. Eighty percent of the victims consisted of Chinese and Korean rural women from farms and villages across the two countries. Almost all of these women were between the ages of twelve and twenty-two when they were drafted—either tricked or forcibly abducted into the draft—and transported to a comfort women facility. Such facilities were spread around the Japanese empire, but most of them were established in China. With the help of local colonial governments and collaborators, the Japanese government founded hundreds of comfort stations in China to systematically manage these women, with the goal of satiating their soldiers' sexual needs. The army maintained heavy surveillance of these women and only spared the bare minimum of rations to meet their needs. Inside comfort stations, women were berated, beaten, and sometimes killed.[6]

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1 Angella Son, "Inadequate Innocence of Korean *Comfort Girls-Women*: Obliterated Dignity and Shamed Self," *Pastoral Psychology* 67 (2018): 176–182. https://doi-org.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/10.1007/s11089-017-0779-8.

2 For more information on Japan's expansionist ambitions, see Andrew Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 139–209.

3 For details on the origin of the comfort women system, see David A, Schmidt, *Ianfu, the Comfort Women of the Japanese Imperial Army of the Pacific War: Broken Silence* (Edwin Mellen Press, 2000), 109–113.

4 The exact number of comfort women is unknown to historians due to key official Japanese documents being missing, but several historians and scholars use an estimation of 200,000. For further information see Pyong Gap Min, "Korean 'Comfort Women' the intersection of colonial power, gender, and class," *Gender & Society* 17, no. 6 (2003): 938–957.

5 The name "comfort woman" is often criticized for its connotations, especially for its implications of the women's "consent" in their participation in the system. However, it is the term adopted by the United Nations and in academia to refer to the victims who were forced to participate in the comfort women system. Therefore, in this essay, I will use the term "comfort women" to refer to these women. For further information on the definition of comfort women see Dolgopol, Ustinia, and Snehal Paranjape. "Comfort women: An unfinished ordeal: Report of a mission." Vol. 88. International Commission of Jurists, 1994.

6 For details of the comfort women system and comfort women experiences, see Sarah C. Soh, "Aspiring to

These nightmarish torments did not end with the war and closure of the comfort women stations. The surviving comfort women endured shame and poverty within their own societies and were thus marginalized, unable to tell their stories after the war or have their suffering validated. It was only after Kim's lawsuit that Japanese historian Yoshiaki Yoshimi conducted one of the first scholarly research projects on the subject of comfort women.[7] Many other scholars followed in his footsteps; however, neither the trial nor the scholarly research focused on the individual victims' lives. They all concentrated on investigating whether comfort women were actually prostitutes instead of victims of trafficking, rather than understanding how the system at its base reflected the international power struggles among China, Korea, and Japan. Also, the scholars represented the comfort women experience as either an extreme example of patriarchal aggression against women or proof of Japan's unacceptable imperialistic transgressions against China and Korea. Very little effort has been made to explore the social forces and norms that shaped individual comfort women's experiences and post-war struggles in their own societies.

Methodology

Unlike previous scholarship, my research considers the comfort women's testimonies from both Korea and China, and what they can tell us about their individual experiences. Building upon existing research about both comfort women and East Asian relations, I look primarily at these women's testimonies and consider how their stories can tell us about their individual experiences as rural women living in 20th century Korea and China.

In my project, I apply two feminist theorists' arguments: Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. In her groundbreaking book *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory* (2003), Mohanty argues that Third World[8] women have been treated as passive victims in Western scholarship. Western scholars tend to flatten these women into homogenous groups with uniform experiences and desires. Such generalizations deprive women in the Third World of their individuality. Her book stresses that all women's lives should be examined as a composite of entangled gender norms, class structures, and local political environments.[9]

To both encompass and distinguish the experiences of Korean and Chinese comfort women, I selected nineteen Korean comfort women's testimonies conducted by the Washington Coalition for Comfort Women's Issues, a Korean-American nonprofit organization, and twelve Chinese comfort women's testimonies conducted by Vassar professor Qiu Peipei in collaboration with Shanghai Normal University. In 1994, the Washington Coalition first translated the fourteen interviews videotaped in Korea by the Korean Council. They also separately conducted five additional interviews from 1992 to 1996: three in North Korea, one in New York, and one in Washington D.C.[10] Two years after Korean testimonies were collected, Su and Chen began to conduct interviews for Chinese victims. In the next decade, Su and Chen conducted multiple sessions with each victim. If the victims were unable to elaborate on certain topics, Su and Chen, in an effort to protect the victim's psychological state, would either skip certain questions or allow the victim's children to speak for them.[11] I read these testimonies side by side with both Chinese and English media coverage of comfort women from 1990 to 1999. Because comfort women themselves narrated these testimonies with the help of different organizations, I was able to situate the victims' voices within the political

Craft Modern Gendered Selves: Comfort Women and Chongsindae in Late Colonial Korea," *Critical Asian Studies* 36 no. 2 (2004): 175–198

7 I am hesitant to label Professor Yoshimi as the first scholarly researcher. Some feminist scholars in Korea did start investigation on comfort stations in Japan, other than Professor Yoshimi. However, Professor Yoshimi is the first person who retrieved official documents in Japan about comfort women and started to restructure the comfort women system.

8 Note also that the term "Third World" has different definitions in different scenarios and some scholars have criticized its negative connotations, especially its imperialistic history. In this essay, "Third World" is defined as post-colonized societies.

9 Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2003).

10 Schellstede, *Comfort Women Speak*, ix.

11 Qiu, *Chinese Comfort Wome*n, 96–101.

and social structures that shaped their experiences and memories. Most importantly, these sources allowed me to paint a picture of how each comfort woman represents her own distinct life and story, each worth hearing.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in her groundbreaking 1985 article "Can the Subaltern Speak?" attempts to deconstruct the moral entitlement in human rights discourse. She critically questions the possibility of a non-elite Third-World woman being allowed to self-represent. She argues that when the oppressed voice cannot be heard, she needs a representative to speak for her, and, in return, the subaltern loses her agency.[12] Building upon Mohanty and Spivak's arguments, my thesis situates each comfort woman's testimony within her socio-economic environment, thereby demonstrating the way each victim's voice was shaped by various political actors' agendas, her environment's social norms, her personal trauma, and her sensibilities as a former slave.

I divide this thesis into two sections. The first section examines the overlaps between the women's testimonies and the particular vulnerabilities rural women faced in their society. I examine how rural women's inferior social standing, continual economic burdens, and their taught submission to patriarchal authority all strongly informed how these women narrated their experiences as comfort women. The second section highlights how their post-war experiences shaped their testimonies. On the first layer, I identify common trends and repeated language that may reveal how various governmental and nonprofit organizations helped shape these women's stories. I also explore how the propagandistic memorialization and circulation intermixed with the women's immediate experience in the creation of these testimonies. On the second layer, I locate testimonies' moments of silences, absences, and slippages. In these textual moments, the testimonies are in tandem with the political and institutional forces that, paradoxically, silenced comfort women while appropriating their testimonies in nationalist discourses. On the third layer, I examine how the omissions, gaps, repetitions, contradictions, and even emotions in their stories reflect the ways comfort women continued to exercise their own agency. Rather than treating them just as "historical sources" in a conventional sense, I read these testimonies as narratives. From a literary angle, I probe how these testimonies express the bodily pain and abuse of their speakers.

Thesis Statement

Comfort women's testimonies illuminate the gendered conditions in Korean and Chinese society throughout the 20th century and until the present. My research shows how comfort women's stories describe the ways in which entrenched male authority combined with pervasive poverty crippled their individual agency both during and long after the end of the war. Beyond the economic pressures, patriarchal controls, and societal discrimination, their stories reflect each woman's own pysche, the social alienation she faced, the self-deprecation she felt, and the ambivalent attitudes she held towards Japan and her own country.

Unlike urban women, who had more employment opportunities and thus probably more financial resources, most rural Korean and Chinese women faced the double burden of maintaining a household and contributing to the family income, while still being subordinated within a patriarchal hierarchy. I propose that this double burden made rural women ideal targets of the comfort women system imposed by the Japanese army during wartime and victims of public shame surrounding female sexuality long after the war. Korea and China made all women's issues secondary to their nation-building, further foreclosing possible avenues for these women to share their stories. Only after Kim Hak-Soon's 1991 trial against the Japanese government did comfort women begin to share their stories publicly.

Still, due to poverty and illiteracy, comfort women's stories continued to be vulnerable to distortion by various political actors. This again robbed these women of their individual agency and reduced their stories to tools for different agendas. Their testimonies were used as reminders of the colonial experience, as extreme examples of the excesses of patriarchal systems, and as performances of nationalistic suffering and shame to galvanize feelings of national citizenship and reinforce the "otherness" of Japan. On the other hand, comfort women themselves had their own stories. Given the omissions and contradictions in the testimonies, I argue that comfort women's stories combined their nations' popular memories of the war and deeply ingrained social values of chastity with the personal struggles and traumas these women faced within both the comfort

12 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?: Postkolonialität und Subalterne Artikulation," Wien Verlag Turia, 2008.

women system and their social milieus. In the end, I propose that comfort women's testimonies share the duality of being both products of their particular historical moment and unique stories of rural women's lives.

HISTORICAL DYNAMIC OF GENDER AND ITS HISTORIOGRAPHY

Gender Relations in Korea and China

RURAL KOREAN AND Chinese women's experiences in the twentieth century cannot be generalized as an offspring of Confucianism, nor as mere victimization by male domination and foreign invasion. Instead, their experiences should be framed with particularities: the time they lived in, the social status and economic background into which they were born or married, and, most importantly, their personal agency under a constantly changing but overall patriarchal hierarchy.

From an ideological perspective, both countries' rural women were somewhat influenced by the patrilineal Confucian values that championed the confinement of women within the domestic sphere and celebrated the supposed female "virtues" of being ignorant, meek, and chaste. Furthermore, through laws, edicts, and dialectic texts,[13] Confucian values generated certain societal pressures that largely reduced women's (both rural and urban) roles to those of bearing sons, serving husbands, and managing domestic affairs.

Confucianism emphasized male superiority, which resulted in the firm belief that a wife should serve her husband. Throughout the ideal Confucian woman's life, she would always be submitting to a male figure, starting with her father and brother, then husband, and eventually, sons. A woman was further asked to prioritize her parents-in-law above her biological parents.[14] Having a subordinated position in their families, daughters were excluded from the natal family line and unable to conduct ancestral ceremonies.[15] Without the right to worship her ancestors, a daughter became a burden to her natal family, unworthy and undeserving of any inheritance. Even today, most women in rural China are prohibited from land ownership. Although exact statistics are unknown, multiple bodies of research show that around 80 percent of rural land is only registered under men's names.[16] In Korea, by the Mid-Choson period, Confucian values had deepened with the help of state-backed, female-targeted dialectic texts, legislative enforcements, and judiciary decisions. These all formed a rigid patrilineal succession, a separate female hierarchy, and obsessions with female chastity.[17] These all crippled female agency by imprisoning women inside the domestic sphere.

In addition, both Chinese and Korean society had a general obsession with female chastity. A woman's chastity was an indication of her morality and sexual honesty.[18] Di-

13 The state sponsored the forefront of a series of dialectic work, with a focus on guiding women's behaviors. In 1407, Zhuxi's *Elementary Learning* became compulsory reading in schools. In 1432, the *Illustrated Guide to the Three Bonds*, a book written in the Korean vernacular, with pictures was composed. With King Sejong's 1433 edict, the book became the basic text to educate all women. In 1475, Queen Sohye published *Instructions for Women*, which painstakingly depicted what the ideal woman's behaviors should be throughout her lifetime. Later in the Choson, women were portrayed as prone to corruption and requiring special discipline.

14 Martina Deuchler, "Propagating Female Virtues in Choson Korea," in Dorothy Ko eds., *Women and Confucian Cultures*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003): 143.

15 Mark Peterson, "Women without Sons: A Measure of Social Change in Yi Dynasty Korea," in Laurel Kendall and Mark Peterson, eds., *Korean Women: View from the Inner Room* (New Haven, CT: East Rock Press, 1983), 34.

16 For more information, see *Haiwang Zhou, Cheng Shi Nu Xing Liu Dong Men Kou She Hui Rong Ru Wen Ti Yan Jiu (City Migrant Women Societal Questions Investigation)*, (Shanghai: Shanghai She Hui Ke Xue Yuan Publishing (2013)), 23–79. The rigid patriarchal values ruled the villages that considered daughters and wives outside the family, and therefore discarded their ownership of land. Considering the relative scarcity of Chinese land for its population, village committees would arbitrarily put a man's name down on land contracts, without women's knowledge.

17 Jungwon Kim. "You Must Avenge on my Behalf: Widow Chastity and Honour in Nineteenth-Century Korea," *Gender and History* (2014): 129.

18 Kim, "You Must Avenge," 123–132.

dactic texts on feminine ideals that were widely circulated in these two countries concentrated on romanticizing chaste actions, especially suicide by widows, as being both courageous and beautiful acts guarding the most precious trait of women. Both countries' governments also commemorated female suicides with memorial arches, plaques, and sometimes material rewards. This state-recognized act of extraordinary chastity, in return, allowed these women to execute the ultimate form of Confucius-idealized female filial piety—bringing honor to her family and her community. This patriarchal ideology thus the crux of women's value to society was chastity, to the extent that it overshadowed any other social roles. More importantly, women often faced enormous personal and familial pressure to guard themselves and restrain their personal desires.[19] Unless deemed necessary, women were expected to revolve their lives around household chores and avoid interactions with men outside their homes. Chastity functioned as a prison and closely bound women physically and psychologically within their houses. Men could therefore commercialize and control every woman's body through chastity: the purer the body, the more it was valued in society.

At the turn of the century, the long-standing Choson Dynasty in Korea and Qing Dynasty in China both fell. Korea was invaded and later annexed by Japan, whereas China entered a period of warlords, followed by the invasion of Japan. When political instability compounded the global economic depression in the 1930s, unprecedented numbers of rural men left home for other jobs in both Korea and China.[20] Without men, rural women were left to do agricultural work on the family farms or to work as wage laborers at factories or larger farms. During the war, rural women carried a double burden as managers of household chores and breadwinners for their families. Once annexed by Japan, Korea became Japan's source of raw resources to support its expansionist goals. For instance, colonial projects like the Land Investigation Project (1918) or the Rice Crop Improvement Policy took away small farmlands and capped the profits for farmers (on rice), decimated Korea's already impoverished agricultural economy and bankrupted many families. In response, around 6 million Korean men left home to seek opportunities overseas.[21] Simultaneously, poverty also forced many rural women to migrate elsewhere to survive and help finance their families.[22] In the 1930s, when the comfort women system started, poverty for the rural Korean population had reached its zenith—making rural women the most vulnerable, overlooked group in society.

In China, after the fall of the Qing Dynasty and the Warlord era, the Nationalist Party finally gained power. Their reign was marked by different natural disasters, political factionalism, and foreign invasions. The 1928 Shandong drought, the 1931 Yangtze River flood, and the 1935 Yellow River flood killed several millions of people and created millions of refugees. Records of child birth sex ratios suggest that female infanticides were widely practiced. Men would sell their wives or children (usually girls) in exchange for food. The 1935 Chinese journal *Eastern Miscellany* (东方杂志) even went as far as suggesting that 99% of men abandoned their families. On the one hand, rural women's social value was reduced to "goods," which could be converted into food or money to serve the men. On the other hand, when men left their households, rural women became a crucial labor force, expected to maintain the house while putting food on the table. After the Japanese officially invaded China in 1937, the situation worsened. Rural men, without resources or money to evade military drafts like others, could be drafted or taken by force at any time.[23] Rural women, then, had to live in constant fear of bearing the burden of raising the entire household. The comfort women system started at a moment when both Korean and Chinese rural women had endured decades of poverty, objectification, and marginalization, and were struggling to survive.

The Pacific War and Comfort Women's Origins

As Japan continued to conquer and expand, the number of Japanese soldiers living in China increased significantly. Facing constant danger, these soldiers were mentally and physically exhausted and distressed. Further-

19 Kim, "You Must Avenge," 132–136.

20 For more information on rural women in China, see Gail Hershatter, *Women and China's Revolution*, (Lanham, Maryland : Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), 132–176. On rural women in Korea, see Sook-Ran Yoo, "The Colonial Government's Agricultural Policies and Women's Lives in the Rural Areas of Korea in the 1930s," *Asian Women* 17, 39–64.

21 Soh, *Comfort Women*, 107-143.

22 Yoo, "Colonial Government," 39–42.

23 Hershatter, *Women and China's Revolution*, 132–164.

more, the guerrilla tactics in which some Chinese soldiers engaged blurred the lines between soldiers and civilian members of the Chinese population in the eyes of the Japanese. As a result, it became common for Japanese soldiers to go on killing sprees and rape local women after a battle as an emotional outlet. Their violent acts incited strong anti-Japanese sentiment and resistance that slowed the speed of Japanese expansion and demanded more resources from the army to control the situation.[24] At the same time, Japanese soldiers visited brothels, increasing the possibility for intelligence infiltration and dramatically increasing the transmission of venereal diseases among their soldiers.[25] All this resulted in insistent pleas from the Imperial Army for the draft of comfort women as a solution.

Answering Imperial Navy Lieutenant Yasuji's demand, the first comfort women station opened in Shanghai in 1932. The station aimed to provide imperial soldiers with a cheap and easily accessible way to fulfill their sexual demands, and it offered some psychological support when needed. After the notorious Nanking Massacre in 1937 (a seven-week killing spree which, according to historians, resulted in the murder of tens of thousands of civilians and the rape of girls and women of all ages), the army's sheer brutality triggered both international protests and the attention of the Japanese metropole. It forced the Japanese government to care for soldiers' behavioral and mental health, so they used comfort stations to offer sexual relief to soldiers as a way to "improve" morale.[26] Thus, the number of comfort women and comfort stations mushroomed and became ever more systemized as a means to boost troop morale and avoid future international interference. Comfort women enabled Japan to maintain its presence of 600,000 soldiers in China indefinitely, fighting continuously, even when a stalemate was reached in 1938.[27]

State of Field

Before we examine comfort women's pre-war experiences, it is important to have an overview on the study of comfort women. Most scholarship on comfort women appeared after Kim's 1991 lawsuit and focused largely on the political and social structures that underlay the comfort women system in Korea. This scholarship can be roughly divided into four distinct strands. First, scholars like George Hicks (1997), Japanese historian Yoshiaki Yoshimi (2000), and Japanese historian Yuki Tanaka (2003) provided substantial evidence for the Japanese government's direct involvement in forming the comfort women system, and for the logistical reasons that motivated Japan's decision to build the comfort stations. Second, scholars such as Pyong Gap Min (2003) and Sarah Chunghee Soh (2008) in Korea, as well as Su Zhiliang (1999) and Qiu Peipei (2013) in China, contextualized the comfort women within their respective nations' gender history. Third, a series of reactionary works by Japanese right-wing historians like Naoko Kumagai (2016) attempted to counter the concept of "victimization" of comfort women by stressing the contractual relationship between the women and the Japanese government. Fourth, scholars like Jungmin Seo (2008), Thomas J. Ward and William D. Lay (2016), and Edward Vickers (2019) focused on the complicated developments of the post-war Japan-Korea or Sino-Japan relationships through the lens of the comfort women. They noted how the comfort women had been politicized into a "tool" to suit each national government's and nonprofit organization's distinct agendas.

The works of George Hicks, Yoshiaki Yoshimi, and Yuki Tanaka offer a useful foundation for explaining how contemporary gender norms are embedded within

24 On Japan's invasion of China, see Soh, *Korean Comfort Women*, 107–143. Also see Rana Mitter, *Forgotten Ally: China's World War II, 1937–1945*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013).

25 For more information, see Keith, *True Stories*, 22–25. Also note that visits to prostitutes and the rape of local women during the war is not unique to the Japanese army. Consequently, venereal disease rates often increased dramatically. Similar statistics have been found in different armies across the world in different times. For example, WWII resulted in five times as many cases of syphilis reported to the U.S. Health Department in 1940. For more information, see American Bar Association, Committee on Courts and Wartime Social Protection, Venereal Disease, Prostitution, and War, Washington D.C., 1943, 1.

26 Such beliefs about using women to improve soldiers' morale might have long historical origins in Japan. According to Historian Sarah Soh, In 1589, Toyotomi Hideyoshi championed the notion that women could maintain the welfare of imperial troops during wars. By 1898, the Meiji state passed rules restricting and reducing women's roles to their devotion: their husbands and the emperor. For more information on Japanese prostitution history, see Soh, *The Comfort Women*, 29–79.

27 For more information, see Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, 139–209.

the comfort women's system. They describe that most comfort women were from rural areas and argue that their weak social agency made them the first targets of abuse. Hicks' book, *The Comfort Women: Japan's Brutal Regime of Enforced Prostitution in the Second World War* (1997) is the first English-language systematic review concerning comfort women. Hicks analyzes comfort women's experiences during and after WWII, focusing on the threats, poverty, and emotional trauma the victims suffered. He argues that the origin of the system was rooted in Japan's military needs to stop venereal diseases and sustain soldiers' morale. Although he briefly addresses comfort women as victims of patriarchal ideologies, Hicks does not treat the gender dynamics of the colonized in depth.[28]

In *Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery in the Japanese Military During World War II* (2000), Yoshimi unearths evidence of the Japanese government's direct involvement in the comfort women system. In response to the 1995 "free history" movement, in which the Japanese government tried to deny the comfort women's "victim" claims, Yoshimi compiled a comprehensive array of evidence demonstrating that not only were comfort women not prostitutes, they were often coerced or simply abducted into slavery.[29] Yoshimi examines the women's experiences through the lens of political history, focusing on logistics within the comfort stations. In 2003, Tanaka's book *Japan's Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery and Prostitution during World War II and the U.S. Occupation* followed in Hick's and Yoshimi's footsteps. Building upon Yoshimi's evidence of the Japanese government's direct involvement, Tanaka argues that the use of prostitution by the military in countries involved in World War II consisted of both consensual prostitution, as in the U.S. and Australia, as well as military sexual slavery, as in Imperial Japan.[30]

Works by Korean historian Pyong Gap Min, Korean anthropologist Sarah Chunghee Soh, and Japanese literary historian Qiu Peipei move beyond the political and logistical structures of the comfort women system to focus on how the women's experience reflects the patriarchal controls that both local communities and colonial governments exerted upon them. In his 2003 article "Korean 'Comfort Women': The Intersection of Colonial Power, Gender, and Class," Min brings the colonization of Korea by Japan and the role of the Korean gender hierarchy into his analysis of the system. He argues that Confucian patriarchal values and Korean men's anxiety were intermingled in the wake of Japanese colonial aggressions, which then facilitated the spread of the comfort stations. His study left many questions unanswered, such as how comfort women may not be able to exercise their individual agency when grave poverty and patriarchal authority hampered their ability to do so.[31] Soh's 2008 book *The Comfort Women: Sexual Violence and Postcolonial Memory in Korea and Japan* furthered Min's effort toward linking the comfort women within the region's broader historical gender context of Korea, and offers a comprehensive characterization of the comfort stations, particularly the heavy surveillance imposed on women. Examining the post-war experience of surviving comfort women, Soh argues that the continued national silence and social marginalization they faced in the post-war era reflected Korea's obsession with female chastity.[32]

Although most comfort stations were in China, current scholarship has yet to examine the commonalities that existed between Korean and Chinese women's experiences, and how these commonalities might illuminate the discrimination, objectification, and post-war silence all caused by vulnerabilities particular to rural women facing extreme poverty and patriarchal authority.[33] In 2014, Qiu published the first set of English-language testimonies detailing 12 Chinese comfort women's experiences in *Chinese Comfort Women: Testimonies from Imperial Japan's Sex Slaves*. Using interviews from one hundred former comfort women across China, Qiu demonstrated how active collaboration between local villagers and the Japanese was used to trick or force Chinese rural women into the

28 George Hicks, *The Comfort Women: Japan's Brutal Regime of Enforced Prostitution in the Second World War* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1995).
29 Yoshimi, *Comfort Women*.
30 Yuki Tanaka, *Japan's Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery and Prostitution During World war II and the U.S. Occupation*, (Routledge, 2001).
31 [Pyong Gap] Min, "Korean Comfort Women: The Intersection of Colonial Power, Gender, and Class," *Gender & Society* 17, no. 6 (2003): 938–957.
32 Sarah C. Soh, *The Comfort Women: Sexual Violence and Postcolonial Memory in Korea and Japan*, (University of Chicago Press, 2008).
33 Peipei Qiu, *Chinese Comfort Women: Testimonies from Imperial Japan's Sex Slaves*, (Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 2013).

system. Her book argues that these victims' stories were ignored because local villagers denounced them as "former prostitutes." Like Soh's work, Qiu's book explores the significance of patriarchal norms and how these women's inferior social status hampered their stories from being heard during the post-war era.

Since 1995, some Japanese historians have also tried to present a different narrative on the comfort women by publishing a set of reactionary literature. Naoko Kumagai's 2016 book *The Comfort Women: Historical, Political, Legal, and Moral Perspectives* endeavored to justify the system and undermine claims of the Japanese government's involvement. She denies historical documents and testimonies, and questions the very definition of enslavement. Kumagai states that these women made a consensual choice to be comfort women and received payment; hence, there were no human rights violations. She claims that most of the victims were not coerced, and that the actual number of comfort women is unverified, implying its scale was small, insignificant. Without citing specific examples, Kumagai also tries to argue that some comfort women were paid monthly and given the freedom to leave.[34] She further disputes the perspective of comfort women as passive victims of East Asia's entrenched patriarchy. Her work is the latest in the "free history" movement's scholarship to define comfort women not as slaves, but as consensual prostitutes.[35] In response, most government and non-profit organizations that hold exhibitions or build museums for comfort women have emphasized comfort women's purity and innocence as virgins: reasserting victims as abuducted sex slaves, not as consentual, contracual prostitutes.[36]

Witnessing the fervent debates surrounding the issue, scholars like Thomas J. Ward, William D. Lay, Jungmin Seo, and Edward Vickers have concentrated their studies specifically on how the study was politicized by various national governments, non-profit organizations, and feminist groups to advance their particular ambitions. Seo, in her 2008 article "Politics of Memory in Korea and China: Remembering the Comfort Women and the Nanjing Massacre," delineates how the comfort woman was used as a martyr to galvanize nationalism. The victims' experiences were generalized into a reflection of the suffering the Korean and Chinese endured during the 20th century. Thomas J. Ward and William D. Lay, in their 2016 article "The Comfort Women Controversy: Not Over Yet," analyzed the continued politicization of the comfort women in the 21st century. For instance, they note how the U.S. government has used their support of these women as a way to gain election votes in the Korean-American community.[37] Lastly, Vickers, in his 2019 article "Commemorating 'Comfort Women' Beyond Korea," focuses his attention on Chinese comfort women and delineates how their government curtailed funding and suppressed education concerning comfort women. As a result, Chinese comfort women were virtually excluded from the discussion from 1991 to 2010. It was only after 2010 that the Chinese government began focusing more attention on popularizing the comfort women topic.[38] These scholars provide a good foundation for me to distill the various political forces involved in propagating the comfort women.

WAR EXPERIENCE ACCORDING TO COMFORT WOMEN TESTIMONIES

ALTHOUGH COMFORT WOMEN were taken from all countries conquered by Japan, the majority were ethnically Korean and Chinese. The Japanese strategically targeted young, rural women who lacked the resources to resist the draft process. As a result, these women's testi-

34 Kumagai Naoko, *The Comfort Women: Historical, Political, Legal, and Moral Perspectives*, Translated by David Noble, (Tokyo: International House of Japan, 2016), 24-42. Note that Kumagai never provides any primary sources to back her claim up. She simply puts how "according to documentary evidence and testimony related to the comfort stant, the "comfort women" were paid."

35 Kumagai, *The Comfort Women*.

36 For more information, see Edward Vicker, "Commemorating 'Comfort Women' Beyond Korea," *Remembering Asia's World War Two*, (London: Routledge, 2019).

37 Thomas J. Ward, "The Comfort Women Controversy: Not Over Yet," *East Asia* (2016): 255–269.

38 Vickers, "Commemorating Comfort Women."

monies illuminate how the culture of gender discrimination and the extreme destitution of rural life combined to ingrain a deep sense of inferiority in their minds.

Pre-draft Experience—Korean Experiences

Of the 19 testimonies collected by the Washington Coalition, 13 women came from rural areas and struggled with finances growing up. Given that non-elite rural women had few economic resources, they often became desperate to the point of accepting overseas jobs to help themselves and their families simply survive. These testimonies show that almost all the victims had been financially engaged before being drafted as comfort women. Hwang Keum-ju and Yi Yong-nyo worked as maids for wealthy families in the city. Jin Kyug-Paeng, Kim Bun-Sun, Moon Pil-Gi, Mook Ok-Ju, Kim Sang-Hi, and Kim Yoon-Shim all reported having helped their parents in the fields at the moment of their draft/abduction.[39] Recruiters, targeting these desperate women, often offered the false promise of legitimate employment. Yi Young Son Pan-Im, Kim Soon-Due, Pak Du-Ri, and Pak Hyung-Soon were told the same lie by their recruiters—that they would be working in a military factory in Japan. Pak Ok-Nyon and Yi Yong-Nyo were tricked by the recruiters by being told they would become military nurses.[40] These women often agreed to join without any hesitation, hoping to alleviate their families' economic distress.

These women, furthermore, were not just enticed by possible job positions. Living under a patriarchal system, they were often taught to trust and obey men at all times. Survivors admitted that the mere fact that the recruiters were male made it hard for them to refuse the demand. When the recruiters came, they would often be accompanied by official figures dressed in uniforms to persuade these potential victims. If met with any resistance, the recruiters would even bring local leaders with them to repeatedly harass these young women, depriving them of the courage to oppose or question the process.[41]

In these testimonies, the victims spent only one or two sentences describing their lives before being drafted as comfort women, and very few descriptions have been included in these testimonies. Since I was unable to locate the original transcripts of these interviews, this absence of description of pre-comfort woman lives may be an editor's decision or the victim's own choice to omit the data. Nevertheless, it can be concluded that the testimonies' tendency to overlook the pre-draft experience served as strong evidence exposing the cruelty of the Japanese army. Moreover, these testimonies were collected, translated, and published by the Washington Coalition into a book named *Comfort Women Speak: Testimony by the Slaves of the Japanese Military*. In the book's appendix, the editors chose to include the United Nations report that explicitly defines the comfort women system as a form of sexual slavery. The editors had a clear agenda of making this book yet another resource to illustrate Japan's war crimes.[42] Therefore, it is probable that the interviewers eliminated certain details like local collaborators' participation or natal families' poverty in these women's testimonies to produce a more focused storyline. Given that the editors had to translate comfort women's words first from Korean to English, it is also possible that some implied meaning that would have constituted their pre-draft experience became lost in translation. Also, the translators, Koreans themselves, may be biased by their own memories of the Japanese invasion. Perhaps, when reconstructing a comfort woman's life, these translators intermixed their own personal emotions with their professional work.[43]

On the other hand, it is also possible that the victims themselves chose to limit their narration. For reasons that I will expand upon later, these women experienced decades of discrimination and shame after the war as former comfort women. It is possible that they wanted to protect their families by not revealing too many details about their

39 Sangmie Choi Schellstede, eds., *Comfort Women Speak: Testimony by Sex Slaves of the Japanese Military* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 2000), 3–105.

40 Schellstede, "Comfort Women Speak," 81–85; 95–97.

41 For more information, see Keith Howard, *True Stories of the Korean Comfort Women: Testimonies*, (London; New York: Cassell, 1995), 11–32. Also see, Sincheol Lee, and Hye-In Han, "Comfort Women: A Focus on Recent Findings from Korea and China." *Asian Journal of Women's Studies* 21, no. 1 (2015): 31–50.

42 For more information, see Schellstede, *Comfort Women Speak*, 108.

43 Note that other scholars have also reported that when their translation on victims whose background is closely linked to translators' own community history, the personal tends to bleed into the profession. Nathalie Huyn Chan Nguyen, "The Past in the Present: Life Narratives and Trauma in the Vietnamese Diaspora," Susannah Radstone, Rita Wilson, *Translating Worlds: Migration, Memory, and Culture* (Routledge, 2020). https://doi-org.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/10.4324/9780429024955.

former lives. These women's reservations about revealing private matters are exemplified in Ms. K's choice to remain anonymous, even as an interviewer, so deep is the cultural shame.[44] Finally, it should be taken into account that almost half a century had passed by the time these women were asked to recount their life stories. This omission, then, could be viewed as an example of the possible memory loss, tremendous emotional stress, and interlocking histories that existed in their retelling of their stories.

Pre-draft Experience—Chinese Experiences

Unlike the Korean testimonies, the Chinese testimonies had elaborate details about these women's lives before becoming comfort women. Like an autobiography, their stories often began with descriptions of their childhoods, their families, and sometimes even their marriage situations. While the Korean testimonies were conducted under the Korean Congress, the Chinese interviewers were university researchers who approached these women with an academic interest, wanting to tie China's 20th century gender dynamics with the comfort women's experiences. At least one third of the questions on the interviewers' questionnaires were directed toward their pre-draft lives. Therefore, thanks to these questions, we can derive a more comprehensive picture of these victims' histories from their testimonies.

Like the Korean victims, the twelve Chinese comfort women all came from humble rural backgrounds. Their families' destitute financial situations often became worse after Japan's invasion. This extreme poverty forced many parents to sell their daughters to neighbors' sons or even human traffickers as "child brides (*tongyangxi*)."[45] Due to the uncertainty of the period, these women would sometimes be resold multiple times to different families. Victim Zhou Fengying commented on how "girls were unwanted and were called 'money-losing goods' since they would serve another family when they were married, and their parents had to spend a fortune to pay for the dowry."[46] By a very young age, these women had already been reduced into mere "monetary goods" by their society, were deprived of a peaceful childhood, and most importantly, had lost basic control over their own lives.

Surprisingly, most of these victims expressed little resentment toward their parents. For example, Zhou Fenying described how her parents struggled with survival as landless farmers and how they would "hold her tightly…[and would] cry their hearts out"[47] after they first tried to abandon her on the side of the road. In Zhou's narration, this touching and tragic scene immediately preceded her sale to a nearby village as a child-bride at the age of five." Her rhetorical choice complicates this testimony, making it not merely a historical account but a narrative text. In particular, we should attribute the artifice of Zhou's testimony to her memory of her pre-comfort woman experience. Memory, as French historian Jacques Le Goff claims, involves both a loss and a creation.[48] The seventy-year gap between the event and Zhou's interview detached her from her direct sensory responses to it. Zhou's past traumas, feelings, and her present state were mixed into the process of her recollection, creating the memory. Her memory allowed her to create an unexpected link between her parent's love and her abandonment. In the end, her memory transformed her subject from a faceless victim to a woman with a unique, complicated life: a life intermingled with love, loss, and pain, well beyond just being a comfort woman.

For example, Zhou seemed to justify her parents' behaviors by foregrounding their love and attachments to her. She conveyed her sale to be a relatively "justifiable" choice considering the extreme destitution her family was in, which demonstrated her empathy for her parents' difficult decisions. Female infanticide and human trafficking of women increased in China during the 1930s,[49] which made women like Zhou even more at risk. Her turbulent childhood brought her unimaginable pain. Zhou had to face a world in which rural women like her had very little social agency. In her recollection, this information demonstrates that her powerlessness as a rural woman started way before she became a comfort woman. As a child, she had to accept women's relative inferiority to men and even "embrace" her

44 Schellstede, "Comfort Women Speak," 102.
45 For more information, see Qiu, *Chinese Comfort Women*, 33.
46 Qiu, "Chinese Comfort Women," 110.
47 Qiu, "Chinese Comfort Women," 111.
48 Gail Hershatter, *The Gender of Memory: Rural Women and China's Collective Past*, (Berkley: University of California Press, 2011), 22–25.
49 Her testimonies revealed how women were being viewed as "inferior goods" by others. Selling daughters was a prevalent and acceptable practice in 20th century China. See Hershatter, *Women and China's Revolution*, 176.

ultimate fate of becoming a filial bride and mother within her new family, her life revolving around the stove. Although they never used emotional words, she and others made the choice to incorporate the details about their parents' decisions and the abuses they had faced since childhood, which had already become their renunciation of social biases.

After becoming "child brides," these women cared for their parents-in-law and worked in the fields. Given that these women had no economic resources and became completely dependent upon their in-laws, they were treated as servants who had to obey all demands from their in-laws and husbands. Victim Lei Guiying described in detail the constant beatings she received from her first mother-in-law.[50] Unable to bear these abuses, Lei escaped the household and became a beggar on the streets. Yuan Zhulin had similar experiences where her mother-in-law "treated her like an outcast… [and] an extra burden on the family."[51]

However, unlike the Korean victims, whose testimonies often described local collaborators providing false promises about jobs overseas as a pretense for the draft, most of the Chinese victims were simply abducted by soldiers on site. Whenever Japanese soldiers came across a village or a town, they would select the local "good-looking" girls and transport them to comfort stations.[52] Zhou Fengying noted that "because my cousin and I were known for our good looks, we had been targeted."[53] In their narrations, these victims were conscious of how their femininity, their light skin, their height, or even their young age, resulted in their enslavement. Besides blaming the Japanese troops, these women also seemed to believe that their innate feminine qualities were responsible for the crimes, implicitly turning themselves into fellow culprits. Their narration revealed the complex psychology of rural victims in 1930s China and Korea. In the end, these rural women's inferior social standing, economic burdens, and their submission to patriarchal authority made them particularly vulnerable to social injustices, which actually prompted these victims to develop self-deprecating views about their pasts within their narrations, even when discussing the sexual crimes they endured.

Life as a Comfort Woman

Japan created and later destructively executed the comfort women system with a clear exploitative, imperialist mindset. Under the pretext of citizen mobilizations, they kidnapped these girls, transported them like livestock alongside other military provisions, and forcibly turned them into sex slaves.[54] This process involved sheer violence. Testimonies from both countries show that when false promises and coercion did not work, the women were simply abducted."[55]

When comfort women were transported to their stations, their personhood was taken from them, and they were treated like tools with one function: to sleep with Japanese soldiers whenever needed in whatever way was desired by the soldiers. When the women arrived, the comfort station managers, usually local collaborators, would give them either an identification number or a Japanese name and refer to them by that new name from that time onward.[56] Possibly as an aim to obliterate their past and quell potential resistance, the station often ordered the victims to wear Japanese clothing and mimic the behaviors of Japanese women.[57] Because Japan colonized Korea, Korean testimonies demonstrated a higher demand for their explicit expressions of allegiance to Japan. They were required to openly recite their love for the Japanese emperor and be thankful for the precious opportunity of "serving" his soldiers. They needed to pray for Japan's victory and express their gratitude to the soldiers who selflessly sacrificed their lives for the empire.[58] These assimilation policies repeatedly forced these victims to submit both physically and psychologically to these soldiers.

Both Korean and Chinese comfort women reported the extremely harsh living conditions and perpetual fear they endured. They were caged in small cubicles that

50 Hershatter, *Women and China's Revolution*, 104.
51 Hershatter, *Women and China's Revolution*, 113.
52 Hershatter, *Women and China's Revolution*, 43.
53 Hershatter, *Women and China's Revolution*, 112.
54 See Soh, *The Comfort Women*, 27–141.
55 For more information on Japan and Korea's colonial relation, see Dai Sil Kim-Gibson, *Silence Broken: Korean Comfort Women*, (Parkersburg, Iowa: Mid-Prairie Books, 1999), 109–113.
56 Yoshimi, *Comfort Women*, 107–120.
57 Soh, *Comfort Women*, 29–78.
58 Soh, *Comfort Women*, 14.

could fit only one bed. They were often kept near the frontlines, moving with the army. Their testimonies recorded that their everyday "job" included serving an average of twenty to fifty men,[59] from seven in the morning to late at night, and emphasized how little food they were provided. The words "hunger," "pain," and "hurt" repeatedly appeared in testimonies from both countries.[60] Given that most of the victims were used to extreme destitution, their complaints concerning the comfort stations' inhumane treatments reveal the unbearable levels of suffering the women there endured.

Apart from living in a vile environment, comfort women were also subject to verbal abuse and physical torments. All the victims in the thirty-one testimonies I read uniformly recounted beatings, curses, and sometimes even stabbing. For example, Li Lianchun showed the interviewers the very long and wide scar on her left shoulder from a soldier biting her. She had such a difficult time discussing the details of the attack that the interviewers needed to redirect the conversation.[61]

Constant ethnic slurs were frequently mixed with the soldiers' violence. Kim Dae-Il reported how a Japanese officer thrust a lit cigarette into a victim's vagina and said, "Hey, this dirty Korean is dying."[62] Many women were required to inject #606[63] or take medicine to treat venereal disease and, most importantly, induce abortions and prevent fertilization. According to testimonies, pregnancy or menstruation were not excuses for rest: a comfort woman needed to sleep with men, even while her uterus was bleeding. If a comfort woman became pregnant, she and her baby would be executed.[64] One Korean survivor recounted how a Japanese officer killed a comfort woman who spoke Korean while offering solace to a new arrival. Infuriated by her perceived defiance against the Japanese, he tortured her to death in front of the other women in the station as a threat.[65] Many women, in their testimonies, lamented about how their pasts as comfort women made them barren and unable to fulfill their most important duty as a woman.

Ironically, these actions exemplify the system's worst injustices: being young and heirless were the same patriarchal expectations that rendered these victims vulnerable to exploitation by their communities and the comfort women system in the first place. Kim Bun-Sun, for instance, concluded her testimony saying: "I have no one, no children. I am in poor health. I live alone, and I will die alone."[66] Born into a poor rural family, Kim had little social power to resist the soldiers who abducted her. Knowing they lived under patriarchal households, the Japanese army devised a system that targeted these marginalized women. In both Korea and China, a woman's value was determined by her ability to reproduce. The comfort woman system took away the one pathway to worthiness that Korean/Chinese patriarchal norms bestowed on rural women. The experiences robbed these victims of their basic social value, ingraining a lifelong shame for their past.

Given Japan's education and propaganda in championing their ethnicity's superiority and destined leadership role in Asia, it is possible that these soldiers may have viewed these "foreign" comfort women as inferior, or as "sub-human." When facing stress, frustrations, and disillusion from countless battles, it is possible that the soldiers projected these negative emotions onto these innocent victims through verbal insults and physical abuses. The women had little power to resist these actions. In fact, historical records show that the comfort stations had a list of demands for these women to meet, one of which was the complete submission to abusive acts by any soldiers.[67] The testimonies recorded how sick comfort women would be abandoned like trash, "wrapped in the sheets and carried away."[68]

To further illustrate a comprehensive picture of the comfort woman's life, I close with Jin Kyung-Paeng's testimony on her comfort woman experience. She opens her

59 Soh, *Comfort Women*, 25–27, 49–51, 63–67.
60 For more information, see Schellstede, *Comfort Women Speak*, 1–108; also see Qiu, *Chinese Comfort Women*, 96–169.
61 Qiu, *Chinese Comfort Women*, 164.
62 Schellstede, *Comfort Women Speak*, 27.
63 #606 injects was an Arsphenamine/Salvarsan compund that both treated venereal disease and, most importantly, induced abortion and eventually caused sterilization. Hwang Sel (2009), "Korean Female Child Soliders, Sexual Violence, and No. 606 Injections During the Pacific War of the World War II" in *Substance Use and Misuse* 44 (12), 1786-1802.
64 Schellstede, *Comfort Women Speak*, 79–120.
65 Schellstede, *Comfort Women Speak*, 26.
66 Schellstede, *Comfort Women Speak*, 23.
67 Yoshimi, *Comfort Women*, 130–151.
68 Schellstede, *Comfort Women Speak*, 46.

testimony with a short introduction to her current living situation, then immediately moves us to the moment of her abduction. She was a rural woman who lived in a remote village called Hapchon. One day, two Japanese soldiers abducted Jin while she was picking cotton with her mother. She was only fourteen at the time. Jin never mentions the presence of her father before or after the war, so it is probable that he was absent. As mentioned in Section II, this absence of a male figure in the household was common during the 1930s due to war mobilization and a general financial depression. She concludes this initial "encounter" with one sentence, "I was crying." She does not report any details of fighting against the two soldiers, but only recalls this moment of emotional frustration. Here, Jin explicitly describes a moment of vulnerability, maybe as a way to reflect her sense of powerlessness as a comfort woman.[69]

The army transported Jin to Kinariyama, Taiwan, where she spent five years as a comfort woman. In her testimony, Jin discloses a few details of these five years. She mentions the number of men she served every night (twenty), and that the army injected her with #606 after she contracted venereal diseases. She mentions that she also worked as a military nurse during the day and a comfort woman at night, "with no time to rest [...] [nor] time for a meal."[70] Many other descriptions in her testimony are related to the general conditions for other comfort women. For example, Jin describes how "most girls were sixteen to nineteen years old… they were all abducted and brought to the camp like me."[71] All of these rather frigid linguistic choices may reflect the depth of Jin's trauma and shame, making it hard for her to recollect her experiences in detail. Moreover, the rest of Jin's details demonstrate that her body and other comfort women's bodies were treated as simply a tool for these soldiers' needs. Her testimony describes how comfort women were hunted like animals, shipped like military provisions, and treated like public toilets.

Before becoming comfort women, these women already had very little control of their own lives and desires. Then, the unimaginable level of abuse and agony that they endured further reproduced and reinforced the same social concept of women's inferiority to these men—a continuation of their turbulent childhoods. These testimonies serve as these victims' lamentations over their horrendous suffering as comfort women, and demonstrate their consciousness of objectification by the Japanese army—instilling a shame that they continued to feel during the post-war decades.

BREAKING THE POST-WAR SILENCE

A Forced Choice: Post-war Silence

DURING THE WAR, these rural women lacked effective social agency and, unsurprisingly, there was little local opposition against the recruitment of comfort women or the establishment of comfort stations. The same vulnerabilities continued to shape those women's experiences after the war. For nearly five decades, all Korean and Chinese comfort women remained in silence. Korean and Chinese records that explicitly mentioned military comfort women recruits, with pictures clearly demonstrating comfort women being drafted, were ignored. Hundreds of comfort stations and their records were left unchecked. Although some social writers, like Ding Ling, did note these women's persecution and suffering at the hands of their communities,[72] no academic research or official investigations were conducted on comfort women before the 1990s.

Before it became an international topic, most comfort women survivors were targets of public shaming and were forced to hide their pasts. If their pasts became known, their local communities, or sometimes even their families, would often identify them not as victims of sexual crimes but as traitors who "slept with Japanese soldiers."[73] Many Chinese survivors were publicly persecuted, imprisoned, and tortured during the Cultural Revolution for "counter-revolutionary" sentiments. Historians note that many comfort women committed suicide during these de-

69 Schellstede, *Comfort Women Speak*, 11–15.
70 Schellstede, *Comfort Women Speak*, 13.
71 Schellstede, *Comfort Women Speak*, 13.
72 Ding Ning, "My Life in Village Xia," in the *Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Literature*, Joseph S.M. Lau and Howard Goldblatt eds., (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 132–147.
73 Qiu, *Chinese Comfort Women*, 121.

cades of silence.[74] Moreover, as explored previously in Section II, patriarchal ideals of chastity permeated Korean and Chinese societies, where a woman's sexual integrity defined her living essence. Comfort women, therefore, were seen as the antithesis of the feminine ideal, having failed to protect their virginity or chastity when they were violated by men, marking them as cowards. Also, in the minds of many, these women intimately "comfort" Japanese soldiers and implicitly "helped" these foreign aggressors to conquer China or Korea. All of this made comfort women a politically and socially fraught topic. Bearing their own shame, the public's prejudice, and social marginalization, comfort women lived in constant fear and remained in silence. Given their nearly half a century of silence, one question arises: What prompted women to overcome the possible public discrimination and shame to suddenly reveal their stories?

Kim Hak-Soon—The Origin of the Redress Movement

In South Korea's case, the silence ended when Kim Hak-Soon filed her lawsuit on December 6, 1991, finally bringing both national and international attention to the enslavement of comfort women by the Japanese army during the war. Her life story naturally became the first officially recorded and widely disseminated comfort women testimony, initiating the redress movement.[75] Behind her seemingly sudden decision is the fact that Kim was only given the opportunity to tell her story after the Korean political environment underwent dramatic transformation in the 1980s.[76] By 1987, Chun Doo-Hwan had peacefully transferred his power to Rho Tae-Woo, who passed the June 29 Declaration that granted more political freedoms to its citizens. More importantly, this political liberation allowed feminist activists and NGO leaders to bring forward human rights issues, one of which was comfort women.[77]

In 1989,[78] basing their claims on English Professor Yun Chung-Ok's research on comfort stations, the Korean Federation of Women's Organization demanded that Japan issue an official apology in regard to its wartime use of comfort women. Later that year, thirty-seven Korean feminist women's groups sent an open letter that repeated their grievances and demanded Japan's apology. These early protests eventually encouraged leading feminists and human rights activists Yun Chung-ok and Lee Hyo-Chae to create a separate platform to deal with the comfort women. By 1990, contemporary Korean feminist groups had united, and the Korean Council for Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan (or the Korean Council) was established.[79] On August 14, 1991, Kim, with the help of the Korean Council, held a press conference releasing her testimony. Unsurprisingly, the Korean Council later became the main agency that interviewed, transcribed, and disseminated these women's testimonies within Korea, including the nineteen testimonies used in this thesis. During the 1990s, Korean Council activists accompanied these victims in almost all hearings, protests, and conventions. When the United Nations first picked up the comfort women topic in 1992, the only two delegates participating in that Geneva Meeting were a former comfort woman and a member of the Korean Council.[80]

However, it is worth noting both the feminist and nationalist focus of the Korean Council. One of its leaders, Yun Chung-ok, came from a family of Korean independence fighters and reported a strong "anger over Japanese colonization of Korea." A forced laborer herself, Yun felt the need to record the stories of comfort women. The other leader, Lee Hyo-Chae, was actively involved in the 1970s democracy movement. In her petition to the UN Human Rights Commission, Lee noted that the Korean Council saw the comfort women as a represen-

74 Qiu, *Chinese Comfort Women*, 76–80.
75 Qiu, *Chinese Comfort Women*, 181–185.
76 The era of political repression under Park Chung-Hee during the 1970s and the Gwangju Uprising in 1980 already marked the beginning of the Korean people's struggle towards democracy. In the 1980s, universities around the country continued to have protests and movements regarding political reform. See Byung-Kook Kim and Ezra F. Vogel, *The Park Chung Hee Era: The Transformation of South Korea*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).
77 Gi-Wook Shin and Daniel C. Sneider, "Japanese Colonial Rule, Forced Labor, and Comfort Women," in *Divergent Memories: Opinion Leaders and the Asia-Pacific War*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2016), 195–214.
78 Rumiko, Nishino, Kim Puia, and Onozawa Akane, *Denying the Comfort Women: The Japanese State's Assault on Historical Truth*, (New York City: Routledge, 2018), 70–87.
79 See Sarah Soh, "The Korean 'Comfort Women': Movement for Redress," *Asian Survey* 36, no. 12 (1996): 1226–1240.
80 Soh, "Korean Comfort Women," 1226-1230.

tation of both patriarchal oppression and a Japanese war crime against Korean women. Using the women's testimonies, she claimed that Japan violated the 1932 international agreement on the prohibition of prostitution, which was signed by Japan.[81] In doing so, the Korean Council redirected and elevated the comfort women testimonies beyond these victims' individual suffering to an issue of national pride.

By 1994, the left-wing international human rights organization, the Japanese Democratic Lawyer's Association, was invited to China. They dedicated themselves to supporting lawsuits for Chinese comfort women and other victims of war crimes. From 1994 to 2005, without any support from the Chinese government or the public, these Japanese attorneys and local Japanese grassroots organizations, such as the Association to Support the Lawsuits of Chinese Comfort Women and Association to Support the Claims of Chinese Law Victims, paid for all research, investigations, and legal costs.[82] It is worth nothing that these Japanese activists' great contributions paralleled the groundbreaking academic work that Japanese scholar Yoshiaki Yoshimi did. Professor Su Zhiliang and Chen Lifei (his wife) at Shanghai Normal University, with funding from these transnational organizations, began their own research on comfort women within China. The twelve testimonies included here also were gathered with assistance from and collaboration with local researchers.[83] Unlike the Korean testimonies, the Chinese victims were interviewed by historians, who were relatively free from strong political or feminist inclinations. Furthermore, since Su studied in Japan, he had a close relationship with non-Chinese scholars, which made him aware of the importance of analyzing the comfort women from a somewhat transnational perspective.

However, given that their work had been accepted by the CCP and even adopted by national museums such as the Nanjing Massacre Memorial and Museum of the Eighth Route Army,[84] all bases for patriotic education, it is noteworthy that some extent of nationalistic and anti-colonial tone is still present in these Chinese scholars' work. As Su said in his own book's foreword, his research is to delineate "this monster's [Japan] evil deeds" and completely expose "the brutality of Japanese militarism" for the honor of the countless Chinese comfort women whose lives were ruined.[85] Lastly, it should be noted that Su's book's publisher was founded by the State Council of the People's Republic of China, which has a direct connection to the Party.

Government's Role in the Redress Movement

Both the Korean and Chinese governments' initial response to these grassroots organizations was to suppress and avoid them. When a Korean newspaper publicized local records of comfort women in 1992, the Ministry of Education in South Korea forbade any further disclosure of these records.[86] The government provided neither funds nor support for the Korean Council or other organizations that advocated for these women. Relying on small private donations, these organizations could not financially aid these victims.[87] The situation was worse in China, where no official research was conducted or grassroots organizations formed until 2000. Even in the 2000s, the Chinese government denied comfort woman Li Lianchun access to travel documents when she was invited to speak in the Women's International War Crimes Tribunal in Japan, claiming that her deci-

81 Soh, "Korean Comfort Women," 1232.

82 On the Japanese civic organization's role in funding the redress movement for the Chinese comfort women, see Qiu, *Chinese Comfort Women*, 190–194.

83 Qiu, *Chinese Comfort Women*, 97.

84 In the beginning, some of the panels and museums that adopted the comfort women theme were temporary. In 2006, when the known right-wing politician Abe Shinzo became the leader of Japan, his revisionist stance prompted the establishment of the "Comfort Women" exhibit in the Nanjing Massacre Memorial, the archive at Shanghai Normal University in Shanghai, and a symposium in Shanxi University, and the Museum of the Eighth Route Army in Shanxi's Wuxiang County. See Vickers, "Commemorating Comfort Women," 184.

85 Su Zhiliang, *The Research on Japanese Military Comfort Women*, Tuanjie Publishing: 2015, 1. Here the recorded language is my translation, and the original Chinese text reads: 作为一个史学工作者，有责任将日军之暴行予以彻底的揭露。

86 Hyunah Yang, "Re-membering the Korean Military Comfort Women: Nationalism, Sexuality, and Silencing," in *Dangerous Women: Gender and Korean Nationalism*, (New York: Routledge, 1998), 125.

87 For instance, by 1995, four years after Kim's trial, seven comfort women had to live in one common room. Soh, "Korean Comfort Women," 1231.

sion to disclose "a shameful past" abroad would harm China's international image.[88] Throughout the redress movement, both countries' governments consciously filtered and refined details of the comfort women and controlled the information's dissemination.

In South Korea, the comfort women became useful leverage when asking Japan to aid in Korea's economic development. Korea signed a treaty with Japan (the Japan-Korea Basic Treaty) in 1965 that settled all colonial period issues "completely and finally" in exchange for Japan's economic aid. The then South Korean president Park Chung Hee prioritized money over these victims' rights for redress. Thereafter, the Korean government made very little effort to protect these women's rights, often leaving them in extreme poverty.[89] After Kim's trial in 1991 and growing international protests, Japan offered another 1 billion yen to the South Korean government in 2015, in exchange for resolving the issue "finally and irreversibly." Yet, as in 1965, the comfort women in 2015 still played no role in crafting or signing the agreement.[90]

The Chinese government, however, did not participate in the redress movements in the 1990s, nor did they fund scholars who worked on the comfort women. Before 2000, there was little media coverage. Since the comfort women have received international attention, feminist groups and NGOs have played an instrumental role in helping these women. However, this intimacy between grassroots organizations and comfort women may have concerned the Communist Party (CCP) for its potential to destabilize their power and societal control, especially after the Tiananmen Square Incident. Consequently, when the UN-sponsored World Conference on Women was held in Beijing in 1995, the CCP forbade all comfort women victims and comfort women scholars from attending. In 2000, the CCP again blocked Chinese participants from attending the Women's War Crimes Tribunals in Tokyo. Essentially, before 2000, the government suppressed any serious discourse concerning comfort women.[91]

To the CCP, the comfort women and their histories challenged their established WWII history. First, the comfort women involved not just China, but women across Eurasia. Second, multiple players, particularly Chinese local collaborators, were heavily involved in abducting, transporting, and managing these victims. Both elements, if widely propagandized, would generate unnecessary questions for the government to answer. To complicate the issue further, the delicate post-Cold War political environment included Japan, a Western/American ally, and China, a communist country, in opposing camps. So, unlike with the South Korean government, Japan made no effort to communicate with either the Chinese or North Korean governments regarding the comfort women, and excluded China from the Asian Women's Fund, an organization designed to offer compensation and an official apology letter to survivors in the 1990s. Only in 2000, when Su Zhiliang received Japan's interest as the director of the Research Center for Chinese Comfort Women under Shanghai Normal School, was some kind of compensation process with these women initiated. After discussing this with the known survivors, Su declined their offer for possible monetary compensation. He claimed that all survivors consented to this decision.[92]

Today, comfort women in China and Korea have yet to obtain control in the redress movement. The governments, the public, and even international academia have long shifted the focus away from the individual victims' lives, redirecting it toward the international power struggles between Japan, Korea, and China. Ironically, testimonies from the comfort women were important sources of evidence upon which scholars in Korea and China built their war-crime arguments and constructed their particular nationalistic public memories.

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88 Qiu, *Chinese Comfort Women*, 176.

89 The power struggle went beyond Korea and Japan. The U.S. helped Japan after WWII and pressured Korea to ask little reparations for war. The U.S. chose not to prosecute Japanese leaders involved in the comfort woman system. From Korea's perspective, President Park Chung Hee legalized prostitution in Korea as a way to situate *Wianbu* as a euphemism used for Korean women, essentially also sexual slaves, who "served" in similar rape centers (camp towns) for American military near American military camps in the 1970s.

90 On Korea's continued tension on the comfort women, see Thomas J. Ward, "The Comfort Women Controversy: Not Over Yet," East Asia (2016): 255-269. On December 27th 2017, President Moon Jae-in called the 2015 "Comfort Women Agreement" flawed, but again, no changes were made.

91 On the Chinese governmental role in the redress movement for the comfort women before 2010, see Vickers, "Commemorating Comfort Women," 174–180.

92 Qiu, *Chinese Comfort Women*, 181–190.

LEGACIES: HOW COMFORT WOMEN (COULD) PRESENT THEIR STORIES

ONE QUESTION THAT we cannot ignore is whether these comfort women really presented their experiences, pain, and lives through these testimonies. Feminist theorist Spivak argues that "if, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow."[93] Since these victims were marginalized and illiterate postcolonial subjects who survived sexual slavery, their stories would naturally be influenced and altered by these intermediary players, who were not subject to these women's traumas. More importantly, these intermediary forces conditioned the contextualization, selection, and circulation of the victims' stories. Within the fraught post-war relations between Japan and other East Asian states, women's voices were deployed as tools of nationalist agitation and leverage for compensation. With those highly personal, intimate experiences in tandem with an awareness of political and institutional forces, these testimonies became overdetermined: as texts and as sites of interlocking histories, consisting of both the personal history of sexual violation and the symbolic discourse of comfort women in the post-war era.

By the time comfort women began to tell their stories, their voices were conditioned by decades-long private trauma, personal shame, and widespread social discrimination rooted in their past enslavement. Naturally, when these victims were finally offered an opportunity to speak, nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and feminist groups held the power to conduct, edit, and later disseminate these testimonies to suit their agencies' distinct agendas. Hence, these testimonies have dual uses as politicized propaganda used to incite antagonism and as personal histories of the distinct tragedies, dilemmas, and vulnerabilities rural women faced. This leaves the question of the comfort women's self-agency. As heard through representatives, did their oppressed voices get heard? Did they regain some of their agency?

Politicization of Comfort Women Testimonies—An Anti-Colonial, Anti-Japanese Discourse?

Comfort stations and the comfort women system were part of Japan's colonial project, serving as a tool to expedite its ultimate goal of creating the "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere."[94] These victims and their memories suffered a burden of their colonized past,[95] with Japan assuming the role of the imperial master. The comfort women system, with the exploitation of human bodies at the center of the violence, represented Japan's absolute violation of the two countries during the war. It strengthened historical dichotomies between good and evil, or victim and perpetrator, when people associated Japan, Korea, and China.[96] For the Chinese and Korean governments, these unimaginable stories could serve as the perfect ammunition to generate strong anti-colonial, anti-Japanese sentiments.

Interestingly, these women's testimonies demonstrate similar rhetoric. During their narrations, Japan was often painted as the superior "other" who defeated their country, instilling fear and suffering in the colonized. The Japanese were the cause for their unfortunate fate and miserable lives. Through a close reading of Korean woman Kim Sang-Hi's and Chinese woman Lu Xiuzhen's testimonies, I argue that these victims' stories intermixed

93 Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

94 Jeremy A. Yellen, *The Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere: When Total Empire Met Total War*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019).

95 Note that China was never exactly colonized by Japan. However, I define the "colonial" past here as a way to describe the invasive nature of Japan in Korea and China.

96 For a similar discussion on the "self-other" dichotomy, see Vickers, "Commemorating Comfort Women," 174–180. Also see Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996. He discusses how the "other" became the strange...and his nature is existentially something different and alien because the propaganda and other forms of everyday idioms reproduced the distinction of the context of a concrete antagonism. Behind the distinction of the friend-enemy dialectic is the "real possibility of physical killing." When the conflict became so grave, and the distance to peaceful resolution became so stark, the war became seemingly the only option that was "common, normal, ideal, or desirable."

individual resentments and lack of agency with their respective nations' common, collective hatred toward Japan. Sometimes, they chose to abstract their individual desires and move their experience beyond personal suffering to Japan's overall transgressions against their homeland and fellow countrymen. Thus, they linked Japan's war crimes to the present day.

Kim Sang-Hi began her story with a short introduction of her family make-up and quickly moved to the moment of her draft. She used the Japanese calendar, stating that she was abducted by two men on the "12th year of Showa (1937)"[97] while she was having a portrait done with her girlfriend. She recounted:

> *A man dressed in olive-drab clothing and wearing a cap started to curse at us in Japanese. I couldn't tell if that s.o.b., pardon my language, was a Japanese or a Korean, because at that time of the Japanese occupation, we Koreans all had to speak Japanese.*[98]

Here, Kim described how the man cursed in Japanese. Yet, she could not tell if the men were Japanese or Korean, because Koreans all spoke Japanese after Japan's invasion.[99] Kim deliberately labeled Koreans the "we" or self, instantly excluding Japan as the "other." Revealing how the "self" had to unconditionally submit to the "other," Kim, even at the beginning of her story, had already described the historical power hierarchy: Japanese on the top and Koreans at the bottom. Also, her emphasis here situates her audience to a specific time period in colonial Korea, a time when Japan initiated a series of harsh assimilation policies to instill nationalism in the colonized, transforming them into Japanese imperial subjects. Policies were aimed at taming Korea to help Japan better mobilize its people during the war. Her testimony, therefore, was unequivocally founded upon Korea's colonial past.

The first piece of information Kim included in her testimony after her arrival at the comfort station in Suzhou was when soldiers changed her Korean name "Kim Sang-Hi" to "Takeda Sanai." Again, Kim labeled this change as "a change of her own" to something "Japanese," and spoke of her rage and desperation when it happened.[100] Kim's choice to differentiate her "self" and the "other" by including the colonial-era power hierarchy was not distinct. In her testimony, Kim Dae-Il also chose "name change" as the first event in her comfort woman life. She even included a quote from a soldier, saying, "This is Japan. From now on, you must not speak Korean. Your new and only name is Shizue."[101] Japan actually required all Koreans to change their name to Japanese with Ordinance No. 20 in 1939.[102] Yet, these women's choice to highlight this event as the moment that transformed them into a comfort woman sheds light on their cognitive dissonance toward colonization and "Japanization." Perhaps in their minds, the "name-change" both denied their Korean pasts and also forcibly imposed their new colonized identities.

Toward the end of her testimony, Kim Sang-Hi lamented about her inability to reconcile herself with her past. However, the final sentence of her narration directs the spotlight away from her personal life. Instead, she chose to address the abstract concept of "Japan," saying: "When I wake up every morning, my head subconsciously turns east toward Japan, and I curse her. I cannot help it."[103] Her personal anger and frustration are also mixed with an abstract anti-Japanese, anti-colonial sentiment. Furthermore, by linking her war experiences and Japan's crimes to her present state, Kim paints it as an unsolved, ongoing issue. Kim Sang-Hi was not alone; one-third of the examined testimonies, both Korean and Chinese, end with similar expressions of an "abstractified" hatred. Many like Kim Yoon-Shim verbally attacked the Japanese, saying they "appear to be kind on the surface, but I don't trust them. They all have a dual personality."[104]

While it is completely understandable that these women, as sexual violence survivors, chose to express their frustrations toward their perpetuators, I believe we should also take into account the contemporary political environment's anti-colonial, anti-Japanese inclinations. In 1995,

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97 Showa refers to the reign of the Japanese emperor Hirohito. It describes the time period between 1926 to 1989.

98 Schellstede, *Comfort Women Speak*, 30.

99 Schellstede, *Comfort Women Speak*, 30.

100 Schellstede, *Comfort Women Speak*, 31.

101 Schellstede, *Comfort Women Speak*, 25–27. Pak Du-Ri made a similar choice to make "name-change" the first information on comfort women's experience. For more information, see Schellstede, *Comfort Women Speak*, 69–71.

102 Kim-Gibson, *Silence Broken*, 36.

103 Schellstede, *Comfort Women Speak*, 37.

104 Schellstede, *Comfort Women Speak*, 47.

then Japanese Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama publicly announced that Japan's annexation of Korea "was legally and historically valid and effective," and that the colonization "did good things for Korea." Japan further angered the Korean public and government by claiming that the contested area "Dokdo" belonged to Japan, directly challenging Korea's territorial sovereignty. Korea responded by tearing down the Japanese Colonial Headquarters and building the National Museum for Independence on the site in 1997. With Korea's victim image amplified, the Korean government aimed to show how outrageously incorrect Japan's revisionist views were, and how they affected the present. Thus, as intermediary agencies conducted and disseminated these testimonies during the 1990s, the Japan-Korean relationship greatly deteriorated.[105] The Korean government actively revisited and invited the public to revisit Korea's colonial past with a focus on the Japanese brutality toward the Korean people. Aligning with this political inclination, the testimonies also dwelled upon the suffering that the Japanese army caused.

The intermediate organization itself, the Korean Council, clearly had strong anti-colonial inclinations. Yun Chung-Ok, its leader at the time, came from a family of independence fighters. She recalled how her father's strict and patriotic education influenced her greatly as a person.[106] Moreover, even when the comfort women became a transnational phenomenon, the Korean Council and other Korean nonprofit organizations primarily concentrated on Korean women's experiences.[107] Using the testimonies, their initial arguments and petitions to the Japanese government and the United Nations usually focused on the aspect that Japan, as the colonizer, used its war mobilization as a cover for the enslavement of Korean comfort women, their colonized.[108] As a result, these victims and their testimonies intermingled post-war Korea's own reconstruction and reorientation with their collective memory of their colonized past.

Similar to Kim Sang-Hi's testimony, Lu Xiuzhen began her testimony with a short introduction to her life before becoming a comfort woman. Then, she described the destruction of China by the Japanese troops, claiming:

> *I heard that the Japanese troops had vacations. Their officers had a week-long vacation, while the soldiers had three days. On their vacation days, the military men would come to the village from where they stationed. They looted chickens, grains, or anything they could find and shot oxen and pigs to eat. Worse even than that, the Japanese soldiers kidnapped the girls and women they could find [...] Chinese people suffered hellishly when the Japanese army invaded our country. Japanese soldiers could kill us at will with their guns, so my mother had no way to save me. Those Japanese troops were not humans; they were no different from beasts.*[109]

Note in this part, Lu first enumerated the various crimes the army committed. Only after this laundry list, Lu started to describe her own experience of being forcibly captured by soldiers. Furthermore, her account of this initial "encounter" ended with a general denunciation of Japan, and a lamentation, not of her suffering, but of the entire Chinese population."[110] By including her experience with other Japanese war crimes, Lu seems to abstract the personal human rights violation against her own body into yet another example of Japanese war crimes against the Chinese people. Moreover, Lu, like Kim Sang-Hi, consciously established a dichotomy between the Chinese as the "self" and the Japanese as the vicious "other." They crafted Japan's image as so strange and evil, practically alien.

This "inhuman" depiction of the Japanese and their soldiers was common in these women's testimonies. For instance, Wan Aihua, throughout her testimony, refers to the soldiers as the "devils."[111] Yuan Zhulin describes how the Japanese soldiers were "devilish-looking."[112] To these women, these men committed unimaginable violence and abuse against their bodies, so their descriptions became justifiable and understandable. But in addition to seeing these descriptions as natural emotional responses to their

105 Cheol Hee Park, "Cooperation Coupled with Conflicts: Korea-Japan Relations in the Post-Cold War Era," in *Asia-Pacific Review*, 2008, 13–35.
106 See Soh, "Korean Comfort Women," 1225.
107 See Vickers, "Commemorating Comfort Women," 176.
108 Rumiko, Nishino eds. *Denying the Comfort Women: The Japanese Assault on Historical Truth*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 219.
109 Qiu, *Chinese Comfort Women*, 118–120.
110 Qiu, *Chinese Comfort Women*, 118–120.
111 Qiu, *Chinese Comfort Women*, 106.
112 Qiu, *Chinese Comfort Women*, 124.

past suffering, we should also be cognizant that researchers conducted their interviews four decades later and that the CCP hoped to exacerbate a particular anti-colonial, anti-Japanese sentiment among its citizens.

Starting in the 1980s, to erase any potential challenges to the party during the Post-Cultural Revolution era, the Deng Xiaoping administration decided to initiate a series of patriotic campaigns revolving around an anti-colonial, anti-Japanese discourse, reminding its citizens of the unmeasurable atrocities and pain that the Japanese inflicted upon the Chinese people. War memories, then, were turned into nationalistic educational tools to reinforce the image of the "other"—Japan. Simultaneously, by hating a common enemy, the CCP kept their citizens looking at the past to appreciate the sacrifices and achievements of the Party through the war that had liberated them from the evils of the Japanese. Rita Mitter, for example, noted how both the CCP and Nationalist Party (KMT) in Taiwan integrated their WWII memory into part of their national identities in the 1980s and 1990s through televisions, museums, and films. In particular, the CCP wished to be perceived "as a virtuous actor, not just a powerful one."[113] To that end, the Party built commemoration sites like the Unit 731 War Museum to reinforce the memory of Japan's sins.[114] It is also during this time that the CCP began to educate its people on the details of the Nanjing Massacre and the comfort women. Such propaganda efforts continued into the 1990s, when the CCP initiated propaganda that focused on delineating Japan's war crimes to deepen the "self-other" dichotomy in Chinese people's minds.[115] During this time of intensified "war crime" education, Su began to conduct interviews with the comfort women, producing the testimonies that we read here. Su himself, as mentioned above, dedicated his research in part to uncovering the brutality and crimes that the Japanese committed against China. Therefore, these victims were both immersed within and directly interacted with interviewers with heightened anti-colonial, anti-Japanese sentiments at the time of their interviews.

As victims of sexual crimes, they justifiably held strong resentment and frustrations toward their perpetrators, and their emotions should not be denied. Yet, we also need to situate their testimonies within their respective political periods. Both the Korean and Chinese governments had launched projects to reconstruct a collective war memory that would link their colonial past and Japan's crimes to the present day. Like the government, the intermediary personnel that handled these interviews held a similar agenda, wanting to position the comfort women with Japan's crimes. Probably influenced by this rhetoric, these victims also intermixed their personal emotions within an overall anti-colonial, anti-Japanese discourse. In these testimonies, Japanese soldiers' human rights violations against bodies became evidence of Japan's transgression against their homelands, making Japan embody the "vicious" other.

Politicization of Comfort Women Testimonies—A Nationalistic Undertone?

Once the governments securely set up the "self-other" dichotomy, they succeeded in uniting all citizens against the "other," producing nationalist feelings. Likewise, along with these women's anti-colonial, anti-Japanese sentiments were their expressions of nationalism toward their homelands. However, being marginalized and discriminated against throughout their lives, their narration of nationalism was frequently interlaced with an implicit cynic grievance against the Korean or Chinese government's inactive bystander stance toward their suffering.

Through a close reading of Kim Dae-Il and Jin Kyung-Paeng's testimonies, I found that these women primarily emphasized comfort women's experiences as non-transnational experiences, saying all comfort women came from the same country. The uniformity in content may speak to the crucial role that the intermediary agencies played in conducting and editing these victims' stories. Also, while being a salient feature throughout the testimonies, the comfort women's nationalism coexists with their subtle frustrations and resentments toward their governments and their environments. Hence, I further argue that this additional layer of nuance contradicts and destabilizes

113 Rana Mitter, *China's Good War: How World War II is Shaping a New Nationalism*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020), 236.

114 Mark R. Frost, Daneil Schumacher and Edward Vickers eds., *Remembering Asia's World War Two*, (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2019), 27-35.

115 Lijun Yang, "A Clash of Nationalisms: Sino-Japanese Relations in the Twenty-First Century," in *China -Japan Relations in the 21st Century*, (Singapore: National University of Singapore, 2017), 83–127.

these victims' earlier confessions of nationalism, revealing how these testimonies could have been altered and later misrepresented by different agenda-driven forces.

Kim Dae-Il begins her testimony by directly diving into her comfort women experiences when she was drafted and transported from Korea to Manchuria. It focuses on describing the terrible treatment and verbal insults that Korean comfort women suffered. She laments:

> *So we were made sex slaves and were forced to service [forthy] to [fifty] soldiers each day. One time, a soldier sat on top of the stomach of a pregnant "comfort woman" who was almost full term. Apparently, this act induced labor. As a baby started to appear, he stabbed both the infant and the mother and exclaimed, "Hey, these senjing (dirty Koreans) are dead. Come and see."*[116]

In this testimony, Kim details how one Japanese soldier pushed a baby out of the body of a comfort woman, stabbed both victims, while yelling "dirty Choson" (an ethnic slang for Korean people). Her whole testimony focused on how the Japanese soldiers intersected their power with grave ethnic discrimination while committing their atrocities. Many other victims also noted how pervasive ethnic discrimination was in their comfort women experiences.[117]

By involving the concept of "ethnic otherness," their descriptions reflected both their anti-colonial, anti-Japanese sentiments and their personal nationalism. The "otherness," as previously mentioned, established a "self-other" dichotomy. However, the attribution of "otherness" came also from the Japanese, not only from the victims themselves. When the Japanese soldiers mixed physical abuse with ethnic slurs, they justified their crimes by branding these women as the "inferior" other, unworthy of any rights. The abuses, therefore, cannot be purely defined as sexual violence, but also as a unique, targeted attack against the comfort women's ethnic identities. Simultaneously, Kim's and others' choices to include these details suggest how essential their national identities are in their memories. In their stories, the Japanese soldiers' crimes went beyond being mere attacks upon their physical bodies, but were elevated to an overall abuse against their countries—revealing the nationalism of their views.

Despite noting how the comfort women system was founded upon and carried out with Japan's ethnically discriminative ideology, these women often noted the participation of local collaborators acting as drafters, interpreters for soldiers, or even managers of comfort stations. Although these local collaborators were not the focal point of their testimonies, historical records reveal the significant role that Korean and Chinese collaborators played in the system's success. A wide array of authoritarian Korean personnel were involved, including village elites, community leaders, police officers, and even administrative clerks. These collaborators accompanied private brokers and sometimes acted as recruiters themselves. Local officials were given lists of qualified girls in their communities and were expected to fulfill a quota within a given time. Using their positions as village leaders, these collaborators often came to victims repeatedly, making long speeches about filial piety and encouraging their participation. Besides wanting to ensure their privileges, the colonial policies imposed upon the elites also compelled them to participate in the recruitment process.[118]

Sometimes, if a recruiter executed their quota, their entire community would be rewarded and honored. Moreover, these elites feared losing authority or their own daughters to the system, and therefore zealously assisted with drafting and running comfort stations. Some collaborators were businessmen who saw the comfort women system simply as a lucrative business. Since the Japanese government supported such businesses, the collaborators could proceed without fear of government curtailment. For example, one Korean collaborator was able to open five comfort stations in Shanghai and received a 20,000 yen annual profit. The comfort women could not be separated from the general, historical pattern of widespread criminal sex trafficking of women in both Korea and China. Yet, both governments and various intermediary agencies overlooked this complexity regarding the comfort women.[119] They treated it as simply a unique Japanese crime against their homeland, rather than fitting it into

116 Schellstede, *Comfort Women Speak*, 26.

117 Other women like Kim Yoon-Shim, Son Pan-Im, and Lu Xuanzhen also talked about ethnic discrimination. For more information, see Schellstede, *Comfort Women Speak*, 25–27.

118 On the local collaborations with the Japanese Army and its importance in the comfort women, see Kim-Gibson, *Silence Broken*, 32–54; Maki, *Unfolding the 'Comfort Women' Debates*, 1–26.

119 For more information, see Soh, *The Comfort Women*, 107–142.

the long-standing and widely accepted practice of kidnapping and trafficking women across East Asia.[120]

However, neither the Korean nor Chinese governments, nor even the nonprofit organizations researching comfort women emphasized this aspect. In fact, these agencies intentionally downplayed collaborators' roles, aiming to simplify the dichotomy to a simple "self-other" between countries. We could even explain this kind of simplification as a continued method of silencing. The result of testimony became a filtered product that eliminated "uncomfortable" historical elements, like local collaborators or interpreters' involvements, that might destabilize people's nationalism. Also, given that these women had little chance to speak about their stories, their interviewers and the intermediary agencies became a crucial element in finalizing their testimonies. We can even push the argument further by suggesting that the omission of the roles of interviewers in their testimonies in themselves may suggest polished products.

Both Korean and Chinese comfort women seem to be nationally conscious when they describe other comfort women's ethnic makeup. Most of their accounts included information primarily on women coming from the same country as themselves. Jin Kyung-Paeng's testimony perfectly demonstrates this emphasis on people's nationalities. Her story opens by describing her present-day living arrangements: "living in a small apartment in Bundang, made available by the Korean government." After setting her nationality, Jin begins to summarize a comfort woman's life. She describes how two Japanese Kempei (military police) abducted her and moved her, with thirty other Korean girls, to Taiwan. She then says:

> *The Japanese guards divided the Korean women from the ship into three groups of ten and took us to different locations. We were the first Korean women in the area. There were also [twenty] Japanese women who had been there for a year. But the [fifty] of us were not enough to meet the soldiers' demands.*[121]

Here, Jin reminds her readers twice more about the comfort women's nationality. The first time, Jin reveals that her "group" was the first Korean group transported to "serve" this army unit. The second time is when she tells us that the thirty Korean girls living in her comfort station could not fulfill the needs of their assigned soldiers.[122] Similarly, Chinese victim Li Guiying's testimony also highlights nationality. She says: "All were Chinese, but wore Japanese robes."[123] It should be noted that, although rare, some women's testimonies included information regarding the transnational features of comfort women. For instance, Ms. K (a Korean victim) mentioned that some girls "of Chinese origin" lived in a comfort station in Manchuria.[124] At least to a certain extent, comfort women from many national origins coexisted within the same station. Maybe, then, we should look at how these women's emphasis overlapped with the nationalistic writing styles of their interviewers.

In the Korean case, as mentioned above, the agency that gave voice to the Korean comfort women had a very nationally focused agenda. Their founding leaders were highly nationalistic, and their early petitions (during the period when testimonies were recorded) were also focused on Korean nationalism. Moreover, the book that collected Korean comfort women's testimonies also had a rather Korea-oriented perspective. First, the Washington Coalition for Comfort Women was founded by Korean Americans—a diaspora community. In fact, the comfort women redress movement received more support and attention in the U.S. than in Korea and China in the 1990s. Through grassroots efforts, many Korean American communities persuaded U.S. politicians to take action to pressure the Japanese government in the compensation process. On July 30, 2007, the U.S. government issued a House Resolution calling Japan to "formally acknowledge, apologize, and accept historical responsibilities."[125]

This could be connected to Jewish efforts to rally

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120 For more information, see Vickers, "Commemorating Comfort Women," 176.
121 Schellstede, *Comfort Women Speak*, 12.
122 Schellstede, *Comfort Women Speak*, 11–15.
123 Qiu, *Chinese Comfort Women*, 106.
124 Schellstede, *Comfort Women Speak*, 101–105.
125 U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, *A Resolution Expressing that the Government of Japan should formally acknowledge, apologize, and accept historical responsibility in a clear and unequivocal manner for its Imperial Armed Forces' coercion of young women into sexual slavery, known to the world as "comfort women", during its colonial and wartime occupation of Asia and the Pacific Islands from the 1930s through the duration of World War II*, July 30 (2007), 110th Cong.

for international, and specifically German, recognition of the Holocaust. The Jewish American community established a similar movement that ensured the Holocaust would be included in the public school education curriculums. Jewish organizations such as the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) of B'nai B'rith promoted the "universalization" of the Holocaust.[126] As the title suggests, the Chinese American journalist Iris Chang's famous yet controversial book *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II* tried to tie the massacre to the Holocaust. Despite its mixed reception, her book instrumentally contributed to adding China and the Nanjing Massacre as part of the World War II narrative and a known topic among Chinese American diaspora communities.[127] Filipino Americans and Tibetan diaspora communities[128] around the world all participated in similar kinds of transnational activism. Anthropologists have argued that these foreign residents' participation in events regarding their own communities could help them to forge a "national" identity and connect them back to that "distant" yet "affirmative" homeland. Perhaps for the Washington Coalition, fighting justice for the Korean people through championing the comfort women was more of a priority than highlighting comfort women's self-agency.

Second, the leaders, editors, and interviewers are all ethnic Koreans. Although the organization titled the book Testimony by Sex Slaves of the Japanese Military, only the testimonies from Korean people were included. Since this book was published in 2000, comfort women survivors all across Asia have come forward and offered similar testimonies.[129] For example, 28 survivors from China have filed a lawsuit against Japan. The United Nations Report, which they included as appendices, also delineates that comfort women were drafted from all across Asia.[130] It is possible that the Korean organization did not have the means to collect or include all of these testimonies; however, given this discrepancy between their title and their content, it is feasible that the editor made a deliberate choice to paint a rather narrow or even biased picture of the comfort women, one without the crucial transnational aspect.

The author of the book that included the Chinese comfort women's testimonies, Qui Peipei, noted in her introduction the lack of Chinese women's voices within the international discourse. She wanted to include their voices in academia, allowing others to obtain a "full understanding of this complicated issue."[131] In the interview, Su and Chen also held similar goals. As Su disclosed in his own book, his work is to pursue justice for the death and suffering that hundreds of thousands of Chinese comfort women endured. To these scholars, these testimonies bear the burden of constructing and representing the extent of this turpitude. Their work aims to fill the holes that academia, international commissions, and journalists all left: the voice of the Chinese. Such nationally oriented goals may have influenced these victims and the style of narration.

Curiously, Jin Kyung-Paeng ended her story by circling back to her government, claiming that:

> *Not long ago, I was invited to visit Japan. I could not go because of my poor health and lack of funds. Today I have constant pain all over my body and frequent dizziness, but I cannot even afford over-the-counter drugs. My monthly income is 45,000 won, or about $55, from the Korean government. I have no possessions, relatives, or offspring. I am alone.*[132]

In the beginning of her testimony, she informed her readers that her current "small home" was arranged by

126 Thomas D. Fallace (Thomas Daniel), "The Origins of Holocaust Education in American Public Schools." *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 20, no. 1 (2006): 80–102. muse.jhu.edu/article/196303.
127 Iris Chang, *The Rape of Nanking: the Forgotten Holocaust of World War II*, (New York: Basic Books, 1997).
128 On Filipino Americans activism and how such social work can help them to form a self-identity that linked themselves back to their previously mystic, distant homeland, see Robyn Magalit Rodriguez, eds, "Conclusion," In *Filipino American Transnational Activism*, (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2019) https://doi.org.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/10.1163/9789004414556_011. On Tibetan diaspora communities and their effort to channel and preserve their Tibetan identity through political activism, see Shelly Bhoil and Enrique Galvan-Alvarez. *Tibetan Subjectivities on the Global Stage: Negotiating Dispossession*. Studies in Modern Tibetan Culture. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2018.
129 Bhoil and Galvan-Alvarez, *Tibetan Subjectivities*, iix.
130 Nishino Rumiko, "Forcible Mobilization: What Survivor Testimonies Tell Us," in *Denying the Comfort Women*, 50.
131 Qiu, *Chinese Comfort Women*, 24.
132 Schellstede, *Comfort Women Speak*, 15.

the Korean government. By the end, she told us that her sole income (45,000 won/55 dollars) also came from the Korean government.[133] In these two pieces of data, Jin highlights the critical role that the government played in helping her survive during the post-war era. As evident in her testimony, the national government, in contrast to their publicly apathetic stance, actually helped some victims. Governmental help is a common theme in both Korean and Chinese comfort women's testimonies. Yuan Zhulin, for instance, also ended her testimony by mentioning that the Chinese government offered her 120 yuan (twelve dollars) as a monthly stipend.[134] These statements could be a way for these women to address their current living conditions. However, given that their testimonies held a strong nationalistic undertone overall, this flagging of their national government's help is very likely to have been a deliberate choice to amplify their show of allegiance toward their country.

As these women delineated the help their governments offered, they also seemed to express deep frustration or bitterness toward their lives, especially regarding how little help their society had offered. In Jin Kyung-Paeng's narration, she stresses that her government-subsidized apartment is "small," and ends her testimony by lamenting, "I am alone."[135] Her blunt statement reveals her frustration about how both her government and the nonprofit organizations failed to truly tend to her needs. Although implicit, Jin asserts to readers that her dreadful life shows no signs of improvement. Kim Soon-Duk even directly criticizes the inaction of her government in pursuing the interests of the comfort women themselves.[136]

Chinese comfort women posed similar criticisms toward their government. Chen Yabian, for example, welcomed anyone to interview her, while she spoke of her desire to have a "peaceful and good life in my late years."[137] Her contradictory wishes may reflect her subtle reluctance to fight or pursue certain goals or agendas that differ from those of her government and other intermediary agencies.

Politicization of Comfort Women Testimonies—A Mission-Directed Statement?

Most comfort women were illiterate, rural women who possessed little social power. With no alternatives, they were forced to remain silent in the post-war era. As opportunities arose, when intermediary agencies came and recorded their stories, these women finally produced their testimonies. Nevertheless, as Spivak pointed out, intermediary agents came with distinct agendas and perspectives concerning a specific issue.[138] As the privileged other, they imposed their views upon these marginalized, illiterate, postcolonial women.

In the comfort women's testimonies, we have already seen the common emphasis on their anti-colonial, anti-Japanese sentiments and their national allegiances. Besides this political subtext, these testimonies were also concentrated on building a relatively feminist argument. A close reading of Hwang Keum-Ju's and Huang Youliang's testimonies demonstrate how the victims' innocence (as virgins and as unpaid slaves) and the male transgressions over both their female bodies and dignities became the de facto focal point of these stories. Furthermore, in their ending paragraphs, most testimonies shifted the tensions of their stories from recounting crimes to making specific demands against the Japanese government—which happened to align with messages that the intermediary agencies desired. In the end, the testimonies seemed to function primarily to satisfy the ambitions of these agencies, not the women themselves.

Hwang Keum-Ju begins her testimony with a little background on her life before becoming a comfort woman. Due to her family's dire financial situation, her parents sent Hwang to a foster home. When she was eighteen, a Japanese order came to draft girls for work, and Hwang decided to leave to spare her foster sisters from the same fate. Hwang describes her trip to her first comfort station in Manchuria and her anticipation of working at a regular factory. On her second day in Manchuria, a soldier

133 Schellstede, *Comfort Women Speak*, 14-15.
134 Qiu, *Chinese Comfort Women*, 128.
135 Schellstede, *Comfort Women Speak*, 13.
136 Schellstede, *Comfort Women Speak*, 41.
137 Qiu, *Chinese Comfort Women*, 114.
138 Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak," in Rosalind C. Morris, *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Reflections on the History of an Idea*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 21–81.

took Hwang to a room and raped her. Before describing the moment of violence, Hwang mentions how her hair "was still braided," a traditional indication of innocence. Kim described her psyche at the moment of the violence.

> *I still had absolutely no idea what he was about to do. I just told him that I hoped one of the orders was for me to work at a factory. He told me that I was not going to any factory. So I asked him what his orders were. He told me to follow his instructions. Then he told me to take off my clothes. It was like a bolt from the sky. My braided hair clearly showed I was a virgin. How was it possible that I could take off my clothes in front of a man?*[139]

Hwang was not the only victim who described her innocence and ignorance of soldiers' violence. Kang Duk-Kyung described how she had no knowledge on sex, not even "the word menstruation" before becoming a comfort woman.[140] Pak Kyung-Soon lamented her innocence as she followed the orders of the Japanese soldiers. "I was so naive," Pak said.[141] Words like "innocent," "naive," and "follow orders/directions" appeared in many testimonies, especially in those of Korean victims. The motivations for underscoring such information may be overdetermined.

First, the ideal of chastity, as we discussed, might be a deeply ingrained concept in these women's minds. When representing their lives, these women may want to underscore their formerly chaste status. Second, the right-wing revisionist argument that Japanese scholars and officials held was that these comfort women were contractual prostitutes, who voluntarily signed up to serve the military.[142] These testimonies, especially the Korean cases, were initially conducted for the purpose of supplementing evidence on ongoing international trials and investigations. Therefore, comfort women's narratives were turned into weapons to attack opposing revisionist challenges. Third, their stress on sexual innocence fits the "perfect victim paradigm," traits that people often expect sexual violence victims to demonstrate. The perfect rape victim was powerless and conservative in her personal dress and behaviors, showing injuries to attest to her reluctance.[143] During the redress movement, different intermediary agencies intentionally tried to fit comfort women into this "perfect victimhood" paradigm. For example, instead of depicting mature women, many comfort women statues erected in Korea and China are either youthful teenage girls with slim bodies and solemn facial expressions (see Fig. 1, 2) or old, distressed elders (see Fig. 3). All of this suggests the hidden yet intense pressure upon these women and their interviewers to emphasize purity.

Besides innocence, these women seem to also highlight their powerlessness to expose male transgressions. Huang Youliang, for example, started her testimony with Japan's invasion of her village. They caught her and shouted at her so loudly that she felt as "if [her] head were swelling." A soldier then followed her home, "carried [her] into the bedroom, and ripped off [her] shirt and skirt."[144] Although her description is short, Huang describes a moment of absolute vulnerability. Readers could no longer read about her presence, but only focus on what the soldiers' actions were doing to her body. A while after that initial violence, the Japanese army transported her to a comfort station, where the girls were guarded by soldiers.

Besides the physical torment, Huang describes how the soldiers "never gave [them] anything or any money. They didn't even give [them] enough to eat, never mind pay [them]."[145] This detail is also the last bit of information that she shares about her life as a comfort woman, before moving on to her later journey and liberation. Both the colonial records and similar stories told by other women have substantiated her claims. Not to challenge Huang's or others' statements, I wish to dwell on Huang's decision to include the powerless moments, the comfort station's heavy surveillance, and the "non-contractual" relationship between her and the army. All of this could support the intermediary agencies' definition of comfort women as military sexual slaves, which, like the emphasis upon innocence, might have served to counter the rising revisionist arguments denying the truth.

Since the mid-1990s, a "free history" movement began and was adopted by many Japanese right-wing his-

139 Schellstede, *Comfort Women Speak*, 6.
140 Schellstede, *Comfort Women Speak*, 13-19.
141 Schellstede, *Comfort Women Speak*, 75.
142 Onozawa Akane, "Comfort Women and State Prostitution," in *Denying the Comfort Women: The Japanese State's Assault on Historical Truth*, 70–87.
143 Jan Jordan, "Perfect Victims, Perfect Policing? Improving Rape Complainants' Experiences of Police Investigations."
144 Qiu, *Chinese Comfort Women*, 147.
145 Qiu, *Chinese Comfort Women*,148.

Peace Monument [2]

torians like Fujioka Nobukatsu. They argued that since no convincing evidence was ever presented to prove the Japanese government's direct involvement in the comfort women draft and comfort station management, these women were lying. Even if such brutal incidents did happen, they were the crimes of civilian middlemen, for all these middlemen drafted only consensual prostitutes. Claiming they were never enslaved and that these women got paid and had the freedom to leave, Kamisaka Fuyuko even went as far as arguing that the whole comfort women "issue" was fabricated by anti-Japanese activists to demean Japan's image.[146] The brute force used by these soldiers juxtaposed by the women's vulnerability was the first challenge against the revisionists' argument concerning "willingness." The details about food shortages and heavy comfort station surveillance countered the revisionists' denial of the Japanese government involvement. Finally, the testimonies' emphasis on "no payment" made these women "sexual slaves," not "prostitutes."

Huang ends her testimony with a demand: an apology from the Japanese government. Her ending encapsulates the feelings held in nearly all the Korean and Chinese comfort women's testimonies. Chen Yabian demanded "an apology and compensation from the Japanese,"[147] Lin Yajin demanded "the Japanese government [...] admit the atrocities it committed and compensate me before I die,"[148] Hwang

146 Yoshimi Yoshiaki, *Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery in the Japanese Military During World War II* , Trans. Suzanne O'Brien (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 1–4.
147 Qiu, *Chinese Comfort Women*, 154.
148 Qiu, *Chinese Comfort Women*,161.

Keum-Ju demanded "Japan show true repentance and act accordingly,"[149] and Moon Pil-Gi demanded "clear apologies and compensation from the Japanese government."[150]

The Korean testimonies were recorded twenty years before those of the Chinese victims. Yet, these women offered the same two demands: proper, sincere apology and compensation. These explicit demands also turned these testimonies from an autobiographical account of victims' lives into argumentative essays or petitions addressed to the Japanese government. On the one hand, such conformity may reveal a consensus that was reached among these victims to prompt Japan to redress their demands. On the other hand, it may suggest the intermediary agencies also had a similar objective for the comfort women's stories.[151] Such demands made the comfort women a continuing, unsolved debate, a problem that these intermediary agencies had to continue to protest and fight against. Ironically, although these comfort women demanded compensation, many still "chose" to reject compensation when offered.

In May 2020, a survivor named Lee Yong-Soo came forward as a whistleblower to expose the Korean Council, who coerced them not to take compensation from Japan. The agency forced her to travel around the world making speeches, retelling her testimony, even when Lee felt uncomfortable doing so. An official investigation later found that the leader of the Korean Council, Yoon Mee-

Nanum Jip/House of Sharing [3]

149 Qiu, *Chinese Comfort Women*, 10.
150 Schellstede, *Comfort Women Speak*, 67.
151 Like the Korean Council interviewers, Washington Coalition for Comfort women interviewers, or the Shanghai Normal University's interviewers (Su and Chen), all directly handled comfort women's grievances to Japan.

Hyang, had embezzled public funds and private donations for personal use.[152] In China's case, as mentioned, Su also rejected Japan's wish to pay these women, upon the women's requests. Even though they suffered with chronic pain and depression, and lived on minimal support from their governments, and even when these women explicitly announced their desire to receive compensation, they, through the mouths of their representatives, suddenly declined and seemed even to "denounce" these payments. According to Su, these victims considered such payments to be a half-hearted, insincere apology.

In this section, I illustrated how comfort women's testimonies had anti-colonial, anti-Japanese sentiments, nationalistic subtexts, and mission-directed inclinations. These commonalities aligned with Korean and Chinese political environments and their efforts to link their colonial past and Japan's war crimes to Japan's present actions. It also aligned with the nationalistic inclinations of the intermediary agencies who conducted these interviews. Though not to negate or question the validity of their claims, these testimonies still reveal that comfort women's stories could have been trimmed. Rural women's lack of social agency continued to shape their experience after the war and after the comfort women system ended. Even when the opportunity arose for these women to narrate their individual experiences, the political environment, nonprofit organizations, and the directed "self-other" dichotomy and curated war memories influenced and perhaps even directed their voices toward their distinctive agendas. Hence, these women's agency became compromised and their stories altered to suit political, mission-directed purposes.

Comfort Women's Personal Voices—Grievances on Public Shaming

Although influenced by political, feminist, and nonprofit institutions and their agendas, I believe these women, by personally telling their stories, did express their distinct feelings and reveal their unique experiences. Beyond the political and feminist subtexts, these women demonstrated their own agencies through exposing the victimization, discrimination, and objectification they experienced during the war and throughout the post-war era. In their stories, they controlled their narration, created their desired representations, and, most importantly, became active players in forming personal histories for comfort women.

After the war ended, the comfort women's identity was a severe public stigma. Huang Youliang's and Moon Ok-Ju's testimonies on their post-war lives reveal that these women challenged the conventional narrow study on the comfort women by stressing the unique horror of their wartime suffering. Additionally, these testimonies illustrate how their communities, and sometimes even their families, were prejudiced against them for being victimized. Job discrimination, verbal and physical abuse, and social isolation filled their post-war lives with unwavering misery.

After describing her comfort woman experience, Huang Youliang described her post-war experiences in three short paragraphs. Her father and a neighbor held a fake funeral to save her from her enslavement. To elude the soldiers' probable searches, Huang and her father left their village and became beggars. When they eventually returned to their village, Huang's past became widely known. She said:

> *Since everyone in the village knew that I had been ravaged by the Japanese troops, no man in good health or of good family wanted to marry me. I had no choice but to marry a man who had leprosy. My husband knew about my past and used it as an excuse to beat and curse me for no reason other than that he was unhappy.*[153]

Here, Huang tells us that her past as a comfort woman made her unmarriable material, because her body had been violated by the enemy. She had to marry a sick, abusive man whom she clearly had little love for. During the Cultural Revolution, her friends and neighbors targeted her as a traitor who supposedly "served" the Japanese soldiers. The village children also cursed her due to her awful past. The government denied both her husband's and children's applications for the Party or local leadership roles. Even today, 50 years after her abuse, Huang revealed that even her own children would "sometimes swear at [her]" because of her past.[154]

In these few sentences, Huang reveals the sheer amount of objectification and discrimination she endured

152 Hyonhee Shin, Josh Smith, "South Korea charges former 'comfort women' activist with fraud, embezzlement," *Reuters*, September 14, 2020. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-southkorea-comfortwomen/south-korea-charges-former-comfort-women-activist-with-fraud-embezzlement-idUSKBN2651GB.
153 Qiu, *Chinese Comfort Women*, 148.
154 Qiu, *Chinese Comfort Women*,147–151.

during the post-war era. First, her suffering did not end with the war; she was shunned by her village, who repeatedly reminded her that her dignity was irrevocably ruined. Huang was still denied control over her own body and life during her post-comfort woman life: she reported that she "had to marry" her husband. More importantly, although we cannot be certain if Huang's past as a comfort woman was the sole cause of her post-war suffering, Huang herself seemed to have already linked her past to her present struggles. She seemed to accept the public's opinion that her past was shameful and that her body was too damaged to qualify her for a "good" marriage. Like in Zhou Fengying's testimony, this intersection between the past comfort women experience and the present marginalization in Huang's recount was a somewhat "newly produced" memory. Particularly, the grave emotional and psychological toll in Huang's words spoke both to her miserable enslavement and her family and community's decades-long antagonism towards her.

Second, the public reduced her identity to one generic label—comfort woman. Huang's personal struggle, poverty, and suffering did not temper their prejudice. The mere fact that Huang slept with many Japanese men seems to have stigmatized her with an inexcusable sin. In the end, Huang's story did not surface until the 2000s, primarily because the public refused to listen to her story with compassion for half a century. Third, because of her "sin," Huang, in the public's mind, deserved all the ill treatment she received. Whether it was her government, family, or a random stranger in her village, anyone could abuse and insult her with impunity. The public actually punished Huang for her enslavement and shamed her to stay silently in the shadow of her past.

Moon Ok-Ju, like Huang, devoted a small portion of her testimony to delineating her post-war struggles. Moon told us that she was de facto liberated in 1945 after Japan's surrender and the arrival of Allied troops. She, along with other Korean comfort women, was sent back to Korea. Moon did not mention her family or anyone per se in describing her post-war life.

> *I stayed home for a while and thought about my future. I had no formal education, no experience in anything, and also I was beyond a marriageable age. I had to find something to support myself. Those days, women working in bars were looked down upon as low-class and dancers were considered high-class prostitutes. So I became a "kisaeng," similar to a geisha, who, in general, was treated better. I earned a living by entertaining customers in better restaurants or in private houses.*[155]

She did everything on her own. After staying home for a while after the war, Moon had to "become a kisaeng (a courtesan providing entertainment to upper class men, often a euphemism for prostitution)" because her comfort women past left her with no alternative. Living in extreme destitution, Moon complained that she had "pains all over [her] limbs…making even simple walking a difficult task." She ends her testimony claiming she has foreseen her fate, a fate in which "[I] am all alone." Moon died two years after her interview.[156]

Although never explicitly discussing her ill treatment, Moon still managed to reveal her struggles and agony with her words. First, Moon had a home to which she returned after the war, but she did not stay there long, possibly due to discrimination. Even without a skill or prospect for employment, Moon still had to leave her family home and find a means to support herself. Even though it was her choice to become a kisaeng, she had little choice but to accept the offer, because "she had to find something to support [herself]." Like Huang, the life choices that Moon made during the post-war era were fundamentally out of her control. Not only did she lack social power, comfort women like Moon were ultimately denied control over their own lives. Consequently, Moon lived in an apartment subsidized by the government. Her destitution is a common phenomenon among comfort women survivors from all countries. Most of them have no income source and have to depend on their families or government support, remaining mired in poverty.

In her post-war job as a kisaeng, her primary role was to serve a male client's pleasure. Her job still made her dependent on the "desires" of men. In a way, after her enslavement, Moon was forced to take on a lifestyle similar to those of her comfort woman days. This continuation not only demonstrates comfort women's post-war struggle, but also complicates the clear "self-other" dichotomy — with the Korean identity being the only credentialed "self." Also, decolonization did not happen overnight. The residues of colonial effects continued after the war ended. Moon and other comfort women's post-war continued poverty could be interpreted as Japan's colonial remnants

155 Schellstede, *Comfort Women Speak*, 59.
156 Schellstede, *Comfort Women Speak*, 53–61.

in these postcolonial societies. As early as the 1950s, the Korean government worked with the U.S. military stationed in South Korea to form the sex industry around the military bases, establishing camptown prostitution. President Park Chung Hee legalized prostitution in Korea as a way to justify camptown prostitution. Wianbu, like ianfu (comfort woman in Japanese), was a euphemism used for Korean women serving in such towns. By the 1970s, industries often used prostitution to please foreign investors, especially businessmen from Japan. Caroline Norma's study even suggested direct collaborations between the governments of Japan and Korea in facilitating prostitution, and Japan supported the development of prostitution facilities on Cheju, a South Korean island.[157]

Moon lived in complete social isolation during the post-war era. Throughout her testimony focused on her comfort woman life, Moon consistently used "we" when describing the situations she had experienced. For instance, in her narration, she says that comfort woman life was difficult because "we were not fed well there, and so we were always hungry." By using "we," she makes her comfort woman life a shared experience that other victims also endured. However, her language completely changes when she recounts her current life. She uses "I," with no mention of accompaniment by relatives, friends, or even neighbors. Moon indicates that she was not surprised by her current isolation because she had long fearfully anticipated this fate. As in Huang's experience, the public shaming had made Moon believe she had committed an inexcusable sin that would always keep her from attaining normality.

Huang's and Moon's descriptions of their post-war struggles and destitution are not unique: the other comfort women also reported living in poverty, enduring abuse, and being ostracized by their communities.[158] Countering the conventional comfort woman image, these testimonies proved that the public deliberately marginalized these women. In the eyes of the public, they were emblems of shame and an inferior past that China and Korea wanted to forget. A comfort woman's unchaste, violated body made her the antithesis of the transitional feminine ideal,[159] making them also the victims of their societies' shame surrounding female sexuality. This shame was constantly reinforced and repeated via the widespread social discrimination victims experienced after the war.

Comfort Women's Personal Voices—Deeply Rooted Personal Shame

After they were liberated from stations, many comfort women faced decades of public shaming, social exclusion, and even physical abuse. These women's decisions to detail their struggles in their narrations reflect how they linked their post-war pain to their identity as comfort women. The public shaming repeatedly negated these women's victimization, turning the comfort women themselves into culprits for their suffering. Unsurprisingly, past traumas combined with present public castigations resulted in the prevalence of a self-deprecating attitude in many of the testimonies. Yin Yulin's testimony, for example, shows that victims developed a strong sense of shame about their pasts and deemed their lives failures. By confessing their shame and pain, they challenged the assumed positive benefits of these interviews, revealing the underlying brutality and senseless nature with the act of "revisiting" the crime.

Yin Yulin begins her story by describing her predraft life. She tells us that she married a man when she was fifteen and he died from typhoid four years later. On the very day of her husband's death, the soldiers invaded her village. They caught her when she was "in great grief for [her] husband [...] and too weak to resist them." After

157 Caroline Norma, "Demand from Abroad: Japanese Involvement in the 1970s' Development of South Korea's Sex Industry," in *The Journal of Korean Studies* (1979) 19, no. 2 (2014): 399–428. http://www.jstor.org/stable/43923277.

158 Kim Haksun's husband abused her because of her comfort woman identity. Other women hid their comfort women identities as a secret because of the destructive potential. For more information, see Angella Son, "Inadequate Innocence of Korean Comfort Girls-Women: Obliterated Dignity and Shamed Self," Springer Since, New York, 2017.

159 Another important element in the study of comfort women is that nonprofit organizations outside of Korea usually worked with a specific agenda too. For example, most explicit support from American senators were efforts to win votes from their Korean American communities. Feminist organizations, like those in Japan, used Korean comfort women testimonies to prove a lineage of patriarchal aggression existed, while avoiding the voices of comfort women. For nonprofit organizations like the United Nations, comfort women testimonies were debased into proving the subject matter as a violation of human rights. Again, victims' individualism, their consciousness, and their experiences were never the center of the discussion.

the invasion, the soldiers stationed on a nearby mountain frequently came down to "rape [her] at [her] home." Yin records how her body "was always trembling with fear" because she had no place to hide. Although water was precious in her village as it needed to be carried from afar, Yin would still wash herself repeatedly after each rape because she felt her "body was very dirty."[160]

After a while, the soldiers took Yin away from her home to a blockhouse on the mountain itself, where an officer and his soldiers gang raped Yin. He "rose from the bed and returned repeatedly, torturing [her] almost the entire night." From that traumatic night, Yin "suffered from an incurable trembling." She shakes uncontrollably "every time [she] is nervous [...] and would feel tremendous pain in [her] heart" whenever she shares her trauma. The rapes continued for two years, and by then Yin had become so sick that she "suffered from constant dizziness and body aches as well as from a menstrual disorder." Yin believed that her "comfort woman" status scared off every man in her village, so she chose to marry a man from afar. This distant marriage ended her enslavement. Her husband respected her and "took on several hard jobs simultaneously for many years to earn money," to help improve Yin's health. However, even after the war ended, Yin lamented the continuation of her misery. Her uterine damage left her with a "filthy reddish discharge," which made her lower body "hurt constantly and [...] every movement difficult." The physical pain was combined with "acute psychological problems" whenever she had her night terrors in which she recalled "these unspeakable things." Yin ends her story by stating her commitment to revealing the Japanese army's evilness and demanding an official apology from Japan.[161]

Yin's testimony does not just re-narrate her past. More importantly, it unveils how her traumatic past has impacted her life, leaving permanent scars and mental imprints. First, Yin explicitly expresses her grave shame concerning her enslavement. In her mind, her sexual abuse corrupted her self-worth, making her dirty. Even fifty years later, Yin still reiterated that she compulsively washed her body every time she was violated. Moreover, similar to Huang Youliang, Yin presumed that her comfort woman past made her an unwanted, unsuitable woman for any local man, forcing her to marry far from home. As discussed, both Korean and Chinese rural women had long been immersed in an "ideal of chastity" tradition that considered women's sexual purity to be the universal feminine goal. Thus, comfort women failed to fulfill a woman's designated duty by failing to protect their purity. Therefore, Yin's shame probably arose from her sense of failure in protecting her sacred chastity. Even before the public began to shame her, Yin had already sentenced herself to a life as someone for whom it would be "impossible to find a man to marry."[162]

Second, her shame existed alongside her physical and psychological pain. The torture she endured left Yin with uncontrollable trembling, chronic pain, and night terrors, all of which constantly pulled her back to her traumatic past, a past she labeled "unspeakable."[163] Her memories burdened and tortured her. Just as with her other tangible pains, memories served as a constant reminder that she had failed in her feminine duties and become damaged goods. Andby including her pain and her memories in her testimony, Yin challenged the conventional view: she bluntly told us that even the process of extracting comfort women's stories was arguably brutal by nature. It forced Yin to recall moments when she lost her self-worth and dignity. It worsened her psychological state, triggering her intense fear and uncontrollable trembling. Consequently, the interview processes forced comfort women to relive the origins of their shame once again.

Comfort Women's Personal Voices—Private Trauma and Collective Agency

The primary component of comfort women's experience is trauma. The imprisonments, physical abuses, and rapes all had profound impacts on these women's physical and mental health. Building upon previous scholarship, I examined a previously unexplored topic: comfort women's self-agency. The women's testimonies, then, personalized these traumas, stressing each woman's individuality. Kim Soon-Duk's testimony attests that through the constant incorporation of their emotional responses toward their trau-

160 Qiu, *Chinese Comfort Women*, 135–140.
161 Qiu, *Chinese Comfort Women*, 135–140.
162 Qiu, *Chinese Comfort Women*, 138.
163 A common adjective employed by comfort women to label their memory, for example Kim Yoon-Shim, Zhu Qiaomei.

mas and by the conscious omission of certain parts of their experiences, the comfort women's testimonies allowed the victims to individualize their pain, revealing their distinctive struggles in dealing with their enslavement. These stories, I argue, created a platform for these women to take on the burden of representation for the other thousands of unheard comfort women by situating themselves against the colonial past as active players who navigated and resisted the political and social forces they faced.

Kim Soon-Duk begins her story with an introduction. She was then seventy-three years old, living in the House of Sharing in Seoul.[164] She was born and raised in Dai-in Myon, near Jinju city. When she was sixteen years old, local Japanese officials posted a notice of the mandatory draft of all Korean women who were fifteen and above to work overseas as nurses. Kim's mother told Kim to hide from the draft at Kim's sister's house, but Kim believed her mother "was needed at home more than [she] was." She decided to go. The army sent Kim and fifty other Korean girls to Nagasaki and housed them at an inn. Each night, a group of "virgin girls" would be forced to have sex with military officers. One night, Kim was also sent, and the Japanese officer persuaded her that "every young girl experiences sex in her lifetime, [and] that [she] might as well do it now".[165] Kim omitted the details of that night. The next morning, Kim confronted the manager about her and others' experiences, but the manager told her that sex with local authority was necessary for them to secure a job position. After a week, the army shipped the same 50 girls to Shanghai and checked them into a comfort station—"We were sex slaves in it," Kim concludes.[166]

They were taken to a military hospital where Kim saw hundreds of Korean girls. Kim told us that she became ill soon after her enslavement, "bleed[ing] severely through [her] vagina." Her manager gave her some black powder that reduced the bleeding. Because her comfort station was close to the battlefront, Kim saw so many corpses that she "even dream[s] of it to this day." After talking about seeing death, Kim devotes an entire paragraph to her thoughts of suicide. "Somehow I could not do it. I had poor health. I was still bleeding [...] I still had nightmares." Eventually, Kim "became acquainted with a middle-aged man" named Izumi who was kind to her and allowed her to stay in his room. Kim even had the leisure to study Japanese. Kim confided to Izumi about her suicidal thoughts, and he helped her obtain travel papers to return home. Their relationship continued after she was back in Korea, and they exchanged gifts and letters. Izumi's letters stopped coming after the war. Kim says she owes Izumi a lot for his help.[167]

Kim then encapsulates her post-war life with three things: she lost all of her family, she had to work different jobs to support herself, and she developed a relationship with a man but remained unmarried, because she "knew" with her comfort woman background she could "never [get] legally married." She still had nightmares and they became worse when "remembering the past at these interviews." Kim ends her testimony by demanding that the Japanese government compensate all comfort women and also publicize their crimes, and that the Korean government apply more effort toward advocating for them.[168]

On its surface, Kim Soon-Duk's testimony delivers the same anti-colonial, anti-Japanese sentiments as other testimonies, emphasizing the same nationalistic inclinations, and ends with the same universal demands as the others. However, if we examine the specific plot and language choices within Kim's testimony, we are able to extract the individual story of a rural woman. First, she counters the conventional powerless, passive image of comfort woman and makes herself an active player who strategically navigates the surrounding environment. In the beginning, Kim tells us that she made the choice to answer the draft and travel overseas (believing she would become a nurse). Kim defied her mother's orders, knowing that her mother "was needed at home more than [she] was."[169]

Beyond demonstrating the trickery of the Japanese government, Kim reveals that poor rural Koreans like her mother dared to resist Japanese orders, and that poor, marginalized girls like Kim were courageous enough to migrate overseas. Also, Kim's final decision speaks to three things: her ability to make an independent decision against her parents' will, her calculated intellect to minimize the draft's damage to her family, and her selfless familial love that enabled her to sacrifice herself for her family. Later, the second day after her initial rape, Kim tells us that she confronted

164 Founded by Korean Council, Buddhist organization, and other foundations.
165 Schellstede, *Comfort Women Speak*, 38.
166 Schellstede, *Comfort Women Speak*, 37–38.
167 Schellstede, *Comfort Women Speak*, 38–40.
168 Schellstede, *Comfort Women Speak*, 41.
169 Schellstede, *Comfort Women Speak*, 38.

her manager on behalf of herself and others about their draft's deceptive description. This detail, again, illustrates that Kim did not passively tolerate her violation; instead, she directly challenged a male authority figure and voiced her grievances.

Moreover, liberation from her enslavement was the result of her active expressions of grievances to officer Izumi. Her liberation ultimately depended upon Izumi, but it would not have been secured if she had not expressed her desires. Her actions reveal that comfort women should not be defined as passive victims who accepted their fates, but rather as active agents who fought for their freedom. Other comfort women also recorded their repeated attempts to escape from their enslavement, despite the risk of severe punishments.

For Kim, in contrast to other testimonies, a Japanese soldier was the key person to release her from enslavement. Kim tells us twice that "Izumi is a kind person."[170] After meeting Izumi, Kim's living conditions improved enough to enable her to even learn Japanese as a leisure activity. He was able to respond to her demands by liberating her from her life as a comfort woman. Their attachment was strong enough to withstand both distance and time. Kim reports that they maintained communication throughout the war, and she even "sent him a number of gifts, including a Senninbari, a Japanese good luck belt."[171] Senninbari, or a thousand stitch belt, is usually made by the family of the soldier in hope of them avoiding all harms during combat. Kim explicitly claims that she "owe[d] him a lot."[172] Her decision to discuss their relationship suggests that she tried to individualize her testimony, to have it function as something beyond a simple victim's tale. Her story countered or at least complicated the normative "self-other" dichotomy consistently presented when discussing comfort women. It shows that sometimes intimacy and even "kindness" were intermingled with the violence. Whether we should define their relationship as romantic is not the point. Rather, these "abnormal" subplots within Kim's story reflect her agency: she was no longer a faceless, generic victim. Kim's narration made her a three-dimensional person with ambitions and dreams.

Despite the potential of external influences tainting their testimonies, Kim, like other comfort women survivors, was put in charge of constructing a story that revolved solely around her own life. She picked particular stories and information to be included in her testimony while omitting others. These choices reflect how her unique traumas affected her psyche. For instance, Kim omitted details of the initial rape and disclosed few personal details of her comfort women's experiences. Obviously, such omissions might be the result of memory loss, given that her testimony was based upon recollections of events from a half a century ago. Her omissions may also suggest her reluctance to retell the details of these traumatic experiences. Just as Yin Yulin expressed, it could be tremendously painful for these victims to even think about the past, the violations, and the moments of their absolute vulnerability. In a way, giving testimony forced them to relive their unimaginable sufferings again, and Kim may have simply refused to continue linking herself to these pains. The acts of selection and omission in these testimonies are a form of power, and by omitting, Kim avoided disclosing pieces of her privacy and dignity that were robbed from her decades ago. Through these unspoken words, Kim retained control of her self-representation.

Instead of specific anecdotes, Kim spends a paragraph describing her suicidal thoughts during her time as a comfort woman. Even without anecdotes, powerful phrases like "I frequently thought of killing myself" and "I thought of jumping from a high place" convey her despair and speak to the extent of the brutality, objectification, and suffering she endured during her enslavement.[173] If we consider that a woman committing suicide to protect her chastity was regarded as a courageous response to potential violation and virtue in the traditional feminine dialectic texts, it is quite possible that Kim included her suicidal thoughts as a way to align herself with this cultural standard. As she mentioned, her past made her "unmarriable," and her post-war struggles certainly illustrated her continued marginalization by society. Therefore, if her "violated body" was her original sin in her society's eyes, she may have included her suicidal thoughts to elevate herself: she, as any other chaste woman, thought about suicide when faced with violation. The fact that Kim thinks of suicide reflects her agency—her ability to control her life. Moreover, even though she lived in such a vulnerable societal position, Kim persevered and survived. She was brave

170 Schellstede, *Comfort Women Speak*, 40-41.
171 Schellstede, *Comfort Women Speak*, 40.
172 Schellstede, *Comfort Women Speak*, 40.
173 Schellstede, *Comfort Women Speak*, 39.

enough to tell her story and even make demands of governments. Her despair is juxtaposed with her assertive, present self, demonstrating her growing self-care in her life. Kim's testimony does not embody mere victimhood; it records the struggle and transformation of a woman.

Kim did not just record her life but tried to embody a common social and cultural context, a shared struggle of hundreds of thousands of comfort women for justice and agency. Besides both her pre- and post-war struggles, her entire testimony alternated between "I" and "we" to represent the subject in the testimony. For example, it is "we" who boarded a ship to Shanghai. It is "we" who became sex slaves in the comfort station. When Kim's interview was conducted, less than two hundred comfort women around Asia had come forward. There were women who died at comfort stations, women who committed suicide after the war, and women who continued to hide in the shadows who did not or could not have the chance to share their story. By using "we" as a pronoun, Kim was consciously transforming her comfort woman experiences into the collective experience of comfort women. Together, they were transported by the army, placed in comfort stations, and raped and enslaved. They share this collective yet private traumatic memory. Although Kim could not generalize her experience completely, she still took on the burden of representation to elucidate to the public what it was like to be a comfort woman.

CONCLUSION

COMFORT WOMEN TESTIMONIES provided an opportunity for people to hear the life-long struggles, marginalization, and pain that more than two-hundred-thousand East Asian women endured. Most were poor, illiterate, rural women who had little social agency. Their poverty, fear of male authority, and low status in their familial hierarchies made them vulnerable to exploitation by the Japanese army. All of these vulnerabilities were compounded by the weak local opposition against recruitment of comfort women and the establishment of the stations. The same vulnerabilities continued to shape these rural women's experiences long after the war was over and the comfort women system ended. Their local communities, their families, and even their governments discriminated against these women, considering them the mere residue of their country's humiliating colonial past. Suffering from both public shame and their own personal traumas, the surviving comfort women endured shame and poverty and were marginalized, unable to freely tell their stories.

When Korea underwent a period of democratization in 1987, civic activists and nonprofit organizations finally began to talk about comfort women. With the help of the Korean Council, the former Korean comfort woman Kim Hak-Soon filed a lawsuit against the Japanese government in 1991 after nearly five decades of silence. The trial, however, immediately ignited a debate about whether comfort women were prostitutes or sex slaves, which shifted both public and scholarly focus away from the individual victims' lives and toward the international power struggles among China, Korea, and Japan. During this contested debate, nineteen Korean women and twelve Chinese women narrated their stories. Their stories contained the duality of being both politicized propaganda used to galvanize nationalism and incite antagonism, and the personal histories of these comfort women and their distinct struggles.

With regard to politicalized propaganda, most testimonies possessed a strong sense of anti-colonial, anti-Japanese sentiment. Their contents stressed the clear "self-other" dichotomy between their home country and Japan. During this political period, both the Korean and Chinese governments launched historical projects to reinforce certain depictions of their national colonial past and Japan's war crimes. It is probable that these women mixed their personal frustrations with the popular national discourse. Their testimonies became evidence that Japan, the vicious other, invaded and ravaged their homeland. Such anti-colonial, anti-Japanese sentiment went hand in hand with a common nationalistic subtext. These women often stressed the nationality of other comfort women and almost exclusively spoke of women who came from their own country. Given the nationalistic inclinations of their interviewers, it is possible that they edited the victims' stories. However, while these women professed their nationalism, they also expressed their bitterness toward their governments and their societies' inaction toward the comfort women.

Beyond political inclinations, these comfort women's testimonies also possessed a feminist subtext. They often emphasized their innocence and powerlessness when facing soldiers. In a way, this information allowed

feminist organizations to exploit comfort women as evidence of East Asia's historical patriarchal transgressions. Almost all testimonies used their ending paragraph to make two specific demands upon the Japanese government: a proper apology and monetary compensation. Given that these intermediary agencies used their testimonies as evidence in trials and in international forums, these endings transformed these testimonies into mission-directed petitions—depersonalizing the comfort women's voices. Comfort women's stories, therefore, were appropriated by political, feminist, and nonprofit institutions to support their own specific agendas.

The fact that these comfort women themselves retold their stories demonstrates their agency, even if the stories were potentially compromised when such agency was interwoven within the political, economic, and cultural environments of China and Korea. First, these women describe their post-war experiences of discrimination and objectification as comfort women. Through either implicit or explicit descriptions, they reveal to their audiences that their liberation did not come with the end of their enslavement. They continued to face discrimination, insults, and often physical abuse from their community and their families. They were forced to recognize that their specific victimhood also made them fellow culprits within their traumas. This revelation shatters the conventional view that comfort women were guilty of a unique crime, and instead shows it as linked to a general, historical pattern of gender inequality that existed in society.

Due to decades of discrimination, these women also associated their past with both shame and humiliation. Their testimonies lamented their broken lives and damaged bodies, revealing how they evaluated their lives with self-deprecating views. Third, beyond their feelings of shame, the testimonies illuminated each comfort woman's individual trauma. By incorporating what they saw and felt and by selecting the particular details that they wanted to include, these comfort women highlighted their active agency in navigating their difficult lives and noted their personal growth after their trauma. Powerfully shaped by both platforms, the testimonies record and disseminate victims' stories, delineating the specific parameters for each woman's experience of her traumas. The comfort women's stories and their afterlives teach us that history cannot be overlooked. It inevitably bleeds into the present.

They did act. They did speak.

Now, it's time for us to listen. ◆

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