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Comfort women: The unrelenting oppression during and after WWII

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Comfort Women: The Unrelenting Oppression During and After World War II

An Honors College Project Presented to
the Faculty of the Undergraduate
College of Arts and Letters
James Madison University

by Alexandra Joanna Riddell

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Accepted by the faculty of the Department of History, James Madison University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Honors College.

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Contents

1. Introduction	2
2. Budding Conflict	5
3. Suppression and Silence	10
4. Freedom from Secrets	15
5. Heated Conflict	46
6. Conclusion	62
 Bibliography	 64

Introduction

Betrayed, kidnapped, tortured, raped, silenced, oppressed. Whether it be little girls, teenagers, or young women, few girls were able to fully able to escape the possibility of these detrimental acts happening to them. The Japanese who facilitated the overall exploitation gave the women the titles of “ianfu 慰安婦” or “comfort women¹” so that their torture seemed to have a real purpose to other countries and so the girls seemed of more consenting age. World War II brought about the gruesome actions of the Japanese that left over 200,000 Korean women and many more of other nationalities-- emotionally and physically-- in pain. The wound was so deep that it would keep the comfort women from sharing their stories until fifty years after the end of the war. It is at that point that comfort women gathered the courage and came forward to reveal their stories to the public in the early 1990s. Japan, then, issued a sub-par apology in 1995 and attempted to come up with a way to compensate the comfort women but many politicians and scholars still deny or excuse most of the things that the soldiers did to the women. The fight over recognition of the grievances committed against comfort women continues into the twenty-first century. Between the disagreements over statues and what is written in the history textbooks, neither side can agree on one way to completely fix the relationship of the countries and the comfort women. While the physical torture of the comfort women ended after the war, the conflict between the Japanese and the comfort women continues to be heated on both sides with little end in sight.²

¹ For the purposes of this paper, I will refer to the women as “comfort women” because that is the more accepted term in the news and around the world.

² For information on comfort women, their experiences, and their oppression read "Number of Comfort Stations and Comfort Women," Digital Museum: The Comfort Women Issue and the Asian Women's Fund, <http://www.awf.or.jp/index.html>. *The Comfort Women: Colonialism, War, and Sex*, vol. 4, bk. 1, Positions East Asia Cultures Critiques (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997). George Hicks, *The Comfort Women: Japan's Brutal Regime of Enforced Prostitution in the Second World War* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995). Yoshimi Yoshiaki, *Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery in the Japanese Military during World War II*, trans. Suzanne O'Brien (New York:

Japan has a special history of prostitution as a profession. The state often ran and sponsored prostitution centers called “pleasure quarters.” Laws created by the Japanese government provided hospitals specifically for prostitutes and modeled their system after European systems of prostitution.³ These pleasure quarters were similar to comfort stations in concept but they were usable by both civilians and servicemen. Comfort stations were buildings that proprietors established to supply women to service men, usually near the battlefields. Comfort stations have a longer history in the Japanese system than just the years of World War II. Documents reveal that there was a Japanese run brothel for the army set up in 1932 almost a decade before the WWII comfort stations were created. By 1937, the system developed into a series of brothels for army soldiers which would later be called comfort stations. As of September 1942, there were four hundred comfort stations spread across Asia.⁴

The stations served many purposes. Most of these reasons were strategic with little concern for the comfort women. The first reason stems from the attacks on civilians by soldiers. After the Nanjing Massacre in 1937, where tens of thousands of Chinese women were raped and hundreds of thousands civilians were murdered, the Japanese government realized that they needed an

Columbia University Press, 2000). "Japanese Army's Comfort Woman," House of Sharing, <http://www.nanum.org/eng/>. Watanabe Kazuko, "Militarism, Colonialism, and the Trafficking of Women: 'Comfort Women' Forced into Sexual Labor for Japanese Soldiers," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 26, no. 4 (1994). Watanabe Kazuko, "Trafficking in Women's Bodies, Then and Now: The Issue of Military 'Comfort Women,'" *Women's Studies Quarterly* 27, no. 1/2 (1999): <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40003395>. Pyong Gap Min, "Korean 'Comfort Women': The Intersection of Colonial Power, Gender, and Class," *Gender and Society* 17, no. 6 (December 2003): <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3594678>. To read more on comfort women that are still living see "News about Comfort Women Living in the House of Sharing," House of Sharing, <http://www.nanum.org/eng/>. To see more about the relations between Korea and Japan read "1940-1945," in *Historical Atlas of Northeast Asia, 1590-2010: Korea, Manchuria, Mongolia, Eastern Siberia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014). Chunghee Sarah Soh, "From Imperial Gifts to Sex Slaves: Theorizing Symbolic Representations of the 'Comfort Women,'" *Social Science Japan Journal* 4, no. 1 (April 2000): JSTOR. Michael Seth, *A History of Korea: From Antiquity to the Present* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), 205-216, digital file.

³ Chunghee Soh, *The Comfort Women: Sexual Violence and Postcolonial Memory in Korea and Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008) 111.

⁴ Soh, *The comfort women*, 132-137.

efficient system so that this mass-rape would be prevented. It was, correctly, believed that if the soldiers continued to rape civilians then the civilians would have a hatred for their new occupational government. Consequently, in 1942, a law was created and revised to prevent the rape of civilians. It was called the Japanese Imperial Army Criminal Law (Article 86, Clause 2). The law made it so that if a member of the army committed rape they would be charged with jail time as to prevent disgrace falling on the Japanese government.⁵ The second reason is the Japanese government believed that it would be healthy for the men to have a sexual release and to do that they needed comfort women. The soldiers participated in the army without a set period of service, so it was unknown when they could return to their girlfriends or wives. The next justification for comfort stations was the prevention of venereal disease or VD. If the spread of VD among the soldiers continued, then it could spread to the general Japanese population. To punish soldiers, if the soldiers were found to have VD, then they were demoted two ranks in the military which lessened the number of men that were skilled in the high positions and put those men in with the less experienced men.⁶ Lastly, they averted others running the comfort stations prohibiting spies to take over and release secrets about the army. The Japanese government created comfort stations solely to further their own position. The happiness and health of soldiers would keep them fighting for the government's cause. Comfort stations were not supposed to be good for the women, only the government and its soldiers.

⁵ Yuki Tanaka, *Japan's Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery and Prostitution During WWII and the US Occupation* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 29.

⁶ Tanaka, *Japan's comfort women*, 29.

Budding Conflict

The conflicts between Japan and Korea escalated when Japan took over Korea in the first half of the 20th century. From 1894 and 1905, three countries competed for influence over Korea: China, Japan, and Russia. After the Russo-Japanese war in 1904, Japan gained control over Korea, although Korea had little choice. By 1905, Japan extended its powers over Korea by essentially taking control of the government and army but promising that Korea would preserve its independence -- a promise Japan would soon break. Japan closed Korean newspapers, banned books that were anti-Japanese, and disbanded the Korean Army.⁷ The Koreans, in retaliation, led many protests against the actions, including prostitution, of the Japanese. Riots and clashes between the two countries ensued for years which led to Japan taking it a step further and finally annexing Korea in 1910. Japan used Korea for many reasons including land and a base for further expansion of domination of military aspects and economic success in Asia and beyond. In addition to Japan exploiting Korea for food production and land, they used Korea for its women, and this increased after the beginning of WWII.⁸

World War II came a little over twenty years after the end of the first World War and almost thirty years after Japan took control of Korea. Elevated tensions caused by the Great Depression in the 1930s left the economy at a low, and the relationships in and between countries were becoming increasingly turbulent with people craving leaders that they felt could bring improvement. Germany, Italy and Japan became more militaristic and started to turn their sights onto controlling the area around them. Although they already had control of Korea, Japan

⁷ Michael Seth, *A History of Korea: From Antiquity to the Present* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), 205-216, digital file.

⁸ David Brudnoy, "Japan's Experiment in Korea," *Monumenta Nipponica* 25, no. 1/2 (1970): 160, 164, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2383744>.

mobilized and began to take over other Asian countries. Some of these Asian countries had Western imperialists influencing them such as the Philippines and Indonesia (Dutch East Indies). This Western Imperialism further motivated Japan to take the colonies to lessen the power and supplies of the imperialists. Within two years, Japan grew bolder and landed an attack on American soil at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 thus bringing the United States into the war.

The Philippines and Indonesia both had comfort women but, they are usually not the focus of discussion. While eighty percent of comfort women were Korean, there were comfort women from eleven countries. Japanese soldier tended to bring the Korean comfort women to the battlefield in China, but they conquered other countries and used those women as well. The media has chosen to focus most of their attention on Korea comfort women for many possible reasons. In the initial trial in Tokyo in which the comfort issue was introduced, there were more Korean women in attendance. Additionally, the Korean government has taken the fight over from the women whereas in many of the other countries the governments have chosen to remain in the background. Furthermore, all the countries combined only make up twenty percent of the comfort women. Although there were not as high numbers of other comfort women from non-Korean countries, their stories still deserve recognition and they often share commonalities with the Korean ones.

Unlike Japan's long relationship with Korea, the Dutch East Indies and the Philippines remained separate from the control of Japan until World War II. Both groups of islands were previously under the control of countries that would become Allied forces. Japan did not focus on the Dutch East Indies until the Netherlands declared war on Japan in 1941 after Japan's attack

on Pearl Harbor.⁹ Japan began their conquest of the Dutch East Indies, in December of 1941 and, by the end of March 1942, Japan controlled Indonesia. Japan originally wanted to control the oil fields in Indonesia. When they arrived, as was their custom, they began to take women away from their families and use them as comfort women.¹⁰ The army forced people residing in Indonesia into internment camps. Java's internment camps, in October 1943, housed "46,784 women, children, and elderly people."¹¹

After the Spanish-American War, the United States of America turned its sights onto the Philippines and thus began the process of Philippine annexation. In 1899, the Philippine-American War erupted. After three years, the war ended and the Philippines became a territory of the United States. It remained a territory of the United States until after WWII. When the United States declared war on Japan, after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Japan moved to take the Philippines from the United States. Japan started its conquest of the Philippines in December of 1941. Manila came under Japanese control and by the beginning of January, they established a military government. The Filipinos joined together to resist the Japanese. The Japanese army fought back fiercely to try to get rid of the guerrilla groups.¹² The American general, MacArthur, was forced to retreat leading to the surrender at Baatan on April 9, 1942. Thousands upon thousands of American and Philippine soldiers were forced to walk sixty-five miles without food or water. Thousands of these soldiers died.¹³ The Japanese controlled the Philippines until 1945.

⁹ Bart van Poelgeest, *Report of a Study of Dutch Government Documents on the Forced Prostitution of Dutch Women in the Dutch East Indies During the Japanese Occupation*, January 24, 1994, <http://www.awf.or.jp/pdf/0205.pdf>, 3.

¹⁰ Yuki Tanaka, "“Comfort Women” in the Dutch East Indies,” in *Legacies of the Comfort Women of World War II*, ed. Margaret D. Stetz and Bonnie B. C. Oh (Armonk, New York: An East Gate Book, 2001), 42.

¹¹ Tanaka, "Comfort Women", 49.

¹² "Women made to be Comfort Women - Philippines," Digital Museum: The Comfort Women Issue and the Asian Women's Fund, <http://www.awf.or.jp/e1/philippine-00.html>.

¹³ "Baatan Death March," History.com, last modified 2009, <http://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/bataan-death-march>.

Between the guerrilla groups and the American soldiers, they were finally able to free the Manila and the rest of the country on July 4, 1945.”¹⁴ While the Japanese were in control of the Philippines they set up comfort stations throughout. During this time, in Manila, there were twelve comfort stations and private five brothels.¹⁵

As mentioned above, the Japanese frequently sanctioned prostitution when it came to World War II which led to them to endorse the abduction of women to be used as comfort women in comfort stations on the battlefronts during the years of the war. The procedure of utilizing comfort women caused conflict for decades to come. Government officials or people that would be eventually rewarded took the soon-to-be comfort women to the comfort stations. The young women were typically fourteen-year olds and above, but there are stories of falsified documents that allowed children of twelve years of age or younger to be used in the station. The soldiers would arrive, pay the determined fee, take advantage of the women, and often abuse them. It is unknown how many women died from being beaten, raped, or from disease at the station because usually the proprietors took the women away and the living women never saw them again. After the end of World War II, the women were left to their own devices most without any compensation for their time and the emotional, mental, and physical abuse that came with their time in the comfort stations.¹⁶

Comfort women have constantly struggled accept their past and be accepted in the public’s eyes but, once they came forward their stories took the world by storm. With my paper, I will explore the overall narrative of the conflict of comfort women during the decades after the war. In addition, I will use numerous testimonies of former comfort women from Korea,

¹⁴ “Japanese Occupation of the Philippines,” Philippine History, <http://www.philippine-history.org/japanese-occupation.htm>.

¹⁵ Digital Museum, “Women made to be Comfort Women – Philippines.”

¹⁶ Keith Howard, ed., *True Stories of the Korean Comfort Women: Testimonies* (London: Cassell, 1995), 16-17, 21.

Indonesia, and the Philippines to reveal the lives they led while being trapped in a building of torture. The paper will explore why the women remained silent and why the topic of comfort women has been hidden from the public eye until the 1990s. Then, my research will explore the most recent conflicts over the way the different countries look at comfort women. While the topic of Korean comfort women dominates the international discussion and debate, comfort women from the Philippines and the Dutch East Indies share their pain and suffering as well, which is why they are also a focus of this paper.

Suppression and Silence

From the end of World War II until the early 1990s, there was little discussion of comfort women. The women were forced to stay silent and carry the scars of the past inside of them every day by multiple countries and their families. They did not reveal to anyone what they experienced while in the stations and when they did divulge information, many advised them to remain quiet. The environment that the women returned to after the world suppressed and oppressed them. Three countries greatly influenced the silencing and overall suppression of the women and their stories: Japan, United States, and Korea.

Japan's silencing of the comfort women stemmed from the nation's victim mentality, their culture, and their actions. Firstly, the two atomic bombs that were dropped in Japan solidified the loss of Japan in World War II. With the dropping of the bombs, the Japanese felt like they were uniquely victimized instead of recognizing the other victims of the war. They focused on what happened to their country and their loss of around 2.5 million Japanese people instead of the pain they caused any other country and they continued with the "victim mentality" for decades to come.¹⁷ Another reason that they did not apologize for their war crimes was because of their cultural belief in Confucianism. In Confucianism, filial piety is essential to their way of life. By apologizing, the Japanese would be disrespecting the actions of their elders and insinuating that they were wrong.¹⁸ After their defeat, they burned documents that would attribute war crimes to them. They did not want to deal with any more trouble than they already were experiencing.¹⁹ They wished to absolve their sins of the war and create a new reputation—a driving force that would take them into the early twenty-first century.

¹⁷ Andrew Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, 3rd ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 223.

¹⁸ Nicholas D. Kristof, "The Problem of Memory," *Foreign Affairs* 77, no. 6 (November/December 1998): 41, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20049129>.

¹⁹ Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, 225.



Figure 1: American soldiers waiting to visit comfort women. Source: Yuki Tanaka, *Japan's Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery and Prostitution During WWII and the US Occupation* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 138.

In addition to Japan's contribution to the oppression of the women, the United States had an important influence on the comfort women after the end of the war. The influence started with the seven-year American occupation of Japan with all intents and purposes of demilitarizing and democratizing. With the arrival of the America allied forces right after the war in 1945, Japan created and continued to use some of the stations. Although it was recommended that the forces not use the stations, the American officers still did which factored into the hidden stories of the comfort women. After the war, the Japanese government created stations for the Allied soldiers to protect the Japanese women.²⁰ When the Japanese army took control of a new country, the soldiers assaulted the people, especially the women. It is understandable that the Japanese would worry about their women being sexually assaulted by the Allied soldiers. Figure 1 shows United

²⁰ Tanaka, *Japan's comfort women*, 133.

States soldiers outside of a comfort station in Japan. The American soldiers used the comfort women in the same manner explained later in the paper that the Japanese soldiers used them during the war. Additionally, the allied forces persecuted some of the Japanese that committed war crimes, but these trials mostly focused on the Japanese that started the war itself not on the actions of the Japanese during the war. At the end of the trials, the American forces focused their attention on reshaping Japan. The actions of Japan during the war were even farther from America's mind once the Cold War started. At the start of the Cold War, America changed its tactics when dealing with the occupation in Japan. Americans realized that they needed to control the Japanese Communist Party. They scaled back and went onto the "reverse course" which reinstated characteristics of imperial Japan. At the end of the American occupation in 1952, on the same day to be exact, Japan and the United States signed the U.S. - Japan Security Treaty to protect Japan from America's enemies. During the Cold War, the Korean War took away the military forces that would have allowed Americans to occupy Japan longer.²¹ With the American actions and the Cold War, the comfort women had little sympathy and help from Americans. Americans, who were supposed to help bring the people who committed war crimes to justice, did little to provide assistance to some of the people that the war hurt the most. Recently, after extensive research in the United States Archives, scholars found videos of comfort women and mass burial grounds that US soldiers recorded further proving that the United States knew about the comfort women and remained impartial to their treatment.²²²³ The

²¹ Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, 227-232, 237-238.

²² "Rare video footage of 'comfort women' released by South Korea," *The Japan Times*, last modified July 8, 2017, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/07/08/national/history/rare-video-footage-comfort-women-released-south-korea/#.WqXEZCjwY2w>.

²³ Elizabeth Shim, "Footage discovered showing mass grave for wartime 'comfort women,'" UPI, last modified February 27, 2018, <https://www.upi.com/Footage-discovered-showing-mass-grave-for-wartime-comfort-women/5471519745002/>.

United States downplayed and hid information on the comfort women by choosing to focus on other aspects of Japanese punishment.

Lastly, in Korea, both the Korean culture and the Korean War kept the women from telling their stories and joining together. Confucianism was extremely influential on the Korean comfort women. In Korea, Confucianism was a prominent teaching that influenced the way that society functioned. Women, in Confucianism, are seen as inferior to men or sub human people. The women are expected to be chaste and their main purpose is to be desirable to men. Confucianism instills in women the Four Virtues which are rules for the women to follow including sexual morality. Sexual morality and chastity are the two main cultural reasons why the women were silenced by themselves, their families, and society. It is seen as the woman's fault if the men sexually indulge themselves placing the blame of the sexual exploitation on the comfort woman. Confucianism also believes in honoring one's family. The comfort women could dishonor their family if they told anyone about being comfort women. This dishonor could ruin a family's reputation for decades and prevent the women of the family from being able to be married off.²⁴ Another important influence on the comfort women was the Korean War. The Korean War began on June 25, 1950 only a few years after the end of World War II.²⁵ Tensions surrounding the war between the two countries resulted in Korean comfort women from both North and South Korea lacking the ability to share their stories together. Additionally, the war resulted in lost evidence of the Korean comfort women. As one woman testified, her photographs from her days as a comfort woman were burned in an attack of her home in South Korea. The

²⁴ Xiongya Gao, "Women Existing for Men: Confucianism and Social Injustice against Women in China," *Race, Gender & Class* 10, no. 3 (2003): 114-116, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41675091>.

²⁵ Seth, *A History of Korea*, 272.

Korean War created new difficulties for the comfort women to come forward. Between the culture and the Korean War, the women were prevented from sharing their stories.

The three countries kept the women's stories in the dark. Although unlike Japan and Korea, America did not purposefully silence the women. It is difficult to completely separate the influence of the three countries because they were all intertwined. Each country had an influence on one another's policies. The social, political, and cultural environment put the women in a position that they could not share their experiences. Comfort women became silent victims with little chance to free themselves from the bonds of their trauma until decades later.

Freedom from Secrets

The 1990s were essential to the publicity of comfort women stories. These stories had been kept a secret for decades and while the discovery of the comfort women happened in 1972, their stories did not spread until twenty years after that. The 1990s was a time that the women could feel free and less pressured to keep their past hidden from families and from the public. Even with the lessened pressure, the women were met with active deniers and many of the women were accused of lying. The denial and apologies of governments kept the women guessing on whether or not the public would believe their truth.

At first, Comfort women's experiences hit the international news accidentally. The issue of Korean comfort women was brought to light after the investigation by the Korean Forced Draft Investigation Group during 1972. The group's purpose was to investigate the work of the forced laborers during Japanese occupation. Initially, they looked into the unequal pay and treatment of the Koreans compared to the Japanese laborers. Although the group was not focused on comfort women, it managed to shed light on the issue enabling the women's groups to discuss the topic and further their own opinions about current prostitution practices.²⁶ Regretfully, although the groups began to talk about the issue, comfort women did not make the world headlines until another two decades later. With no threat of the world discovering their actions, the Japanese made little effort to combat the growing threat of the comfort women.

At the start of the 1990s, the debate over comfort women grew heated. The Japanese Diet, Japan's Parliament, denied their involvement with the comfort women which resulted in Korean women sending them six demands. These petitions included demanding that Japan admit to the forced draft and requesting a public apology be made, to the Japanese embassy and to the

²⁶ Hicks, *The Comfort Women: Japan's*, 172.

South Korean government.²⁷ In the 1990s and to this day, there are right-wing Japanese activists who deny the accusations, against Japan, that they were responsible for creating comfort women.²⁸ The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), a rightist party in the Diet, has participated in elections since 1955 revealing their influence on the women's lives after their release from the comfort station. Their role in politics carried far into the 1990s and they dominated the Parliament.²⁹ One reason for their denial of the comfort women is that many of the LDP's relatives had been in power around World War II, so out of respect for their family legacies, they refuse to admit that their involvement. Another reason for their denial is their nationalist belief in Japan's superiority and uniqueness. With a group that denies the comfort women in control of the Japanese parliament, little helpful legislation could be passed. These right-wing politicians defend their nation and actively deny accusations which made it even more difficult for the women to get the full recognition and compensation they deserved.

While the Diet denied the women for many reasons, there are also many reasons why the South Korean government did not take interest in the issue, despite pressure from comfort women and later feminist supporters. The South Korean government wanted to avoid antagonizing the Japanese government because of the strategic economic relationship between the two countries. Additionally, it did not want to admit so many of their young women were taken. Another reason is that it did not want to acknowledge the fact that people in their country would abduct young girls to for money. While the South Korean government ignored the plight of the comfort women, the Japanese Embassy, in response to the six demands, stated that it never

²⁷ Hicks, *The Comfort Women: Japan's*, 183-185.

²⁸ Hirofumi Hayashi, "Disputes in Japan over the Japanese Military 'Comfort Women' System and Its Perception in History," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 617 (May 2008): 123-124, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25098017>.

²⁹ Patrick Köllner, "The Liberal Democratic Party at 50: Sources of Dominance and Changes in the Koizumi Era," *Social Science Japan Journal* 9, no. 2 (October 2006): 243, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30209541>.

forced women to become comfort women. The South Korean government refused to let the response of the embassy in Seoul to be public.³⁰ Both governments resisted the conflict and ignored the comfort women.

The refusal by both the Japanese government and the South Korean government to take responsibility led to Kim Hak Sun, the first Korean comfort woman to come forward and testify in court in 1991 declaring herself as a victim.³¹ She was a sixteen-year-old girl who tried to leave the comfort station numerous times. She revealed for the first time the innocence that the soldiers forcibly took from comfort women.³² Her testimony was the first of many to come. As a result of her testimony, during the early 1990s, a few more of the surviving comfort women began to come forward with their stories of the abuse that they endured in the comfort stations. News outlets blasted the stories around the world.³³

In addition to Kim Hak Sun's testimony, other women bravely revealed the stories of how people tricked and transformed the girls into comfort women. In one instance, a Korean, Kim Tökchin seventeen at the time of her abuse, talked with a man who convinced her that she could find good work in a factory in Japan and instead he took her to the comfort station. The false promise of good work, whether it be in a factory or as a nanny, allowing them to support their family brought many women to the stations including fifteen-year-old Yi Yöngsuk, sixteen-year-old Oh Omok, and eighteen-year-old Mun P'ilgi. In different instances, some of the girls experienced kidnapping. Kim Haksun, a seventeen-year-old girl from P'yöngyang in North Korea, went to find work in China with a foster father when soldiers took her and put her in a

³⁰ Hicks, *The Comfort Women: Japan's*, 186.

³¹ Hicks, *The Comfort Women: Japan's*, 193.

³² "Comfort Women: Japan," Memory & Reconciliation in the Asia- Pacific, http://www.gwu.edu/~memory/data/judicial/comfortwomen_japan/haksun.html.

³³ Hicks, *The Comfort Women: Japan's*, 193.

truck. Back in Korea, men approached Yi Okpun, a twelve-year-old girl, told her that her father needed her and took her away.³⁴ The journey from their homes to the comfort stations, they later realized, was the least of their troubles.

Life at the comfort stations was extremely uncomfortable for the women. When the women arrived, the proprietors of the comfort station gave them new Japanese names and detained them in a room. Often the rooms were extremely small only designed to fit one person laying down. Kim Tökchin refers to the room as a “cubicle” with planks separating the “cubicles.” The women were very rarely allowed to leave the rooms if they could at all. Some never got to leave the room except for the times that the doctors gave them a physical gynecological exam. There is a split between the ways that the doctors came and evaluated their health. Some girls had to go to the local hospital while doctors examined others in the stations which was humiliating because they often left the door open for many to see. If the women showed any sign of sickness or disease, they would be administered a shot called “No. 606.” It is currently unknown what was in the shot, only that the shot was believed to eradicate any disease. Although the shot was helpful in curing disease, it would make it difficult to eat and move with one girl stating that once someone got the shot they “couldn’t touch water for a whole week.”³⁵ The rooms were cages to keep the women in for the entertainment of the soldiers. The genuine health and safety of the women was never the main concern. They were given the physical exams because the proprietors did not want to lose the soldier’s business.

³⁴ Howard, *True Stories of the Korean*, 34, 42, 96, 65, 81, 145.

³⁵ Howard, *True Stories of the Korean*, 44, 45, 53, 60.



Figure 2: Japanese soldiers in line to visit comfort women. Source: Yuki Tanaka, Japan's Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery and Prostitution During WWII and the US Occupation (New York: Routledge, 2002), 58.

The unrelenting abuse and punishment in the comfort station came from two sources: the proprietors and the soldiers. Proprietors could be male and female. The number of soldiers that the women had to serve varied from station to station. Mun P'ilgi testified that the proprietor expected her to serve at least ten on a slow day and fifty daily on a weekend or else she would be punished. Others served around thirty men every day. The soldiers and officers would queue up outside the room as pictured in Figure 2 and wait their turn. Frequently, the men would be loud and rowdy if another soldier was taking too long. Each soldier and officer was expected to pay a fee to enter the room and do as he pleased to the woman. They would bring a ticket with the price written on it that would be given to the women and later given to the proprietors of the station. Soldiers would come in starting early in the morning and sometimes the officers would

stay the night with the comfort women and not leave until the next morning. In many testimonies, the comfort women state that they were raped from the first minute that they arrived. Few soldiers viewed the women as human beings. They treated them sexual objects. Kim Tökchin revealed that she was raped by a man who “had a pistol” which shows the power which the men had over the women from the very beginning of their experiences as comfort women. Some of the women were unconscious when the soldiers first raped them as was the case of the twenty-year-old Hwang Kümju. She fainted when an officer “ripped [her] underwear off with a knife” when she resisted his “embrace.” One woman’s uterus was so swollen from rape that she was beaten into a three-day coma because she could not serve the soldier. In another case, one soldier branded a comfort woman’s armpit with a hot iron when she resisted his advances as if she was a cow. She lived with the pain of the wound for three months until it finally healed.³⁶ If the women did not listen to the soldiers or the proprietors, they would be beaten or in some cases they were killed and their remains would be fed to the other women. The soldiers told the women that it was beef soup.³⁷ The soldiers did it both as a warning and for their amusement. The women’s lives as comfort women were at the mercy of the soldiers.

Some women took precautions to the extent they were allowed. Although some women were supplied with condoms in the rooms, they often ran out of them or soldiers refused to use them. One woman states that she would frequently wash the condoms because they were not supplied with enough to service thirty or more men a day. Condoms do not stop the transmission of diseases when they are washed and used continuously. The women would still contract and spread disease between the soldiers causing the women to have to get the ‘No. 606’ shot.

³⁶ Howard, *True Stories of the Korean*, 43, 61, 74, 76, 84, 85, 99.

³⁷ "Japan Boiled Comfort Woman to Make Soup," *The Seoul Times*, <http://theseoultimes.com/ST/?url=/ST/db/read.php?idx=1846>.

Pregnancy often resulted from being raped around thirty times a day. Occasionally, the shot would not work resulting in the forced removal of their uteruses due to swelling and infection. This procedure left numerous women to live unable to have children. On the other hand, if a woman became pregnant, the proprietors gave the woman pills or the 'No. 606' that would cause an abortion leaving them to lose a child and sometimes causing them to be barren for the rest of their lives. Disease and pregnancy kept the women from performing their jobs and the condoms and abortion pills only served for the convenience of the soldiers. Another issue at the station that the women had to deal with were menstrual periods and while many of the girls stated that they first started their cycle during their time at the stations, they still had to deal with the inconvenience of monthly periods. In the beginning, proprietors of the stations provided the women with cotton, but as the war continued, the supply ran out. One woman stated that she and other women at the station stole objects to use to stop the blood were often beaten because of it. Hwang Kŭmju said they would take the soldiers gaiters but if they were caught then they were beaten because the soldiers saw this as unlucky.³⁸ Women were left to fend for themselves. The only concern of the comfort station staff was to stop the pregnancy, remove uteruses, and provide make shift feminine products only so that the women could continue entertaining the soldiers.

At the end of the war, the comfort women found themselves left in a foreign country with little way to get home and sometimes they were afraid to return to their hometown. The women that remained either caught rides on boats or wandered until they could find help. While some tried to return to their families, others felt too humiliated to see them again and found other places to live. When reuniting with their families, they lied about where they were, usually

³⁸ Howard, *True Stories of the Korean*, 74, 75, 84.

saying that they worked at a factory in Japan. The women cited many of the reasons stated earlier in the paper. Traditional Korean culture influenced by Confucianism played a major role, especially when they considered the dishonor and blame they could bring to their family. One woman's family, when she gathered the courage to say what happened to her, said that she had to leave so she would not "disgrace the family." This caused the women anguish for decades following the war. Mun Okchu suffered from severe insomnia while others became addicted to alcohol and drugs to cope with the pain of the past. In addition to finding ways to survive, they had to find jobs that could provide enough income to help support their families and themselves often living pay check to pay check. During this time, they kept their secret hidden. Not until the first comfort women came forward did the women feel like they no longer had to keep their stories a secret. Some women were afraid to come forward but with the help of their loved ones they overcame their fears and humiliation. On the other side, some families tried to stop the women from giving their testimonies and registering as a former comfort woman because they thought it would bring dishonor on the family, but the women still testified.³⁹ Regardless, the women brought their testimonies to the public eye and showed the world what had been hidden for over fifty years. Their experiences shocked the world; it amazed many how their stories were kept a secret so long while many other war crimes from World War II had been discussed for many years.

Similarly to the Korean comfort women, there are a lack of records that document how many women in Indonesia were raped and where these women came from.⁴⁰ While it is estimated that there were 200,000 Korean comfort women, it is estimated that there were two

³⁹ Howard, *True Stories of the Korean*, 86, 87, 113, 114, 123, 133.

⁴⁰ Tanaka, "Comfort Women", 44.

hundred to three hundred white Dutch women used as comfort women.⁴¹ The selection of the comfort women came from “Indonesian women, European women living in the internment camps, and European women living outside the camps.”⁴² What is known is that the government in Tokyo did not regulate the comfort stations. Java has the most information available of all of the Dutch East Indies islands and in charge was the 16th army.

At the beginning of Japanese occupation, in the first stage which lasted from mid-1942 to mid-1943, the 16th army hired and pressured third parties to find the women and these third parties consisted of Dutch officials, free Europeans, and brothel owners. Women were recruited through advertisement and through the promise of work. Both the military and regular police sometimes resorted to threatening the women and their families with death or internment if they refused to work in brothels. Also, there was system of privately run brothels that were owned and run by European women who recruited women.⁴³ The second stage lasted from mid-1943 to mid-1944. Force was the key factor of the second stage because of the decreasing number of women without diseases who were available to work in brothels.⁴⁴ The time between mid-1944 and mid-1945 classifies as the third stage. Because of the closure of many brothels, the number of military brothels also decreased. This was also a time where force became less prominent as a recruitment tool. Although documents show that the majority of women were volunteers, it does not reveal the full experience of the women that were forced into the life of a comfort woman.⁴⁵

Unlike the comfort stations that used Korean women on the battlefield, on the island of Java, it was required that the brothels have women that volunteered to participate instead of

⁴¹ Tanaka, “Comfort Women”, 45.

⁴² Poelgeest, *Report*, 2.

⁴³ Poelgeest, *Report*, 6-7.

⁴⁴ Poelgeest, *Report*, 8-14

⁴⁵ Poelgeest, *Report*, 14.

forced, but frequently the women did not know that they were signing volunteer forms. Some women were lucky depending on who found out about them. The “Semarang incident” gave some women the chance at leaving when military officials were contacted about the comfort women. A Dutch officer discovered that the women were forcefully used as comfort women and wrote a report to top officials. The result of his report was that the comfort stations in that area were closed quickly which freed the women of both Dutch and mixed decent. Race played an important role in this case with the Dutch protecting white women. After the closure of the stations after the Semarang Incident, different comfort stations using mixed race women were put in their place.⁴⁶ Although one officer shut the station down, most stations were not closed so easily. One woman tells a story of her encounter with the Commandant and states that after she and a few other women told him who raped them, he proceeded to move them to a classroom in a school while telling them they would be safer there. Instead, he brought even more men to rape the women.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ "Women made to be Comfort Women – Netherlands," Digital Museum: The Comfort Women Issue and the Asian Women's Fund, <http://www.awf.or.jp/e1/netherlands.html>.

⁴⁷ Tanaka, “Comfort Women”, 43.



Figure 3: Women in an internment camp in Batavia in 1945. Source: Yuki Tanaka, *Japan's Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery and Prostitution During WWII and the US Occupation* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 70.

Women came from many different backgrounds. With prostitution prevalent in the Indonesia, many of the original comfort women were already prostitutes. These prostitutes consisted of both European and Indonesian women. Later, it became necessary for the Japanese to forcefully take women from their homes or scare them into signing volunteer forms with the threat of what could happen to them in the internment camps under the control of the army due to the spread of VD in the army.⁴⁸ Eight women from one of the camps thought that they would work in a Chinese restaurant, but when they arrived at the stations they refused to be comfort women and were released back into the internment camps.⁴⁹ Other women did not have the option to be released again. Internment camps gave soldiers a pool of women to pick from and they did just that. It, also, allowed them to release women back into the camps in contrast to the

⁴⁸ Poelgeest, *Report*, 4.

⁴⁹ Poelgeest, *Report*, 9.

Korean comfort women who had absolutely no choice in the matter. Calling the women volunteers to prevent legal issues, they hand selected girls from line-ups that they ordered. When the women resisted, police removed the young girls and sometimes former prostitutes from the camp. Jan Ruff-O'Herne writes of the day that she was one of the ten girls selected to go to the comfort station. Women "tried to pull [them] back" while "protesting loudly" at the idea of the young girls taken from them.⁵⁰ These girls and their families put up a fight because they knew what would happen to the girls unlike the Korean girls who had no idea where they were going or what was happening to them. Figure 4 is of Ruff-O'Herne at the age of sixteen. This was taken roughly five years before she was taken to the comfort stations. At this age, it was unimaginable for her or her family what was coming next, but as mentioned above in 1944, they knew the future was ominous.

⁵⁰ Jan Ruff- O'Herne, *50 Years of Silence* (Sydney, Australia: Editions Tom Thompson, 1994), 68.



Figure 4: Ruff- O'Herne at the age of sixteen: Source: Jan Ruff- O'Herne, *50 Years of Silence* (Sydney, Australia: Editions Tom Thompson, 1994).

Once taken from their families, the Japanese army confined some women to rooms while soldiers raped them multiple times a day for a few weeks until they were released. Additionally, old schools and classrooms were transformed into comfort stations at the order of army commanders. In Ruff-O'Herne's experience, the Japanese gave her her own room which consisted of numerous furnishings which Korean comfort women could only dream of, but Ruff-O'Herne knew that it "was a place to be feared".⁵¹ After being photographed, she had her name changed to a Japanese name.⁵² On her first night there, which is also the day she lost her virginity, a Japanese man threatened her with a sword if she did not submit to him. The other

⁵¹ Ruff- O'Herne, *50 Years of Silence*, 73.

⁵² Ruff- O'Herne, *50 Years of Silence*, 78-79.

girls in the house all experienced similar things and promptly tried hiding for the rest of the night⁵³. During both her nights and days, she was raped. Even the doctor raped her after she tried to tell him that she was not there voluntarily.⁵⁴ The girls were subjected to examinations by this doctor while the Japanese watched through the missing door.⁵⁵ As with the Korean women, many had to have abortions after they fell pregnant. Ruff-O’Herne, after telling a woman that she might be pregnant, had to take pills so that she would miscarry.⁵⁶ At the stations, numerous women did anything they could to escape the life including attempting suicide with drugs and cutting. One of Ruff-O’Herne’s friends at the comfort station attempted suicide by slicing her wrists, but Ruff-O’Herne saved her.⁵⁷ While many took advantage and tortured the women, there were a few that helped the women survive their situation. Ruff-O’Herne had one person on the inside name Hasan. He allowed her to have secret contact from her sister and gave word to her family that she was still alive. His help influenced a man named Yodi to rent her for the nights so that she would not have to endure rape so frequently. Finally, after three months at the brothel, she was released and had silence “forced upon” her when she returned to a prison camp. The soldiers running the prison camps instructed her to not reveal what happened to her at the station or risk her family’s death so that their fellow soldiers would not suffer consequences.⁵⁸ Her mother, who she told, could not handle the truth so Ruff-O’Herne never discussed it with her again.⁵⁹

⁵³ Ruff- O’Herne, *50 Years of Silence*, 86-87.

⁵⁴ Ruff- O’Herne, *50 Years of Silence*, 89, 95.

⁵⁵ Ruff- O’Herne, *50 Years of Silence*, 96.

⁵⁶ Ruff- O’Herne, *50 Years of Silence*, 103.

⁵⁷ Ruff- O’Herne, *50 Years of Silence*, 93.

⁵⁸ Ruff- O’Herne, *50 Years of Silence*, 108.

⁵⁹ Ruff- O’Herne, *50 Years of Silence*, 111.



*Figure 5: Javanese comfort women after being rescued. Source: Yuki Tanaka, *Japan's Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery and Prostitution During WWII and the US Occupation* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 81.*



*Figure 6: Javanese comfort women after being rescued. Source: Yuki Tanaka, *Japan's Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery and Prostitution During WWII and the US Occupation* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 82.*

Indonesia was largely under the control of Japan until their surrender at the end of WWII. Many of the comfort women were released in 1945. In Figure 5, Javanese comfort women are photographed by Australian troops that liberated them from Japanese control. The Japanese attempted to hide their true purpose as comfort women by forcing them to wear Red Cross armbands so that it would seem as if they were not only there voluntarily but also as if they were part of a care organization. The forty-six women in the photo also show how the comfort stations were not always small scale with around ten girls, but could be four times that. Allied troops, including Australian and British troops, attempted to free the comfort women from Japanese control. In Figure 6, a former Javanese comfort woman is ecstatic after experiencing freedom for the first time. While the woman's name is not known, her joy matches many former comfort women's joy at their release from the hands of the Japanese. This joy, although, did not necessarily continue.



Figure 7: Ruff-O'Herne hugging another comfort woman. Source: Jan Ruff- O'Herne, 50 Years of Silence (Sydney, Australia: Editions Tom Thompson, 1994).

As with the Korean comfort women, the women in Indonesia had to deal with rejection, bullying, emotional, and physical pain. After the comfort stations, Ruff-O'Herne and her family had to deal with the torture that came from social ostracizing that originated from other women

at the prison camp. These women called her a whore and threw rocks with notes at her because they heard of her past as a comfort woman. Even the priest told her she could never become a nun though she truly wanted to which completely crushed her spirits.⁶⁰ When the British came to help free and protect the Dutch people, Ruff-O'Herne met Tom. Tom made her feel safe enough that she told him what happened to her under the Japanese and he convinced her to report it in 1945, but nothing came of it.⁶¹ The comfort woman life also took a toll on her body. She was not able to stay pregnant and had three miscarriages which led to her having surgery.⁶² After confessing her experiences to Tom, she did not mention her time as a comfort woman again until December 9, 1992 when she was a witness at an International Public Hearing in Tokyo. The hearing focused on Japanese war crimes and how there should be compensation. While there she met with numerous other comfort women from China, North Korea, South Korea, and the Philippines. This gave her a greater sense of experiences that other shared⁶³.

While there were no trials for the Korean comfort women, Dutch women had a chance to see their abusers and their overseers punished. After the war ended, there were multiple trials that were brought against people who ran comfort stations and forced women into prostitution. The martial-courts were military courts put in place by the Netherlands to punish people who committed war crimes. At Netherlands Temporary Court-Martial in Batavia, Washio Awochi was charged with forcefully recruiting and holding Dutch women as prostitutes in his club, the Sakura-Club. Twelve girls and women came forward and gave their testimonies to the court including a girl who was twelve. He was sentenced with ten years in jail for his crimes which the

⁶⁰ Ruff- O'Herne, *50 Years of Silence*, 115, 127.

⁶¹ Ruff- O'Herne, *50 Years of Silence*, 130-131.

⁶² Ruff- O'Herne, *50 Years of Silence*, 132.

⁶³ Ruff- O'Herne, *50 Years of Silence*, 138-148.

court classified as enforced prostitution.⁶⁴ Again, in Batavia, thirteen Japanese people were tried in 1948. One of the men committed suicide so that he would not have to go to trial. Another was charged with a crime that involved the death penalty but instead he was only sentenced to fifteen years in jail. Army major Okada was sentenced to execution. Another one of the thirteen was sentenced to ten years in jail. The others, including medical officers, a captain, and four comfort station managers, had their jail time range between five and twenty years. Two of the thirteen were found not guilty and these were a civilian officer and a NGO. A year after this trial, Lieutenant-General Nozaki Seiji went to trial with a recommendation of the death sentence but only received twelve years after he claimed that he did not fully know what was happening with the comfort stations. He, in his statement, was more concerned about how he brought disgrace to the reputation of the army instead of the women his people hurt.⁶⁵ Korean comfort women could have only dreamed of seeing men punished for their role in creating and administering the comfort stations. There are many possible reasons for the Dutch's willingness to prosecute. The most influential is the Netherlands' position as a European country that prosecuted German soldiers as well after WWII. The Netherlands played a major role in punishing the Japanese individuals who were involved while the Korean government did not prosecute.

The Filipino women also experienced a different situation during and immediately after the war. Unlike the Korean women where a significant portion were tricked into going to the comfort stations with the rumor of work, Filipino women were often kidnapped from their home by the Japanese. Some women were on errands or outside when they were found by the army. A number of these women had to witness the brutal murder of their families before they were taken

⁶⁴ The United Nations War Crimes Commission, *Law Reports of Trials of War Criminals* (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office 1949), 122-123. Retrieved from https://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/Military_Law/pdf/Law-Reports_Vol-13.pdf

⁶⁵ Tanaka, *Japan's comfort women*, 76.

to buildings that had been converted to comfort stations including churches, schools, hospitals, tunnels, and even one's own home.⁶⁶ Tomasa Salinog's father was beheaded by Japanese soldiers while Rufina Fernandez presumably lost five family members while she was in sight and hearing distance of them.⁶⁷ Being a comfort woman was not usually their full-time job as it was for the Korean comfort women, they would service less men because during the day they cleaned clothes, cooked and worked in construction. The stations were usually run by the Japanese army instead of a third party like they were in stations that utilized Korean comfort women.⁶⁸ These women resisted and fought back in numerous cases leading to further abuse from the Japanese. One girl in her testimony stated that "I was really struggling because I didn't want my clothes to be stripped off. I kept my legs together, tightly crossed. After I did that, they punched my thighs so that they could do what they wanted."⁶⁹ Japanese officers stabbed, kicked, punched, and even burned leaving the women with permanent scars.

A significant portion of the women tried to escape or thought about running away. Thirty-three percent of the women in the investigation tried to flee and many more witnessed the punishment of girls that tried which deterred them from attempting.⁷⁰ Of the known comfort women in the Philippines at the time of the investigation, twenty-five percent of women were kept at the comfort stations for over four months. The length of confinement was between three days and over a year. Some women's family members managed to find them at the stations and rescue them. The American army also was able to rescue the women and scare the Japanese

⁶⁶ Tanaka, *Japan's comfort women*, 49.

⁶⁷ Tanaka, *Japan's comfort women*, 50.

⁶⁸ Tanaka, *Japan's comfort women*, 49.

⁶⁹ Jane McMullen, "The House Where the Philippines' Forgotten 'Comfort Women' were Held," *BBC*. Last modified June 17, 2016. <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-36537605>.

⁷⁰ Department of Social Welfare and Development, Republic of the Philippines, *An evaluative research in the implementation of the assistance to Lolos in crisis situation (ALCS) Project*, March 2002, 14. Retrieved from <http://www.awf.or.jp/pdf/ALCS.pdf>.

away.⁷¹ When one girl, Julia Porras, was almost released, one soldier tried to behead her, but luckily another soldier stopped him.⁷² As with the Korean comfort women, life was not easy after they left the comfort stations.

Maria Rosa Henson is one of the most well-known Filipino comfort women. She was the first to tell her story publicly and led a lawsuit against the Japanese government. She published her autobiography and shared her story with the world. Her story begins as an illegitimate child of an illiterate mother and a rich, famous man who owned land and ran a pharmacy in the Philippines.⁷³ Her original goal of becoming a doctor was crushed when World War II was declared after the attack on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese.⁷⁴ In 1942, Japanese soldiers found her while she was gathering wood and raped her multiple times. A couple months later the same soldier raped her again. This did not stop her from helping the Huk, a guerrilla group, to go against the Japanese by finding medicine and food.⁷⁵ She went with some of these members of the Huk to locate family that were in the Baatan Death March. In the Philippines, the Japanese changed the currency, the language, and enforced a strict curfew with passes.⁷⁶

⁷¹ Department of Social Welfare, *An evaluative research*, 14.

⁷² "Comfort Women: Japan- Filipino Comfort Women," Memory and Reconciliation in the Asia-Pacific. https://www2.gwu.edu/~memory/data/judicial/comfortwomen_japan/filipina.html

⁷³ Maria Rosa Henson, *Comfort Woman: a Filipina's Story of Prostitution and Slavery Under the Japanese Military* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999), 11.

⁷⁴ Henson, *Comfort Woman*, 18.

⁷⁵ Henson, *Comfort Woman*, 24-26.

⁷⁶ Henson, *Comfort Woman*, 29-30.



Figure 8: Henson being held down by a soldier in the comfort stations. Source: Maria Rosa Henson, *Comfort Woman: a Filipina's Story of Prostitution and Slavery Under the Japanese Military* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999) 40.

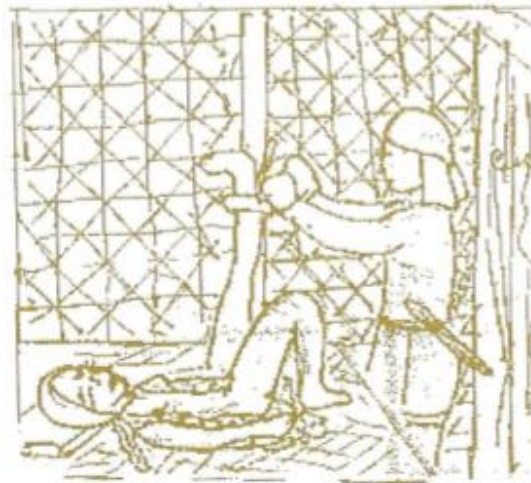


Figure 9: Henson being tied up by a soldier at the comfort station. Source: Maria Rosa Henson, *Comfort Woman: a Filipina's Story of Prostitution and Slavery Under the Japanese Military* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999) 40.

It was on her journey to collect food that she had to pass through a Japanese checkpoint. After clearing the checkpoint, the Japanese soldier called her back and took her to a comfort station where there were six other girls. The first day was filled with being raped over twenty times by over twenty men in “quick succession” leaving her in a great deal of agony. A doctor gave the women check-ups once a week and they were constantly guarded. The soldiers arrived in groups like clockwork and were often very violent. She stated that “when the soldiers rape me,

I felt like a pig”. In her illustrations (Figure 8 and Figure 9), she portrays the way that the soldiers treated her. The left drawing is of one man punishing her because he could not maintain an erection while another man was waiting his turn to rape her. In the picture on the right, she illustrates the way that the men would tie her leg up in the air to restrain her. She was transferred from station to station and eventually ended up in the house that used to belong to her father. She became ill with malaria and during her sickness, she still had to service soldiers. As a side effect of the medicine to cure the malaria, she had a miscarriage even though she was only fifteen and had not yet had a period. Her anger was strong against the Japanese. When she overheard that the town where her mother was residing was going to be burned down by the Japanese, she whispered to someone outside the fence to warn them. The Japanese realized what she had done and tied her up and tortured her. She was still tied up when she was rescued after nine months of being a comfort woman.⁷⁷

The head injury she received from the torture left her unable to speak, write, walk, and eat normally for years after she regained consciousness. She experienced feelings of shame and lost her “self-respect”. She lost all her hair and had to wait for it to slowly grow back which contributed to her shame.⁷⁸ At first, because of her experiences with men, she resisted her mother’s suggestions that she find a husband and love. She even resisted marriage while her future husband courted her. During her marriage, she struggled with sex because it caused flashbacks of the rapes she dealt with as a comfort woman.⁷⁹ Her husband knew of her past before they were married and was accepting, but she could tell that he was saddened by it. Doming, her husband, was taken by armed men leaving her at home with two children and

⁷⁷ Henson, *Comfort Woman*, 35-48.

⁷⁸ Henson, *Comfort Woman*, 49-52.

⁷⁹ Henson, *Comfort Woman*, 59-62.

without him, it became even harder to meet their needs.⁸⁰ As she later found out, her husband became the commander of an antigovernment group and had her detained in a hut for over three months. When she tried to escape, he hit her with the butt of a gun and raped her.⁸¹ She finally escaped when they went to town and was able to give birth with her family around her. For the rest of her life, she worked hard as a single mother under her three children. All married and were able to help her out.⁸²



Figure 10: Former comfort women together in Tokyo in 1992. Source: Jan Ruff- O'Herne, *50 Years of Silence* (Sydney, Australia: Editions Tom Thompson, 1994).

While listening to the radio one day, she heard about the term comfort women and the Task Force on Filipino Comfort Women. She gathered the courage over many days to contact the women on the radio.⁸³ The women from the radio recorded her story and convinced her to come

⁸⁰ Henson, *Comfort Woman*, 66.

⁸¹ Henson, *Comfort Woman*, 68-70.

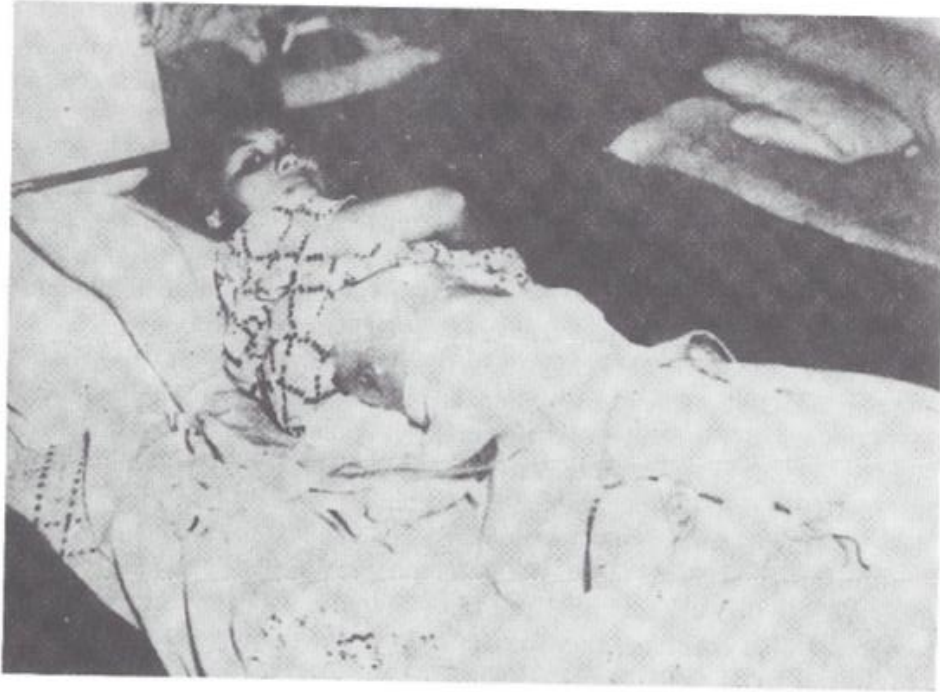
⁸² Henson, *Comfort Woman*, 74-77.

⁸³ Henson, *Comfort Woman*, 83-84.

forward as a former comfort woman. She participated in press conferences and marches as well as testifying to the Senate and meeting with other comfort women. She also testified at the same International Public Hearing in Tokyo that Ruff-O'Herne spoke at in December of 1992. Figure 10 includes both Ruff- O'Herne and Henson on the right. The women in the photograph are all former comfort women from the countries mentioned in this paper. Even though many were sympathetic to her, there were others who ridiculed her and her family including her granddaughter. She led many other comfort women in the lawsuit that will be discussed later in this paper.⁸⁴ She died in August of 1997 at the age of sixty-nine before Filipino comfort women received real recognition⁸⁵. She went through significant pain and did not get to see how much her hard work and courage helped other comfort women.

⁸⁴ Henson, *Comfort Woman*, 86-89.

⁸⁵ Seth Mydans, "Maria Rosa Henson, 69, Dies; Victim of Japanese Brothels," *The New York Times*, August 27, 1997, <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/08/27/world/maria-rosa-henson-69-dies-victim-of-japanese-brothels.html>.



*Figure 11: Filipina comfort woman recovering from her injuries. Source: Yuki Tanaka, *Japan's Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery and Prostitution During WWII and the US Occupation* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 48.*

After their release from their places of torture, the women had to endure the suffering that came after. Their experiences as comfort women led to ongoing physical pain. A comfort woman cannot work for too long because her waist causes her agony. In addition to the physical pain, as with the Korean women, they returned home and were afraid to share their stories and experiences from their time as comfort women. Survivors became afraid of noises and did not recognize her parents. They tended to become introverted and lost their self-confidence as Henson did. One woman did not marry because she was scared that her husband would hurt her as the Japanese soldiers did. Another woman did not marry because she depended on medication from a stab wound that she received from a Japanese soldier. Even while carrying his baby, a former comfort woman's husband left her after she shared with him her past. She was not alone in her experiences, many family members and husbands left after hearing the women's stories and in some cases if they did not leave, they would treat them differently. Many Filipino women

joined organizations to further the comfort women cause and give them a sense of community with other comfort women.⁸⁶

Testimonies are not only important in terms of the overview of the events that happened while at the stations, they also give a look into the thoughts of the comfort women specifically their suicidal thoughts and resentment. Numerous women contemplated killing themselves so that they would not undergo the torture that ensued at the comfort stations. Each of the girls who talked about suicide in their testimonies ended up stopping because they could not go through with it or worried about the effect their death on their family. Testimonies allow the public to see into the mind of the comfort women and understand a small portion of what they went through. Additionally, the lives the women led after the end of the war left the women unfulfilled. They could not return to normal lives; some tried to have families which usually ultimately failed or were unhappy while others refused to marry because of the mental scares of the past. The testimonies are essential to fully comprehending the truth of what occurred to the women because no documents can grasp the severity of the devastation the use of comfort stations caused the women.

While many comfort women were able to give their testimonies, there are stories that will never be heard because of the fifty-year gap between when most of the testimonies were given and the end of the war. Still, there are numerous similarities between the testimonies leading to the conclusion that the women are telling the truth. Some may say that the women could be mistaken or misremember the events of the past but with the pain that they endured they still have the physical, mental and emotional scars that came with their time in the comfort stations. Additionally, the women have no reason to lie about the events including the number of soldiers

⁸⁶ Department of Social Welfare, *An evaluative research*, 15-18.

she had to serve a day or the actions that she committed because at the time that many came forward there was no compensation as a reward for them. The purpose of the women sharing their stories was to make the Japanese government to repent for their actions and to free themselves from the secret they have held for decades.

The reliability of the women has become a topic of intense scrutiny, but their corroborating stories across multiple countries along with an increase in photographs and videos provides validation to their testimonies. It is understandable that there may be some exaggeration, may that be intentionally or unintentionally, due to their nature as humans and the difference in time between the event and the date of their testimony. The things they experienced had the opportunity to warp their sense of what happened in the station so with the sources cannot be completely accepted at full truth which is what the Japanese have used as a defense of their reputation. Despite this possibility, the survivors' testimonies should be regarded as worthy of people's trust. They were eye witnesses and experiencers not a passive observers or people who heard about the events. Because the events of their testimony occurred decades ago and most other primary sources other than a few photographs have been lost, the testimony of these women are essential to understanding the real events at the comfort station.



Figure 12: Comfort women sitting in the back of a truck. Source: Korean Comfort Women in the Back of a Truck, photograph, *The Seoul Times*, <http://theseoultimes.com/ST/?url=/ST/db/read.php?idx=1846>.



Figure 13: Comfort women standing next to a Japanese soldier. Source: Korean Comfort Women with a Japanese Soldier, photograph, *The Seoul Times*, <http://theseoultimes.com/ST/?url=/ST/db/read.php?idx=1846>.

Few photographs survived after the end of the war but they give a valuable insight to the way the soldiers and proprietors treated the women. Figure 12 illustrates how the women were forcefully packed into a trunk and shuttled to where the soldiers needed them the most. The

women's safety was not a concern as they were dangerously driven in the truck. The women's faces reveal all stages of emotion. One woman smiles while others frown.⁸⁷ In the Figure 13, the comfort women look distraught while the Japanese soldier smiles. Only one of the women is looking directly at the camera; the others avert their eyes by looking at the ground possibly humiliated or embarrassed. The man on the other hand beams with pride. They are not wearing shoes and are wearing simple clothes standing in mud and dirt in a trench. The woman on the far right leans on the wall for support with her pregnant or very bloated stomach.⁸⁸ Two of the women in the second photograph were also included in recently discovered footage of Korean comfort women in a province in China. The footage shows the women being addressed by members of the U.S.- China force while they are lined up against a wall.⁸⁹ These images were not meant to be shared with the public when they were taken; the photographers captured them in more of a documentary sense. The photographs record the moment of pain and humiliation the women experienced while being transported and used as if they were not human.

The revolutionary testimonies and to a lesser extent the photographs led to big change in the relations between comfort women, the implicated governments, and the rest of the world. In 1991, nine former Korean comfort women spearheaded the first lawsuit for the use of Korean comfort women during World War II.⁹⁰ With the flood of comfort women testimonies and the first lawsuit, the Japanese government, finally, had to admit that their army had been involved in the kidnapping and utilization of comfort women in the Kono Statement of 1993. The Kono Statement, released by Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono, states that the military was involved

⁸⁷ Korean Comfort Women in the Back of a Truck, photograph, *The Seoul Times*, <http://theseoultimes.com/ST/?url=/ST/db/read.php?idx=1846>.

⁸⁸ Korean Comfort Women with a Japanese Soldier, photograph, *The Seoul Times*, <http://theseoultimes.com/ST/?url=/ST/db/read.php?idx=1846>.

⁸⁹ "Comfort women': Researchers claim first known film," *BBC*, July 10, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-40552812>.

⁹⁰ Hicks, *The Comfort Women: Japan's*, 199.

in finding the women, transporting them often with force, and visiting them in comfort stations.⁹¹ The outrage of people around the world forced Japan to offer compensation to the women. In 1995, Japan created the Asian Women's Fund to provide the comfort women with money from Philippines, Korea, and Taiwan but not Indonesia. In Indonesia, the AWF was unable to identify many comfort women and instead built facilities for the elderly in areas where there were comfort women.⁹² A problem arose when it was discovered that the money from Japan came from private donations and not the government itself.⁹³ The act of creating the fund was supposed to lessen the tension between the two countries but instead it heightened it because Koreans realized the Japanese government was not making a genuine effort to compensate the women. For the rest of the 1990s, the women and many feminist groups fought for better compensation and an apology from the Japanese government for the crimes committed against the comfort women.

In 1993, over forty Filipina women filed against the Japanese government demanding twenty million yen each for compensation for their experiences as comfort women. October 9, 1998 marked the day that the Tokyo District Court dismissed the claims of the women citing many different reasons. Firstly, the judge asserted that the 1907 Hague convention only covered states appealing to states for compensation not individuals going after states. Secondly, because of the fifty years between when the first woman was taken and the start of the lawsuit, the time to file the lawsuit has already lapsed. Under Japanese law, a complainant had to file a grievance

⁹¹ "Statement by the Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono on the result of the study on the issue of "comfort women,"" Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, last modified August 4, 1993, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/women/fund/state9308.html>.

⁹² "Measures Taken by the Government of Japan on the Issue known as "Comfort Women,"" Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, last modified October 14, 2014, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/women/fund/policy.html>.

⁹³ Alexandra Starr, "South Korea and Japan Reach Landmark Deal over Comfort Women," NPR, last modified December 28, 2015, <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2015/12/28/461269736/south-korea-and-japan-reach-landmark-deal-over-comfort-women>.

within twenty years. Finally, the San Francisco Peace Treaty from 1951 prohibits the Philippines from demanding compensation because the Philippines abandoned requesting war retributions from Japan with the Treaty. Only two weeks after the ruling, the comfort women argued to the Tokyo High Court that the 1907 convention protected women from sexual slavery under another countries military. The Tokyo High Court dismissed the women again on December 6, 2000, citing the same reasons as the Tokyo District Court. Again, the women appealed this time to the Supreme Court. For the last time, on December 25, 2003, the women's case was rejected.⁹⁴

The 1990s brought some relief from the emotional and mental suffering of the comfort women. They were brave enough to discuss the terrible crimes committed against them even if they blamed themselves for being kidnapped. The world heard stories of women that had been systematically abused, neglected, and scarred. International public relations on the subject were polarized with the supporters, deniers, and some in between. What the women and the world did not know was the conflict would continue for almost two decades into the 2000s.

⁹⁴ Memory and Reconciliation in the Asia-Pacific, "Comfort Women."

Heated Conflict

The early 2000s were filled with confrontation between supporters and deniers of stories of comfort women. The survivors were able to explain themselves even further and while some groups came forward to help the women, other groups felt as if the women did not need more help. The supporters stayed strong and determined in their fight for the comfort women globally. On the other hand, the people in the middle felt the women had already received enough compensation. Lastly, the Japanese government frequently changed their public positions and statements. While the women could share their stories and express themselves, they still faced opposition.



Figure 14: Kim, Soon-Duk "Day I was abducted"



Figure 15: Kang, Duk-Kyoung, "Deprived Purity"



Figure 16: Kang, Duk-Kyoung "Punish the Responsible Person!"

While many of the comfort women have long passed, there are a few comfort women that are still alive still searching for resolution. As of February 2016, there are seven former comfort women that live in the House of Sharing, a home in South Korea that houses survivors with the help of donations. It also doubles as a museum that tells the story of on comfort women. Some of the former sex slaves living in the home are finally able to find peace and do the things they love whether it be singing or painting.⁹⁵ The first painting (Figure 14) was done by Soon-Duk Kim and titled “Day I was Abducted”. The girl, Soon-Duk, in the painting has fear in her eyes and she clearly represents the forced nature of her abduction showing that she in no way went voluntarily contradicting the statements the Japanese government made. She reaches back to a land of flowers, her home, while being pulled across an ocean to a comfort station.⁹⁶ In the second painting (Figure 15), titled “Deprived Purity” by Duk-Kyoung Kang, the man is growing from skulls and death. She lays under the tree naked and withering as the soldier thrives at her expense. He reaches to embrace her while she lays naked, humiliated, and covering her face. The painting shows those who actually benefited from the comfort stations.⁹⁷ Lastly, the third painting (Figure 16), which is titled “Punish the Responsible Person!” also by Duk-Kyoung Kang, shows the responsible person tied to a tree with guns pointed at him and white doves in the air. Through the painting, Duk-Kyoung reveals her belief that until the responsible person is punished to the fullest extent possible there will not be peace as the white doves represent. The man is growing from the roots of the tree connecting the man to past. The man is restrained and blindfolded as were the comfort women. The soldiers trapped the kidnapped women preventing them from seeing their surroundings and forbidding their release.⁹⁸ The three paintings together

⁹⁵ "Japanese Army's Comfort Woman," House of Sharing, <http://www.nanum.org/eng/>.

⁹⁶ Soon-Duk Kim, *Day I Was Abducted*, <http://www.nanum.org/eng/>.

⁹⁷ Duk-Kyoung Kang, *Deprived Purity*, <http://www.nanum.org/eng/>.

⁹⁸ Duk-Kyoung Kang, *Punish the Responsible Person*, <http://www.nanum.org/eng/>.

depict the feelings of the former comfort women in a visual way that words cannot always express.

The three paintings in addition to the testimonies give insight into the inner workings of the comfort women's minds and the events that they experienced at the hands of the Japanese. Art is a way to express internal feelings as a way to supplement oral testimonies. The women's stories can give the facts while the art gives the feelings. The two female artists do not paint for specifically for the general public unlike the intended audience of their testimonies. The artwork is raw and honest statement of happened to the women before, during, and after the comfort station. While the comfort women are finally able to fully express themselves, some Japanese still struggle to hide the truth of the comfort women.

In addition to the House of Sharing in Korea, Project Lola which is run by the Department of Social Welfare and Development in the Philippines (DSWD) gives some compensation to the former Filipino comfort women. These women receive a monthly pension instead of housing. When questioned about project Lola, the eighty-nine people in the study titled "An Evaluative Research in the Implementation of the Assistance to Lolas in Crisis (ALCS) Project" were split about their feelings about it. While they were happy and thankful for the financial assistance, many said that it was not enough. The money was intended to be able to pay for meals, doctors' visits, activities, as well as to cover other bills. Project Lola proved to be helpful for the women in allowing them to achieve and buy what they need and want. Although the money does not always cover basic needs, this can be attributed to a number of different reasons including the increasing food costs and the recipients using the money for other things.

The insecure conditions in the Philippines make it difficult to fully predict how much money the women need from Project Lola.⁹⁹

While provide some survivors with both financial support, an emotional outlet, and an opportunity to live out their lives more comfortably, some Japanese continue to whitewash the history and remove the parts that would condemn Japan as a country. The textbook controversy has long been imbedded in the conflict between Japan and Korea. Japan wants to maintain status quo while Korea wants the textbooks to reveal what really happened in the history around World War II. The conflict over textbooks started in 1982 when the Japanese Ministry of Education had a passage about Japan in the war deleted from a textbook.¹⁰⁰ Since then, the Japanese have combated their portrayal in textbooks. The debate over the coverage in textbooks of Japan's actions extended to the West. As recent as the 2016, there is a conflict over two sentences that will appear in a textbook in California which simply mentioned what comfort women were. Korean Americans and Japanese Americans have created petitions over what should be written about the comfort women. The Japanese feel as if it is unfair propaganda against their country if the publishers include information about comfort women in the textbook. Further adding to the conflict, California is a huge buyer of textbooks so what is written in their books will soon spread to other states in the U.S.¹⁰¹

In addition to the textbooks, Japan wants the removal of statues that portray comfort women in both the East and the West. One of these statues depicts a Korean girl and is placed

⁹⁹ Department of Social Welfare, *An evaluative research*, 19-25.

¹⁰⁰ Hayashi, "Disputes in Japan over," 126-127.

¹⁰¹ Victoria Kim, "'Comfort Women' and a Lesson in How History Is Shaped in California Textbooks," Los Angeles Times, last modified February 7, 2016, <http://www.latimes.com/local/education/la-me-comfort-women-curriculum-20160207-story.html>.

outside the Japanese embassy in Seoul.¹⁰² Another statue that brought worldwide attention in 2014 was erected in Glendale, California. The monument is of a girl in South Korean clothing sitting next to an empty chair.¹⁰³ Both statues portray a Korean comfort woman sitting alone representing the plight and silence of the women as well as their loneliness. In both cases, the Japanese believe that it is unfair propaganda against their country. Furthermore, the conflict over statues created foreign disputes and international tensions. San Francisco, California was formally a sister city with Osaka, a large city in Japan. Sixty years of sisterhood concluded in 2017 over the construction of a comfort woman statue in downtown San Francisco. The Japanese Consulate unsuccessfully attempted to end the construction of the statue. Yoshihide Suga, the Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary, stated his wish to “continue making every effort so that things like this won’t happen again.”¹⁰⁴

Virginia became a battle ground over how to portray the history over comfort women too. In Fairfax, VA, a very diverse area, a memorial to comfort women was being built with support of the government outside of the Fairfax County Government Center. Before it was dedicated in 2014, government representatives and supervisors began to receive emails and protests took place. One email stated, ““We wish you will stop revealing such a stupid memorial on 30 May.””¹⁰⁵ Also in the email, they asserted that the US military bombings of Japan during WWII

¹⁰² Donald Kirk, "In Comfort Woman Debate, Experts Agree Statue Has to Stay across from Japan Embassy in Seoul," *Forbes*, last modified January 12, 2016, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/donaldkirk/2016/01/12/experts-blow-hot-air-but-agree-comfort-woman-statue-must-say-in-front-of-japan-embassy-in-seoul/#7c65f14f1894>.

¹⁰³ Valerie Hamilton, "Korean and Japanese Immigrants Clash Over 'Comfort Women' Statue," *New America Media*, last modified February 2, 2014, <http://newamericamedia.org/2014/02/korean-and-japanese-immigrants-clash-over-comfort-women-statue.php>.

¹⁰⁴ Adam Taylor, "Osaka mayor to end sister city status with San Francisco over 'comfort women' statue," *The Washington Post*, November 25, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/11/25/osaka-mayor-to-end-sister-city-status-with-san-francisco-over-comfort-women-statue/?utm_term=.2673069cfd1b_

¹⁰⁵ Antonio Olivio, "Memorial to WWII Comfort Women dedicated in Fairfax County amid protests," *The Washington Post*, May 30, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/memorial-to-wwii-comfort-women-dedicated-in-fairfax-county/2014/05/30/730a1248-e684-11e3-a86b-362fd5443d19_story.html?utm_term=.09c2b6c3dcc2

should be the focus of a memorial. Again, some Japanese individuals would rather focus on their own victimhood instead of the people that they made victims. The Japanese minister of affairs, Masato Otaka, thought that the memorial would result in Japanese and Japanese Americans children being bullied in Virginian schools and that it would make some people “uncomfortable”. People pass statues every day, especially in the case of the ones mentioned, creating a talked about piece which further spreads the interest in comfort women. As other countries, half way around the world, begin to include comfort women in textbooks and in memorial, Japan focused on a campaign to control the image of their country abroad.

THE FACTS

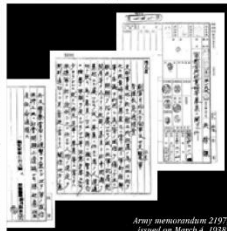
The purpose of this paid public comment is to present historical facts.

At the end of April, an advertisement purporting to tell "The Truth about Comfort Women" appeared in the Washington Post. The claims contained in these statements, though, were anything but the "truth." Rather than being based on "facts," they appeared, if anything, to be the products of "faith." The people of Japan have the highest respect for the United States as a fellow democratic nation and as a strong and reliable ally. For democracy to operate effectively, though, the freedom of speech, thought, academic research, and religion must be guaranteed so that individual citizens can draw their own appropriate conclusions. To enable this, people must have access to correct facts, rather than fallacies, distortions, biases, and factual errors. This public comment seeks to present a number of historical facts relating to "comfort women" that have not been adequately brought to light so as to enable the readers of this respected publication to draw their own conclusions.

FACT 1 No historical document has ever been found by historians or research organizations that positively demonstrates that women were forced against their will into prostitution by the Japanese army. A search of the archives at the Japan Center for Asian Historical Records, which houses wartime orders from the government and military leaders, turned up nothing indicating that women were forcibly rounded up to work as *ianfu*, or "comfort women." On the contrary, many documents were found warning private brokers not to force women to work against their will.

Army memorandum 2197, issued on March 4, 1938, explicitly prohibits recruiting methods that fraudulently employ the army's name or that can be classified as abduction, warning that those employing such methods have been punished. A Home Affairs Ministry directive (number 77) issued on February 18, 1938, states that the recruitment of "comfort women" must be in compliance with international law and prohibits the enslavement or abduction of women. A directive (number 130) issued on November 8 of the same year, moreover, orders that only women who are 21 years old or over and are already professionally engaged in the trade may be recruited as "comfort women." It also requires the approval of the woman's family or relatives.

A historian who claims that the number of "comfort women" reached 200,000—a contention frequently quoted in the US media—believes, on the other hand, that the memorandum offers proof of the army's active involvement.



FACT 2 There are many newspaper articles, moreover, that demonstrate that these directives were dutifully carried out. The August 31, 1939, issue of Dong-A Ilbo, published in Korea, reports of brokers who forced women to become *ianfu* against their will being punished by the local police, which was under Japanese jurisdiction at the time. This offers proof that the Japanese government dealt severely with inhumane crimes against women.

Unscrupulous Brokers Run Rampant Abduction of Rural Women and Girls
More than 100 Women Victimized
Pusan Police Officers Dash Off to Mukden

PUSAN - Unscrupulous brokers have been conspiring to abduct women from poor families by promising them systematic rewards in Manchuria, where Japanese soldiers are claimed to be eating, feasting in awfully party-festive mood. Brokers were found to be working in Pusan, where they lured unsuspecting young women away from their families and sold them into prostitution in Manchuria. Over 100 women have already been victimized. Intensive investigation by Pusan police has revealed the identity of a Mukden doctor involved in these activities, and six officers were dispatched in the evening of August 20 to the city to arrest this doctor. The arrest is expected to fully expose the nightmarish activities of these brokers.



FACT 3 There were admittedly cases, though, of beatdowns in discipline. On the island of Sumarang in the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia), for instance, an army unit forcibly rounded up a group of young Dutch women to work at a "comfort station." The station was shut down under army orders, though, when this incident came to light, and the responsible officers were punished. Those involved in this and other war crimes were subsequently tried in Dutch courts and received heavy sentences, including the death penalty.

FACT 4 House Resolution 121 sponsored by US Representative Mike Honda and other charges of Japanese mistreatment of "comfort women" are mostly based on testimonies by former *ianfu*. In none of their initial statements are there references to their being coerced to work by the army or other units of the Japanese government.

Their testimonies have undergone dramatic changes, though, after the start of the anti-Japanese campaign. Those who testified in a House of Representatives public hearing first reported that they were whisked away by brokers, but then later claimed that their abductors wore clothing that "looked like police uniforms."

FACT 5 The *ianfu* who were embedded with the Japanese army were not, as is commonly reported, "sex slaves." They were working under a system of licensed prostitution that was commonplace around the world at the time. Many of the women, in fact, earned incomes far in excess of what were paid to field officers and even generals (as reported by the United States Office of War Information, Psychological Warfare Team Attached to U.S. Army Forces, India-Burma Theater, APO 689), and there are many testimonies attesting to the fact that they were treated well.

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*Sadly, many women were made to suffer severe hardships during the war. It is with profound regret that we contemplate this tragic historical reality. At the same time, we must note that it is gross and deliberate distortion of reality to contend that the Japanese army was guilty of "coercing young women into sexual slavery" in "one of the largest cases of human trafficking in the 20th century," as the House Resolution claims. After all, two-fifths of the approximately 20,000 *ianfu* during the war were Japanese women, as detailed in an academic paper by historian Ikuhiko Hata. We are interested, foremost, in sharing the truth with the American public. Criticism for events that actually occurred must be humbly embraced. But apologies over unfounded slander and defamation will not only give the public an erroneous impression of historical reality but could negatively affect the friendship between the United States and Japan. We ask only that the facts be objectively reported so that we may share a correct perception of history.*

Translation of an article demonstrating that there was no organized or forced recruitment. Misconceptions about comfort women and US Japanese military http://www.sdh-fact.com/CL02_1/31_S4.pdf

Assentors

Dut members

The Liberal Democratic Party of Japan

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We, the undersigned members of the Committee for Historical Facts, endorse the public comment presented above

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Figure 17: Advertisement in Washington Post. Source: "The Facts," advertisement, Washington Post (Washington D.C.).

Japanese citizens have taken to publicizing their opinions on the comfort women in the United States. In the *Washington Post*, members of the Committee for Historical Facts purchased a spot for an advertisement to defend their position. The piece states that the women were never forcefully taken and that those involved in recruiting the women were punished for their crimes. According to the advertisement, its purpose is to inform the public of the real “facts”. Another clear aim of their advertisement is to defend reputation and sway the American public to support their side of the conflict. The committee calls the accusations of the comfort women and their supporters “unfounded slander and defamation” which is the reason that they refuse to apologize sincerely. They use “facts” to support their cause while including no “facts” that could portray them in a negative light. The use of a paid advertisement is extremely important in understanding the motives behind the people who paid for it. The purpose of an advertisement is to sell and this example is no different especially taking into account that it was published in the *Washington Post*, one of the most influential newspapers in the world. Another important element of the advertisement is the assentors that are listed at the bottom. Most of the assentors are members of the Japanese Diet in the LDP, the group which actively denies the participation of the government in collecting and sanctioning the comfort women.¹⁰⁶

Twenty years later after the women began recounting their stories, in December of 2015, South Korea and Japan finally reached a deal. The agreement included a billion yen provided from the Japanese government to support the forty-six Korean comfort women that are still living. Additionally, Japan issued an official apology through Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Although both countries agreed to the deal, the Korean comfort women were not completely happy with it because they were not consulted in regards to the compensation and the wording of

¹⁰⁶ "The Facts," advertisement, *Washington Post* (Washington D.C.).

the apology.¹⁰⁷ The women argued that they experienced significant torture before and after the war but the Japanese government gave a sub-par apology that did not fully recognize the extent of the damage. Both the foreign ministers and Prime Minister Abe emphasized that the problem should be resolved forever.¹⁰⁸ While the Japanese government made a blanket apology to originally include all comfort women, they focused their attention on the problem of Korean comfort women. A former comfort woman, Estelita Basnano Dy, from the Philippines asserts that “this agreement is between Japan and South Korea. I want to urge the Japanese government to scrap it because it doesn’t include all the victims, from countries like the Philippines.”¹⁰⁹ She worries that international opinion is that the comfort women issue has been solved when in reality the problem still exists for women from the Philippines.

The Japanese government continued to contradict itself almost immediately after they made the deal. Hard feelings which remained for the comfort women and supporters grew when Japan sent their report to the United Nations. In the report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, Japan denied forcefully taking the comfort women due to the claim that there is no historical evidence.¹¹⁰ Japan’s incomplete admission of guilt has not satisfied South Korea. Japan wants to end the conflict but at the same time they do not want to give in and admit to their war crimes. The deal was supposed to settle the dispute but the conflict continues especially with the problems caused by Japanese politicians on the right. One of these

¹⁰⁷ Starr, "South Korea and Japan," NPR.

¹⁰⁸ “Japan-ROK summit telephone call,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, December 28, 2015, http://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/na/kr/page4e_000366.html.

¹⁰⁹ Eric Johnston, “‘Comfort women’ demand formal apology, redress for all survivors worldwide,” *Japan Times*, November 4, 2016, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/11/04/national/comfort-women-demand-formal-apology-redress-survivors-worldwide/#.WCjXFPkrI2w>.

¹¹⁰ Jiji, "Seoul Criticizes Japan for Sending ‘Comfort Women’ Report to U.N. Committee," *Japan Times*, last modified January 31, 2016, accessed February 3, 2016, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/01/31/national/seoul-criticizes-japan-sending-comfort-women-report-u-n-committee/#.VrJmbPkrLWI>.

rightists, a LDP lawmaker named Yoshitaka Sakurada, made a controversial claim and then retracted his statement days later in January of 2016 due to pressure. He said that the comfort women were prostitutes and the propaganda is convincing the public believe that the women were victims.¹¹¹ Rightists tend to agree with the LDP lawmaker. Additionally, they believe that it is too late to raise the issue because almost seventy years have passed since the women started to be collected.¹¹² The passage of time, they reason, gives them an excuse for not addressing the problem earlier. Japanese Prime Minister Abe is one of the people that embodies the rightist ideas. He argues that there is no proof that the women were kidnapped or taken forcefully. Some people close to him in 2014 said that Abe was contemplating replacing the Kono statement.¹¹³ Although the statement was never replaced and the Japanese government created a system of compensation, the Japanese government did not label the compensation as reparations so that the rightists would not be upset.¹¹⁴

In October of 2017, UNESCO deferred the decision on incorporating documents about comfort women into their Memory of the World collection which holds documents that are important to events, groups, and cultures around the world. Groups on the side of the comfort women argued in the documents that they were sex slaves while Japanese groups and a private American group submitted a document saying that the women were not sex slaves. Although this did not involve the Japanese government specifically, UNESCO was hesitant to put the documents in in case they lost Japan's funding which is essential to keeping UNESCO operating.

¹¹¹ Tian Shaohui, ed., "LDP Lawmaker Calls 'Comfort Women' Prostitutes in Latest Blow to S. Korea-Japan Accord," Xinhua, last modified January 14, 2016, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-01/14/c_135009392.htm.

¹¹² Hicks, *The Comfort Women: Japan's*, 214.

¹¹³ Clint Richards, "Could Japan Still Revise Comfort Women Statement?" The Diplomat, last modified October 9, 2014, <http://thediplomat.com/2014/10/could-japan-still-revise-comfort-women-statement/>.

¹¹⁴ "Japan, South Korea Reach 'Final' Deal to Settle 'Comfort Women' Issue," The Japan Times, last modified December 28, 2015, http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/12/28/national/politics-diplomacy/south-korea-japan-reach-deal-to-settle-comfort-women-issue/#.Vr5KJ_IrLWI.

The Japanese group argued that putting the documents into the collection would further destroy the relationship between countries when UNESCO was supposed to be keeping peace. There is still an opportunity for the documents of both sides to be put into the Memory of the World.¹¹⁵ Even though, to appease the public, Japan occasionally conceded to the use of comfort women by their military, the Japanese government still tries to deny the comfort women. The survivors, however, are determined not to let Japan forget its complicity.

Even in their old age, some comfort women have also continued battling the Japanese government. In 2016, Lee Yong-Soo and others, including other former comfort women from different countries, asserted that the Japanese comfort woman deal was not enough. She is one of the most outspoken former comfort women. She, much to the distaste of the Japanese government, continues to fight for the recognition and compensation for the comfort women.¹¹⁶ In 2017, she was invited by South Korea to attend a banquet dinner where representatives from many nations met for a meal including President Donald Trump and representatives from Japan. The Japanese government was not happy with the arrangement revealing how even two years after the deal was reached, disagreements still persist. However, the South Korean government doesn't view the deal as enough. Genron, a Japanese group, created a poll which revealed that seventy-five percent of South Koreans agree that the deal was not to their satisfaction and that they wanted more.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Mina Mitsui, "UNESCO Puts Off Registration of Comfort Women Material" Japan Forward, November 2, 2017, <https://japan-forward.com/unesco-puts-off-registration-of-comfort-women-material/>

¹¹⁶ "Comfort Women' urge Japan, South Korea to Scrap Deal," ABS CBN News, November 4, 2016, <http://news.abs-cbn.com/overseas/11/04/16/comfort-women-urge-japan-south-korea-to-scrap-deal>.

¹¹⁷ Traci Tong, "South Korea makes a bold move with a former 'comfort woman' at its state dinner with the US and Japan," PRI, November 8, 2017, <https://www.pri.org/stories/2017-11-08/south-korea-makes-bold-move-former-comfort-woman-its-state-dinner-us-and-japan>.



Figure 18: Supporters holding images of former comfort women in front of the Japanese Embassy. Source: Yang Ji-Woong, South Korean Supporters of Comfort Women, photograph, NBC News, January 6, 2015, <http://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/comfort-women-protesters-rally-new-york-outside-japanese-consulate-n491651>.

Every Wednesday since 1992, women have protested in front of the Japanese embassy in Seoul to show support for the comfort women and their distaste for the way that the Japanese, Korean and American governments handled to the situation. Figure 18, which was taken at a protest on December 30, 2015, shows the deceased former comfort women in their old age. The women in the photos were able to share their stories and start a movement before their death, but they were not able to see experience the support of part of the world. The young protestors hold the photographs to cover their faces as if they are the women themselves. They raise the point that it could have been them who were taken against their will and raped. Photos

of elderly women, as the protesters know, resonate differently with onlookers and the public.¹¹⁸ The protests have also spread to other countries including the United States. In early January of 2016 in New York, there was a protest against the Japanese deal. The protesters marched from the Japanese consulate to the Korean consulate carrying signs with accusations against both the Korean government for not supporting the survivors more and the Japanese.¹¹⁹ Protests and marches are some of the different ways that the supporters of comfort women spread their movement.

While the conflict between the governments and the comfort women grew, another conflict arose: men versus women. Some women tend to join the cause of the comfort women because they feel emotionally connected to the stories. They can sympathize with them and put themselves in their position. Most of the protesters are female while significantly fewer men come to the protests. Feminists were the ones that brought the stories to national and later global headlines.¹²⁰ They were the ones who saw the struggle and empathized with the women. They took the testimonies and of the survivors and emphasized the gendered dynamic of these human rights abuses.¹²¹ After the war, recognition of victims focused on the Prisoners of war, the male's stories. The females were pushed into silence, a silence that the protestors fight to break with feminism. On the other hand, the men in Korea and around the world tend to accept the apology of the Japanese government because they do not connect with the comfort women like other women do. For most of the Korean men, the torture of the comfort women had little to do with

¹¹⁸ Yang Ji-Woong, South Korean Supporters of Comfort Women, photograph, NBC News, January 6, 2015, <http://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/comfort-women-protesters-rally-new-york-outside-japanese-consulate-n491651>.

¹¹⁹ Jihye Lee, "Protesters Gather in New York Outside Japanese Consulate to Denounce 'Comfort Women' Deal," NBC News, last modified January 16, 2016, <http://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/comfort-women-protesters-rally-new-york-outside-japanese-consulate-n491651>.

¹²⁰ Hicks, *The Comfort Women: Japan's* 173-178.

¹²¹ Linda Martin Alcoff, "Feminism," *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 26, no. 2 (2012): <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/jspecphil.26.2.0268>.

their daily lives so it easier to move on and forget it happened. For them it is the practicality of the situation while the women focus on the emotional side of the situation. Men seem to believe the crimes against the women can be solved with money and an apology- something that they have done for centuries. Women know that the scars of the past will not disappear with compensation and a subpar apology. Now there is not only a conflict between the governments and the women, it has expanded to disagreements between men and the women. Compounding the issue, the governments are made up of mostly men so the men are taking actions that they would want instead of what the women know the comfort women need. Hidden underneath the conflict over comfort women, the gendered conflict between men and women continues.

Emotions, polarized opinions, white-washing, and protests filled the first two decades of the 21st century. The comfort women could finally express their stories to the public. Polarized opinions resulted in the news and amongst the public. Protests were the way the supporters of the survivors expressed their views while white washing was the way the deniers and pro-Japanese attempted to spread their belief that the Japanese did nothing wrong. Politicians knew that they had to try to please the majority of the public but many in Japan harbored their rightist feelings. These deniers occasionally made the mistake of revealing their lack of sympathy for the women and had to backtrack to please the public again. The Japanese government still dismisses comfort women while many feminist groups are determined not to let the comfort women's troubles be forgotten.

Conclusion

Although the comfort women are no longer under the physical control of Japan, Japan continues to affect them with their apologies, compensation and especially with their statements of denial and white-washing. During the war, the women suffered as much as any prisoner of war. After the torture, the women had to deal with being silenced as if they were a criminal instead of a victim. Even in their life after the war, the survivors are constantly reminded of the mental, emotional, and physical scars of the past. Finally, in the 1990s and into the early 21st century, the women were able to gain legitimacy as victims of systematic sexual abuse. The Japanese, although, were used to being the victims so they felt the need to defend their nation. Japan is the main perpetrator of the torture of the comfort women and although they did not play the only role in silencing the women after the war, Japan remains the most consistent in denying the truth. This refusal continues to prolong the emotional and mental abuse of the women by not making a sincere apology. The women's testimonies and artwork are their way of combating the failings of the Japanese government. The survivors are able to express themselves in an attempt to alleviate the half century year old crimes they experienced. The comfort women are now free from their secret but still have not found resolution.

The conflict between the Japanese government and the comfort women continues to be heated on both sides with little end in sight. Taking into account that the testimonies have been available to the public since 1991 and the conflict has not come to an end, the end of the controversy seems far from attainable. As recent events show, the protests will continue and some Japanese will attempt to fight what they consider anti-Japanese propaganda. Even after the last comfort woman passes away, feminists and other human rights activists will continue fight for the women and attempt to push Japans to admit guilt.

While the world transitioned into a more supportive environment for the comfort women, there is still a lingering hostility. Numerous people still attack the women's stories and their character. Referring to the women as prostitutes is an attempt to further tarnish their reputations and forgive Japan's actions. This victim blaming intensifies all the heartache and physical pain they experienced in captivity. Additionally, the term prostitutes imply that there was no military force involved to take the women or to keep the women at the comfort stations. While it is undeniable that there were comfort women that were former prostitutes, the term "prostitute" and "comfort woman" have extremely different meanings. Prostitutes exchange services for money while comfort women very rarely received payment for their sexual activity and had no choice in who they were going to engage in sexual activity with. Comfort women was simply a euphemism for sex slaves which defines their situations more appropriately. Defining comfort women as sex slaves more accurately honors the abuse perpetrated by the Japanese military.

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