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The Comfort Women System: Sexual Slavery during World War II

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DePauw University

The Comfort Women System:
Sexual Slavery during World War II

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The Comfort Women System: Sexual Slavery during World War II

One can learn from reading a book or attending a lecture, but the lesson becomes real when you experience it. This is what Lee Oksun experienced as she shared her story. Lee and I are at the House of Sharing located in Gwangju, Gyeonggi-do Province, outside Seoul, South Korea. The House, also known as *Nanum* House, is as a safe haven, providing surviving Korean comfort women (*ianfu*) with security, safety, and shelter. Lee explains, “People always talk about comfort women not knowing what it truly means. People have to understand where the term comes from and what it denotes. To be a ‘comfort women’ means ‘to die’” (Lee 2016).

Born in 1927, Lee lived in a small, rural Korean village till the age of fifteen when she was kidnapped by two unknown men. Lee says, “I went to the comfort station [*ianjo*], and I came back defeated. . . I came back useless.” She lifts her arm to show me the scars that never properly healed. “This is a knife wound,” Lee continues and recounts, “I tried to run away [from the comfort station] but failed. I was dragged back to the station, and the soldier asked me why I ran away. I told him ‘I am done. I’m hungry and cold and I want to leave.’ The soldier then used a knife to cut my feet so I could no longer run away” (Lee 2016). Lee points to her feet, displaying more scars.

In many ways, this Honors thesis is a testament to *ianfu* and their experiences. Comfort women, in the wake of their international movement for justice, have become symbols of resilience, strength, and courage. By telling their stories of sexual violence and everlasting suffering, *ianfu* have readdressed and redefined crimes against humanity and violence against women in times of war and armed conflict.

In hopes of creating a thesis worthy of the comfort women and their legacies, I first describe a culture and environment that gave rise to the comfort system during World War II.

Though this is, in no way, a justification for the sexual enslavement of women, it does, to an extent, explain how and why such an institution was created. After doing so, I then continue to define and describe *ianjo and ianfu*. Comfort women stations were systematic and methodical. More than an isolated incident, there was a method and a plan in which *ianfu* were abused, raped, and, in some cases, murdered. The third large segment is about human rights and international law. It is important to note that, though the comfort women system ended in 1945, the Imperial Army's system of sex slavery was not defined a crime against humanity till decades later. The United Nations commissioned a report in 1996. I conclude this thesis with a focus on the ongoing comfort women case in light of international law.

After World War II, the global world was in shambles. Despite the international community's weak attempts in investigating crimes and restoring justice, major offences were ignored, war victims pushed aside, and the guilty freed. For decades, the Japanese Government denied its crimes, holding onto its innocence. It kept secret the coercing and kidnapping of countless women into sex camps (Pike 2011: 89, 90). To this day, the Government of Japan and its conservative politicians attempt to refute the comfort women case. They maintain that they have no legal responsibilities to Korea or its comfort women. As such, the *ianfu* issue is not one of the past, as it remains topical and relevant. Horrific as it may be, violence against women during times of war and conflict are not uncommon.

The current Japanese Government may label *ianfu* as volunteer prostitutes. The Government might claim comfort women to have been volunteers who chose to serve the Imperial Government and Army in World War II. However, surviving comfort women, may define themselves as former sex slaves. Girls and young women, mostly from Asia, were coerced and forced to sexually oblige Imperial soldiers in foreign territories, like "Japan, China, the

Philippines, Indonesia, the then Malaya, Thailand, the then Burma, the then New Guinea, Hong Kong, Macao and the then French Indo-China” (Coomaraswamy 1996: 29).

My own understanding of the comfort women case, having researched and personally interacted with surviving Korean *ianfu*, is that this is an issue of coercive human trafficking, wartime rape, and victim silencing. The *ianfu* issue is, without a doubt, a gross human rights violation and crime against humanity; however, what is even more heartbreaking than reading *ianfu* testimonies is knowing these survivors have been and continue to be silenced by the Government of Japan. Surviving *ianfu*, now in their nineties, have said their dying wishes are to receive a formal apology but know this will not happen in their lifetime.

In 1996, the United Nations defined *ianjo* as a system of “forced prostitution and sexual subjugation and abuse in wartime” (Coomaraswamy 1996: 4). The term *ianfu* is an inappropriate euphemism that “does not in the least reflect the suffering, such as multiple rapes on an everyday basis and severe physical abuse” (Coomaraswamy 1996: 4). The Special Rapporteur, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, explains this case “should be considered a clear case of sexual slavery and a slavery-like practice in accordance with the approach adopted by relevant international human rights bodies and mechanisms” (Coomaraswamy 1996: 4).

Kim Hak-sun: The First to Testify

Kim Hak-sun, a Korean comfort woman, was the first to force Japan to finally acknowledge its past. The day before the Korean Independence Day in 1991, Kim, at the age of sixty-seven, revealed herself as a former *ianfu*. From this moment on, Kim and other survivors have been rewriting the history of wartime rape and crimes against women.

Kim was born in 1924. Her birth father died when she was still an infant, leaving her mother to remarry. Unable to adjust to her stepfather and new family, Kim was enrolled in a

Korean geisha house at the age of fifteen. She attended for two years until her stepfather relocated her to Beijing, China where she worked as an *ianfu*. She remained and worked for four months till she convinced a Korean man to help her escape. Though she successfully got away from the comfort station and safely returned to Korea, Kim suffered the rest of her life. She married the man who helped her escape and gave birth to a son and daughter. Her children died very young. Her husband, abusive and intolerant, called Kim a “dirty bitch” and other nasty insults that “stabbed her in the heart” (Park 2014). She stayed in Korea, periodically relocating and working various jobs as a concubine or housekeeper till the early 1980s.

During this time, Korean Dr. Yoon Jeong-Ok and women’s organizations were trying to gain momentum in the *ianfu* issue. The Government of Japan did not acknowledge the comfort women case, Korea failed to be assertive, and no living comfort women had yet come out. Dr. Yoon, determined to explain this case as a system of sex slavery, had a two-fold goal: 1) the Japanese Government needed to reveal the truth and accept their past wrongs and 2) the Korean Government, rather than being passive, needed to address the injustice. It was then when Kim offered to share her testimony. No longer wanting to tolerate Japanese lies, Kim reasoned, “I’m on my own and have nothing to lose. I believe that God kept me alive through these years . . . to give me this job” (Park 2014).

Kim delivered her first public testimony in the Tokyo District Court (1991) and it goes as follows: Kim was forced into prostitution by the Japanese Imperial Army in northern China. She was stripped of her Korean identity, given a Japanese name, Aiko, and “forced to have sexual intercourse with Japanese soldiers, as many as 20-30 times a day” (Pike 2011: 90; Korean Victims of the Asia-Pacific War). At the Court, Kim and the two other survivors demanded an official apology, a thorough investigation of their cases, compensatory payment to survivors

(\$154, 000), the revision of Japanese textbooks, and a memorial museum (*Korean Victims of the Asia-Pacific War*). While the Japanese Government maintained their innocence and refused responsibility, Kim and her story shocked the world.

Kim passed away in 1997, age of seventy-three, with a message: “You should absolutely know this [the truth]. It happened before in the past, and it should never, ever happen again” (Park 2014). Kim may not have been able to receive the recognition and apology she demanded, but her actions were a great catalyst in the ongoing comfort women phenomenon. It was she who initiated a movement that inspired Lee Oksun and others to continue the fight. Though the conflict still continues, these women have changed the face of international law.

For this thesis, I spent summer 2016 in South Korea, researching and meeting survivors. I chose South Korea for three main reasons. First, I, as a Korean American, am fluent in Korean and understand the country’s culture. Traveling to South Korea and meeting with Korean survivors were things I could realistically accomplish. Second, the majority of the comfort women were Korean. Third, Korean survivors and activists are prominent contributors to and figures leading in the unending comfort women case. As such, it should be noted that this particular analysis of comfort women will focus on Korean women. Despite the focus on Korea and Korean women, it is important to remind readers that all comfort women should be remembered when considering the content of this assessment.

Marked with testimonies from surviving women, international support for the victims, and a desire to condemn Japan of its past wrongs, the comfort women case, in light of international law, has been a special one (Malekian 2011: 6). Towards the end of my visit at *Nanum House*, Lee concludes, “Think about it: we didn’t survive because we wanted to. We just did. This [the comfort women system] was a mass execution of women. And now we hope Korea

and the people's support will help resolve the ongoing conflicts with the Japanese government” (Lee 2016). Decades after the War, Lee and many others tell the story of their past and their journey towards justice and peace.

Japanese History and Culture

The comfort women system cannot be fully understood without first reviewing Japanese history and sex culture. According to Cynthia Enloe (2000), prostitution may be one of the oldest professions; however, Sarah Soh (2008) rejects this assertion (Enloe 2000; Soh 2008). Soh claims pimping, “‘the living off of the earnings of a prostitute,’ to be the oldest profession across the globe” (Soh 2008, 109). She supports this with various examples. In ancient Babylonia, a class of women was reserved to the temples to help “civilize the wild man”; in medieval Europe, some “cities maintained public houses of prostitution for the benefit of young unmarried men”; sometimes, the government even subsidized such facilities by making them “legally free and socially eligible for marriage” (Soh 2008, 109). Similar practices are evident in Imperial Japan's history and prostitution culture.

Historically, Japanese culture is not unfamiliar with prostitution as a system of entertainment and business. In Kyoto, Japan (1589), warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi sought a pleasure facility to serve his soldiers who were away from families and wives. The facility in Kyoto was only a forerunner of what was to become future “pleasure quarters.” This eventually resulted with the Yoshiwara (1617), “the first pleasure quarters in Edo (today's Tokyo),” being granted an official government license of business (Soh 2008: 110). Japanese men would enter these facilities, or brothels, basically looking for the company of Japanese women. Soon, as the industry started to flourish, there were “hundreds of thousands . . . employed in all corners of Japan” and “virtually every adult in Japan had ‘encountered a woman who worked, had worked,

or would someday work in the sex trade” at the time (Wang 2012). Licensed prostitution was a “commercial system composed of state-regulated ‘pleasure quarters’ in delimited districts where prostitutes’ bodies were confined” (Soh 2008: 109). Japan, as suggested in existing literature, placed great emphasis on women’s sex work.

Sex work often has a negative connotation of being immoral or sinful; however, this was not the case in early Japan. Rather, the trade of selling sex had a somewhat positive cultural connotation within context. Daughters sold by their families or women working in sexual labor were considered the “‘sacrifice’ of a filial daughter to support her family” (Wang 2012; Stanley and Sommer 2012). Amy Stanley, author of *Selling Women: Prostitution, Markets, and the Household in Early Modern Japan*, suggests that the status of sacrificial daughter was a “positive moral value” (Wang 2012; Stanley and Sommer 2012). Because the roles of dutiful daughter and supporting family member were so heavily emphasized, sex work was not looked down upon. It did not matter as much if the daughter was defiled or endured “violent abuse from employer or clients”; they were achieving their customary role of dutiful daughter and supporting family member (Wang 2012; Stanley and Sommer 2012). However, once women began to gain prominence and agency within the community, they quickly lost their “sacrificial” aura. In a traditionally patriarchal society such as Imperial Japan, this was unacceptable.

According to Stanley, this shift from support to shaming does not really have to do with the act of selling sex. It has more to do with doing work that causes a rift in the male-controlled society. She says, “[Japanese prostitutes] were working at an increasing distance outside the patriarchal household” and were consequently deemed “materialistic and self-centered” (Wang 2012; Stanley and Sommer 2012). They were rejected with a societal backlash

simply because they defied “the ideal gender order, replacing the logic of the household with the logic of market” (Wang 2012). The image of filial daughter soon faded from view.

Imperial Japan’s “Pleasure Quarters”

Japanese “pleasure quarters” were essentially designated spaces for heterosexual, commercial sex. The women worked within and the men would come and go; however, the women in this industry became the victims of their work, not because they were prostitutes, but because they were manipulated and controlled by society. Soh continues her analysis that pleasure quarter workers were “virtual prisoners” sold by their penniless parents as a means of earning income (Soh 2008: 109, 110). Because sex work was a lucrative industry and a profitable source of tax revenue, government workers and public officials “almost always turned a blind eye” to prostitution, and in doing so, stripped its women of their basic human rights (Wang 2012).

The “pleasure quarters” acted as independent cities with their own set of instructions, rituals, and guides (Jenkins and Katsumoto 1994). A guidebook for the Yoshiwara and other “pleasure quarters” had the following instructions:

“The basic fee (which doubled on festival days) [for high-ranking courtesans] ranged from the equivalent of \$450 to \$750 in 1993 American money, and this included none of the tips that had to be paid to the *hikitejaya* [tea house], the entertainers, and the courtesan’s attendants. . . . [Lower-ranking courtesans] . . . had to sit on public display in a custom known as *harimise*. . . . [They sat] behind their cage-like windows on full view to passersby” (Jenkins and Katsumoto 1994: 18).

These were the rules and fees for American visitors. In response, Donald Jenkins, co-author of *The Floating World Revisited* (1994) and art curator for the Portland Art Museum suggests that the living conditions of these prostitutes were “not excessively harsh by the standards of the time” (18). This, however, is a weak, if not faulty assessment. Jenkins suggests that though the work was “harsh”, it was not excessively so. For the “standards of the time”, the women did not

suffer as much as they could have. The implications of Jenkins' observation places the women's sex work on a scale of bad to worse. Is it fair to place a degree or value on the suffering of these women? One could argue that it is not. Samurais entering the "pleasure quarters" were asked to leave swords and daggers with the attendants outside before entering the building. This was done so out of fear that prostitutes, if given access to weapons, would end their own lives to permanently escape the "pleasure quarters" (Longstreet and Longstreet 1970: 15). It seems these working conditions were borderline unbearable. Still, the international fame of Japan's "pleasure quarters" grew and grew.

Japan experienced a period of economic, political, and social turmoil during the 1850s and 1860s. As Western forces strengthened, Japan was strong-armed into signing treaty agreements with the U.S., Britain, Russia, and the Netherlands. Such agreements achieved two objectives. First, foreign traders were now allowed to settle around the Yokohama harbor in large numbers, overpowering Japanese traders. Second, additional "pleasure quarters" were to be established for foreigner-use only. American men accused of raping Japanese women hoped that this ward off anti-foreign sentiment among Japanese (Soh 2008: 110). By 1868, this came to fruition and a red-light district was created within the confines of Tokyo. The new "pleasure quarters" constructed in this same year consisted of 130 brothels with 1,724 prostitutes, 92 brothel geisha, and 109 independent geishas. The Yoshiwara was the first of its kind, but by the twentieth century, it was only one of six in the area of Tokyo (Longstreet and Longstreet 1970: 19).

The meaning of "sex work" in Japan is a condition of its specific time and place during the years leading up to World War II. To refer back to Enloe and Soh's comparison of prostitution vs. pimping, Japanese sex culture and "pleasure quarters" are, to an extent, a product

of Government pimping. Some may argue that the women who left their poor, patriarchal homes to better support their families from afar is an indication of “self-determination by achieving potential freedom from the confines of family” (Wang 2012). Even if this is true for some women, the patriarchal standards of the former Imperial State created the conditions that encouraged women into sex work. It is important to note that there is no shame or dishonor in sex work. But the abuse and exploitation endured by these women during this period is unacceptable.

Japanese Colonialism

The *ianfu* issue is, by in large, a product of Japanese sex culture and colonialism. Though the culture and colonialism are not to blame individually, together, they provided the foundations of sex slavery.

The Meiji State (1868-1912)

The Meiji State further modernized the Japanese prostitution system and introduced it to Korea. With the decline of the Shogunate Era, the Meiji State was marked with a reinforced imperial rule and an adoption of European practices and laws. The prostitution industry, likewise, underwent a slight evolution. Soh describes three overall changes. First, there was a greater emphasis on the prevention of venereal diseases. Prostitutes were required, by law, to undergo mandatory disease examinations at “prostitute hospitals” (Soh 2008: 111). This was a responsibility placed solely on women as they were the only ones required to medical checkups. Perhaps a more pro-active method of preventing diseases would have been to ask both men and women to remain safe and disease-free, but this was not the policy. Soh infers only women were blamed for contracting venereal diseases, as men were not exposed to medical checkups. Second, the Government of Japan enforced a monthly tax on brothel owners and prostitutes. Third,

unlicensed prostitution was deemed unlawful and effectively criminalized (Soh 2008: 111). Japanese historian Fujime Yuki (1997) explains this evolution “as an attempt to monopolize the traffic in women for sex” (Yuki 1997: 141; Soh 2008: 111). The second and third changes indicate the Government was involved in facilitating the commercialization of women and sex. The only way to legally and effectively operate sex work was through the Government. Japan’s prostitution industry was not an independent business, and the Government is largely responsible for the movement of women’s bodies for sex needs.

Despite such malpractices, there was very little concern for human rights violations. In 1872, *The Maria Luz*, a Peruvian ship, entered the Yokohama harbor to rest and repair. Onboard were 231 Chinese, nineteen of whom were children, being transported from Macao to Peru. So disastrous were the conditions on the ship that a man “who had been deceptively recruited by traffickers in the ‘coolie trade’” jumped into the water in a cry for help. Rescued by an English battleship crew, the man begged the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs to seek mistreatment intervention and filed a civil suit. An English lawyer representing the man who jumped ship argued “that if the Chinese laborers were to be regarded as slaves from a humanitarian perspective, the tens of thousands of women trafficked as prostitutes in Japan were in fact slaves, too” (Soh 2008: 112). The lawyer’s testament may have been unexpected at the time, but now, it is clear he was not wrong. Now, as evident in the 1996 United Nations’ *ianfu* commission, women trafficked for the purpose of sexual servitude is a crime against humanity and a form of sexual slavery. But this was already evident fifty-one years before the formal the formal United Nations protocol was passed. Despite the lax human rights laws and protocols, the Japanese Government and judge overseeing the ruling had no choice but to agree and emancipate the prostitutes. Japan informed China to come retrieve its people (Soh 2008: 112).

About a month after the incident, the Japanese Government created Ordinance No. 295, also known as the Prostitutes' Liberation Law. This Ordinance was only a farce and an attempt to save face whilst maintaining the Japan's prostitution system. The Government had no intention of getting rid of the "pleasure quarters" or even the red-light districts. The women onboard the *Maria Luz* who were emancipated back to China were unfortunately unable to find other means of support. Many of them had no choice but to return to the "pleasure quarters" or other similar work to stay afloat (Soh 2008: 112).

Within Japan, the State worked hard to create a "Pure Japan" that incorporated the pleasures of systematic sex without legal obstacles and limitations. Outside Japan, however, the Meiji State further entrenched its Imperial rule, particularly in Korea (1868). As Japan grew stronger and continued to militarize during the nineteenth century, military bases and camps sprouted throughout the country and outer territories. If a military base was established, a government-organized brothel was soon to follow. One did not come without the other (Soh 2008: 113–4). This, to an extent, describes the Japanese prostitution culture which, as will be explained in the sections to come, eventually gave rise to Imperial Japan's comfort women system. Many of these same practices used in "pleasure quarters" and red-light districts were adapted during World War II.

The Introduction of Prostitution in Korea

Korea, by influence of colonialism, slowly adopted the Japanese prostitution culture. This is important to note as it allowed for the eventual trafficking of Korean women to Japanese territories and *ianjo*. Without this introduction and adaptation, it remains unlikely Korean women would have created the bulk of the *ianfu* population.

Korea's first introduction to a modern system of licensed prostitution started with Japan's Kwangju Treaty (1876). Following the Sino-Japanese War and the Russo-Japanese War (1894-1895 and 1904-1905 respectively), there was a growing Japanese military presence in Korea. To accommodate Japanese soldiers abroad, "pleasure quarters" were established. This started in Pusan, Korea and eventually spread to port cities, like Inchon, Wonsan, and Chinnamp'o, Korea. In the years leading up to Korea's annexation (1910), there were almost 3,000 Japanese women in Korea working as "overseas prostitutes" (Soh 2008: 8). It should be clarified that this institutionalization of prostitution began with Japanese women working abroad in Korea. It was not till later that Korean women also joined this work force. The stronger Japan grew, the more dependent Koreans were on Japanese institutions generally, and this included sex work.

Japan's stronghold on Korea amplified in the decades following the Meiji State. The Japan-Korea Treaty (1905) ultimately did away with Korea's sovereignty, forcing Korea to "consult" Japan in areas of finance and foreign affairs. As a result, Korea was "completely deprived of its diplomatic power and autonomy in internal affairs" (Tanaka 2002: 34). By 1910, the Japan-Korea Annexation Treaty officially declared Korea as a colony of Japan, and Korea's economy drastically worsened. Korea's traditional land ownership system was dismantled leaving many Korean peasants and farmers homeless. Much of Korea's rice production was exported to Japan, cutting local rice consumption. Consequently, unemployment rates soared to 85% in the 1930s.

This had a snowballing impact on Korea's prostitution culture. Not only did more and more Koreans relocate to Japan in hopes of finding work as indentured laborers, but also Korea's newly budding prostitution industry blossomed (Tanaka 2002: 34-5). There was a swift increase in the number of Korean sex workers in Korea. In 1910, there were 1,193 prostitutes; by 1915,

there were 1,7681. This is roughly a 50 percent growth. The number of Japanese prostitutes in Korea also increased somewhat but only by less than 20 percent (from 4,091 to 4,680) (Soh 2008: 9). Koreans became heavily reliant on Japanese industries for survival. Young women, as a result, had no choice but to “[pick] up odd jobs to support their peasant families” (Tanaka 2002: 35). Most worked as low-paid factory workers, waitresses, prostitutes, and housemaids for Japanese families. Prostitution was an especially popular form of employment at the time. According to a 1927 article in *Dongah Ilbo*, a Korean newspaper, “many young women were sold to brothels in return for an advance payment to their families. Many married women also became prostitutes due to financial difficulties that arose while their husbands were working away from home” (Tanaka 2002: 35; Song 1997). While some women may have chosen to work in this industry, others were sold. It is difficult to assert either that all women worked voluntarily or that all women were constrained against their will.

In order to accommodate the growing prostitution industry, even unassuming yet apparently legitimate businesses operated underground prostitution rings. Restaurants, cafés, bars “operated clandestine prostitution businesses” by paying Korean women for their “waitress[ing]” and “barmaid” services (Tanaka 2002: 36). For example, restaurants-*cum*-brothels, owned by Japanese businessmen, was a booming commerce. By advertising “second-class *geigi*” work, many unassuming Korean women were tricked. *Geigi*, a synonym for *geisha*, gave women the impression that they, too, would be doing the work of an entry-level geisha, not as an outright prostitute (Soh 2008: 8). Soh suggests defining the sex work as such was not necessarily unintentional. The implication was that if women knew the kind of sex work this involved, they would be less willing to participate. Thus, by manipulating the situation, more women were inclined to work, and by then, it was too late to quit. It was not uncommon to witness “scenes of

tearful, angry Japanese recruits fighting their deceitful recruiters” during this time (Soh 2008: 8). Considering the coercion and manipulation, one must critically question whether or not “second-class *geigi*” work classified as prostitution. It could be argued not, as these women were not consenting participants.

However, this was of very little relevance to the colonizers. As long as the industry continued to thrive and there was a constant supply of women, the Japanese Government cared little. As the prostitution industry gained prominence, Japan further entrenched the business in Korea. From 1916 to 1922, the Government of Japan enacted a series of laws regulating prostitute employment agencies that allowed brothel owners and “employment agents” to operate under police protection. Now, if women were coerced or manipulated into sex work, there was no one to complain to. The corruption was official policy. Those who were more willing to collaborate and cooperate with Japanese administrations, even if this meant exploiting Korean women, were more likely to gain licensing approval and bypass regulation laws (Tanaka 2002: 36). Police could simply look the other way. The Korean prostitution system was a tool of exploitation used by the Japanese.

Fewer regulations meant greater business opportunities, and the industry continued to grow. As of the mid-1920s, there were about 5,000 to 6,000 “employment agents” in Seoul alone. It is estimated that 30,000 women were sold annually for prices ranging from 50 to 1,200 yen (Tanaka 2002: 36–7; Song 1997: 182). This total, however, does not include the number of women who were “deceived by labor brokers who gave false promises of employment, such as factory work, and ended up as prostitutes” (Tanaka 2002: 37; Song 1997: 181–2). Yuki Tanaka, author of *Japan’s Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery and Prostitution during World War II and the US Occupation* (2002), explains Korean prostitutes were significantly cheaper than were their

Japanese counterparts, and this “pricing mechanism” further sustained Korea’s ongoing and worsening poverty (36). For example, in 1933, brothel owners in Inchon, Korea paid between 200 and 700 yen for a Korean prostitute and between 700 and 2,500 for a Japanese, both on a five-year contract. It made more financial sense to employ more Korean women than Japanese. Several Korean women essentially had an equivalent monetary value as having one Japanese woman (Tanaka 2002: 35-6). Japanese prostitutes were valued while Koreans were not. Korean women were basically cheaper goods.

In short, the Imperial Japan had an officially recognized sex culture. As Japan colonized Korea, it introduced this culture and created an industry. It is important to recognize that while some women were sold or forced into prostitution, others chose this industry to earn a living. As American scholar of Japanese legal studies J. Mark Ramseyer explains, “the women who became licensed prostitutes were ‘not with many attractive alternatives’” (Soh 2008: 114). It was the best, most viable option for some women at the time.

Prostitution and commercial sex may have been legal under the Government of Japan, but it was not by no means acceptable. Though the discourse between prostitution for commercial sex and sexual slavery is complicated and sensitive, this distinction is crucial. The difference between choice and coercion within this context is not a simply binary. Many horrible things happened to these women, almost making the need to define “prostitute” vs. “sex slave” unnecessary. I do not seek to shame or criticize Japan’s culture or prostitution or commercial sex. Rather, the controversy exists because the Government’s involvement in coercing and trafficking women’s bodies for profit. The Government may have condoned “pleasure quarters” and red-light districts, but there is no validation in abusing, torturing, and raping women. This is a violation of human rights.

Broader Origins of Comfort Women

The Japanese comfort system is not the first of its kind and it is unlikely to be the last. War does not come naturally to man, but it does create an environment in which soldiers yearn for a certain type of human connection. Some scholars, such as Joshua Goldstein of *War and Gender* (2001), suggest that because war is “the most stressful environment possible,” soldiers display an “almost universal preoccupation with sex” (Goldstein 2001: 333). Perhaps this can be applied to our understanding Imperial Japan’s comfort stations. Throughout history, there have been countless cases of wartime sexual violence and rape. It seems that where there is conflict, there is also the need for women’s bodies and sexual satisfaction.

War’s Intimate Connection with Sex

For example, the Roman Empire (753-27 BC) had an arrangement similar to that of the Japanese Imperial Army’s. Founded on a system of slavery, Roman society was structured in a way that best served the elites in all aspects of life. Because slavery was connected to conquest and war, the Roman Army had a steady supply of slaves and captive women. The Roman version of comfort women, for a lack of a better term, essentially provided military men with “sexual services at all hours of the day and night, as well as . . . traditionally female chores such as nursing, washing, and cooking” (Hicks 1995: 29). Similarly, the Spanish Armada sailed towards the Netherlands, it travelled with “400 mounted whores and 800 on foot” (Hicks 1995, 29). Decades later, the British military in India, in the nineteenth century, organized bazaars with a prostitutes’ quarter where Indian women “performed all the services required” (Hicks 1995, 30). The sex quarters used by the German army in World War II were regulated with specific rules: “Use a condom—danger of venereal disease,” “Memorise your partner’s registration number,” “Disinfect after intercourse!” (Hicks 1995, 32). Not much was different during World War II

where “sex [also] flourished” (Goldstein 2001: 337). Apparently, war and military camps are not complete without some sort of organized sex camp.

The most commonly given explanation for war’s intimate connection with sex is that soldiers need an outlet to help control their emotions and distract them from the dangers of war (Goldstein 2001: 333). In an attempt to maintain soldiers’ morale, military commanders would sometimes encourage, even initiate, army prostitution services. Perhaps this is why the Roman Empire, the Spanish Armada, British military, Germany army, and Japanese Imperial Army had their own organizations for convenient sex.

Both men and women are tools used of their governments during war and conflict. Whereas men are those typically fighting, women are behind the lines serving the men. But the wartime woman is also the wartime man’s tool. Men also use women as a means of humiliating, defeating, and emasculating other, enemy men. Goldstein says the following to explicate wartime rape:

A raped woman ‘is devalued property, and she signals defeat for the man who fails in his role as protector.’ Rape is thus “a means of establishing jurisdiction and conquest.’ ‘Rape at once pollutes and occupies the territory of the nation, transgresses its boundaries, defeats its protectors.’ For its victims, rape as a ‘violent invasion into the interior of one’s body represents the most severe attack imaginable upon the intimate self and the dignity of a human being,’ constituting ‘severe torture’ (Goldstein 2001: 362).

Rape during conflict represents not just male domination of women, but it is also of male domination over other men. When men fail in their patriarchal role of guarding and defending the community and their women, this is rationalized as a sign of weakness. It is an indirect conquest of men. Perhaps this is what the Rape of Nanking, soon to be explained, symbolized for the Japanese soldiers and Government. Japan was asserting its dominance over its colonies, like China and Korea.

The Rape of Nanking (1937): The Moment that Gave Way to Comfort Stations

In 1931, Imperial Japanese forces entered Manchuria. As the Army moved through China and the rest of Southeast Asia, it established comfort stations for no greater reason than to “comfort the brave Japanese soldiers fighting for the empire abroad” (Fisher 2015). Though these quarters and red-light districts may not be the same as the comfort system used in World War II, their core tendencies remained similar. The *ianfu* system was a part of official Government policies and laws as introduced during the “pleasure quarters” time period.

However, as Japan’s Central China Area Army expanded through China and to Nanking, its soldiers also desecrated the local community with acts of “looting, massacre, arson, [and] rape” for a six-week period (Tanaka 2002: 13). Infamously known as the Rape of Nanking, the Japanese Army slaughtered around 200,000 Chinese. Such actions were met with outrage from both China and the international community as images and reports of Japan’s crimes surfaced. In an attempt to prevent future such conflicts and avoid further hate, the Government of Japan devised a plan (Lai 2002: 34). The solution, though it was anything but, was to create a system of easy and “legal” sex. If soldiers were given a sexual outlet, then maybe they would be less likely to rape local women, at least not publically. Japan could keep their reputation intact. The Rape of Nanking is credited as the moment that gave origin to *ianjo*.

Lieutenant-General Okabe-Naozaburo rationalizes,

. . . the reason for such strong anti-Japanese sentiment [among the local Chinese population] is widespread rape committed by Japanese military personnel in many places. It is said that such rape is fermenting unexpectedly serious anti-Japanese sentiment . . . Therefore, frequent occurrence of rape in various places is not just a matter of criminal law. It is nothing but high treason that breaches public peace and order, that harms the strategic activities of our entire forces, and that brings serious trouble to our nation (Tanaka 2002: 16).

Japanese forces ransacked Nanking and raped hundreds of Chinese women, but Lieutenant-General Okabe did not “expect” Chinese locals to resent Japanese soldiers. He could not understand the implications of this human rights violation. Okabe goes on to explain comfort stations will be established “to prevent our [Japanese] men from inadvertently breaking the law due to the lack of such facilities” (Tanaka 2002: 16). Though Okabe is convinced rape is a crime deserving of punishment, he does so only because it hinders Japan’s goals of expansion. Rape as part of a system of business or military provisioning does not strike him as rape.

Goldstein suggests, similar to what happened in the Bosnian War, the Rape of Nanking and the *ianfu* case are historical events of “[s]ystematic mass rape during conquest” (Goldstein 2001: 363). Without understanding the complexities of prostitution and rape during war, it is impossible to truly understand what Lee Oksun meant what she said at the beginning of the paper: “To be an ‘comfort women’ means ‘to die.’ . . . [The comfort women system] was a mass execution of women.” Now this makes clearer sense. To be an *ianfu* essentially translates into “[having] sex with as many as thirty men per day, working in stations of about fifteen women” in a “large-scale, officially organized system of rape by the Imperial Japanese Forces” (Goldstein 2001: 346). One must wonder why the definition of the comfort women case as wartime rape is contested when other, similar incidences, such as the Rape of Nanking and Bosnian War, are not.

Though comfort stations have been described as brothels in other literatures, that description is inadequate. These camps were a part of a greater organization mandated by the Japanese military to imprison non-Japanese women and girls for the purpose of non-consensual sexual satisfaction. Within the comfort women paradigm, the pimp was the Japanese State and it preyed on young women for military sex slaves.

Imperial Japan's Curiosity with Comfort Women

This current section goes a little further to explore Imperial Japan's curiosity with comfort women. Japan's rationale can be explained in three claims. First, as Japan continued to expand and adopt new territories, the frequency of rapes committed against local women by Japanese soldiers rose. When soldiers "plundered towns, raped women, started fires and brutally killed any captives", anti-Japanese sentiment worsened among locals, making it difficult to maintain any sense of order and power. In an attempt to reduce such tensions, military personnel were instructed so that ". . . each soldier's behaviors must be tightly controlled and sexual comfort facilities should be set up" (Chung 1995: 44). This was already illustrated in Okabe's statement above.

Second, by restricting the sexual acts of soldiers to camps and specified women, sexually transmitted and venereal diseases were kept at bay. When soldiers raped at random, such diseases and infections were problematic and difficult to control; however, sex camps made this manageable. Dr. Aso Tetsuo, a former military surgeon with a gynecology background, was one of the first to observe the medical conditions of the comfort women system. In 1938, Dr. Aso examined 100 women working at the "recreation centre" and concluded,

Those to be examined were 80 women from the Peninsula [a term for Koreans often used to avoid reference to nationality] and 20 or so from the Homeland (Japan proper). Among those from the Peninsula, there was very little indication indeed of venereal disease, but those from the Homeland, although free of acute symptoms at present, were all extremely dubious. . . Care needs to be taken with the more jaded type of woman, whom I have repeatedly examined for syphilis and found clearly branded with a past history of venereal disease by the scars of bubo excisions on the groins. These are really dubious as gifts to the Imperial Forces (Hicks 1995: 34).

Dr. Aso's reflection further indicates how comfort women were viewed and what their designated wartime roles were. While those comfort women from Korea (Peninsula) showed few

signs of venereal diseases, those from Japan were more likely to be infected. Women who are “more jaded” need more care as they are evidently forgetful or careless. It is inappropriate to present the Imperial Forces with “dubious gifts.”

Third, as presented in official military documents, the most direct purpose of having sex slaves was “to encourage the spirit[s] of the soldiers” (Chung 1995: 14). The longer the War continued, the more it seemed Japanese soldiers were losing energy and faith in the fight. Their psychological states worsened, making it difficult to effectively and efficiently maintain occupied territory and further expand sovereignty. It was assumed that sexual deprivation was particularly harmful in making one more accident-prone. Sex, as a result, was the recreational activity known to relieve stress and counteract the deleterious effects of war (Chung 1995: 14; Hicks 1995: 32–3). Author of *The Emperor’s Forces and Korean Comfort Women*, Kim Il Myon, illustrates this:

To soldiers in the frontline, ever surrounded by the sounds of guns, wrapped in smoke stinking of death and not knowing when death would come . . . a visit to the comfort station was no doubt the only form of relief. It was the only kind of individual act in which one was ‘liberated.’ Theirs was a prison-like existence, their eardrums daily ringing from blows. The comfort station was where they were at least temporarily ‘liberated’ from the savagery of the unit. It was their ‘oasis’ (Hicks 1995: 33).

It was believed that the sexual comfort of a woman would relieve stress and tension, consequently allowing Japanese men to focus on the important military tasks at hand.

Evidently, sex within the Japanese Army became a ritual of sorts. It evolved into a rite of passage that all men though were entitled to and a superstitious belief that sex before battle would keep Japanese soldiers safe from wartime injuries. Good luck charms were even “made with pubic hair of comfort women, or from something belonging to them” (Hicks 1995: 32). Those who remained “aloof,” or virgins, were considered odd and unusual. In a recorded incident, for example, a soldier who had never been to the *ianjo* was forcibly taken by a fellow

comrade “who then watched through holes in the wall” (Hicks 1995: 33). An excerpt from the War Ministry summarizes the Japanese rationale:

. . . care must be taken into [sic] regard to suitable living conditions and comfort facilities. In particular the psychological influence received from sexual comfort stations is most direct and profound and it must be realised how greatly their appropriate direction and supervision affect the raising of morale, the maintenance of discipline and the prevention of crime and venereal disease (Hicks 1995: 33).

This was all was done under the pretense of concern psychological health and wellbeing. But men are the focus of analysis, and the stresses and hardships of war on women were never considered.

Deceit and Coercion in Comfort Women Recruitment

The previous section mentions Japan’s rationale for creating *ianfu* and *ianjo*. This section will complement the ongoing argument and I will show in more depth how and why the comfort women system was deceitful and coercive.

First, to claim that *ianfu* were volunteer prostitutes for the Imperial Army, but this is simply false. These women were deceitfully recruited by the Government of Japan and Army. They are victims of human trafficking and rape in a system of sex slavery. Recruitment of *ianfu* focused heavily on Korean communities, and it was a process dependent on not only the Japanese State but also outside players, like Korean and Japanese police and local government (Hicks 1995: 20; Tanaka 2002: 38).

The exact number of *ianjo* and *ianfu* remains unclear, but the Department of Police Affairs in Northern China in July 1939 recorded about 8,931 geishas, prostitutes, and barmaids. Presumably, many, if not most, of these women were comfort women. This total most likely also does not include all of the comfort women recruited by the Japanese army (Tanaka 2002, 16). Major Yamazaki Masao, a staff officer, says more:

As [Chinese] women are still afraid [of the Japanese soldiers], not many want to work here, and the service is not good enough. However, if we assure them that their lives are safe, we pay an appropriate amount of money, and we do not make them work hard, I expect women will come to work one after another. The military police are unofficially saying that they will recruit 100 . . . (Tanaka 2002, 13).

Women were uncomfortable, but with some money and the illusion of safety and protection, they would be convinced otherwise. The concept of “recruitment” may sound innocent, but a closer look suggests otherwise. One wonders how they plan to recruit as many as 100 women under such unfavorable circumstances. This marks the origin of comfort women and comfort stations. Though not explicitly affirmed, the journal entry suggests a certain degree of coercion and exploitation in the recruitment of women.

There were two methods to this procedure: 1) recruiting agents were sometimes hired by the Army to “secure a specific number of women” or 2) they were “commissioned by . . . brothel owners/managers to actually procure women sub-contractor” (Tanaka 2002: 38). In a typical scenario, a Japanese or Korean *ianjo* manager would travel to Korea, somewhere like Pusan or Incheon, on business. He would usually stay in a local inn for a few weeks or months, slowly recruiting more and more women until he had enough. The recruiter would travel from city to city, collecting local Korean women with him. A popular location to enlist women were schools, where “many of the victims were children ages fourteen to eighteen—so that the military could ensure their virginity” (Fisher 2015; Coomaraswamy 1996). On average, each trip yielded in about forty to fifty women. Once enough women were secured, the sub-contractor would return to China with the women (Howard 1995; Tanaka 2002: 38).

The women were then shipped to military bases and occupied lands to serve the Imperial Army. Majority of the young women used as comfort women were unassuming and naïve, drafted into the system against their wills (Hicks 1995: 20). Though one could argue that comfort

women understood the workings of the comfort women system and even “sign[ed] an ‘agreement,’” there was a sweeping misconception of what this demanded (Hicks 1995: 20). Any form of recognition or consent given by the women were arguably meaningless. Many of the women were trafficked to the front lines in China and locked in three-by-five barracks to be raped up to sixty to seventy times a day (Fisher 2015). No one could have agreed to such conditions.

Furthermore, research conducted by Jong Jingsong (1993) explains the most common form of recruiting Korean women, particularly those of poor, peasant families, was through false promises and deceit. Jong researched 175 comfort women, and of these women, 105 claim to have been recruited from rural areas in Cholla Provinces and Kyongsang, Korea. As these women were the easiest to target and manipulate, they were the most popular. A recruiter would approach a young Korean woman from a poor family with promise of work, usually “as a factory worker, assistant nurse, laundry worker, kitchen helper or the like,” abroad in Japan or Japanese territories (Tanaka 2002: 38). Once the woman agreed to the work, she would then stay with the recruiter, eating good food and receiving great care and comfort, till their moment of departure. During this time, the women would not find out where they were going or what kind of work they would be doing until arriving at the comfort station (Jong 1993; Tanaka 2002: 38). It was noted in a Japanese military document that “personnel in charge of drafting women must be selected with great care to minimize commotion during the process” (Chung 1995: 19).

Very little known was about *ianfu* prior to 1991 when Kim Hak-sun and two other survivors, who chose to remain anonymous, testified about former Japan’s human rights violations. The testimonies of these three survivors provide personal, historical accounts of the comfort women system during World War II. Their stories are marked by coercion, forcible

detainment, and human trafficking. The first of the three testimonies is Kim's, as was described above. Kim grew up in a poor family, and her parents had no choice but to give their daughter up for adoption. At the age of fourteen, Kim's adopted father, enrolled Kim to a "prostitute training school, from which she graduated in 1939 at the age of seventeen" (Sato 2014: 263). Promptly after, Kim, by the instructions of her foster father, was transported to China to find a "good job" (Sato 2014: 263). Upon arrival, "Kim was locked up in a house and made to serve ten to thirty soldiers daily" (Sato 2014: 263). She eventually ran away with a Korean man (Sato 2014: 263).

Plaintiff A, one of the two anonymous survivors, also shared her story. She lived in Pusan, Korea when she was taken to Japan. Plaintiff A left her house to witness the first elevator in a Japanese department store. Here, she met two men, one Japanese and the other Korean, who convinced her to travel abroad with promises of a new job in a Japanese textile factory. Though hesitant, the woman agreed to follow the men. Upon boarding a ship, Plaintiff A, concerned, expressed her wish to return home. Plaintiff A was "forcibly detained" and taken to Rabaul where she "joined about twenty other women working as *ianfu* in a church building" (Sato 2014: 263).

The second *ianfu*, Plaintiff B, similar to Plaintiff A, was also lied to with promise of work. A Korean man came to her village with news of work abroad. The man bribed the woman with thirty or forty yen. She accepted the money, gave it to her mother, and followed the man only to be taken to Shanghai where a Japanese soldier drove her and other women to a nearby *ianjo* (Sato 2014: 263). The lawsuit alleged that the "military authorities approved the establishment of *ianjo*" and that "most of the women were deceived into becoming *ianfu* and subsequently forced to provide sexual services to soldiers" (Sato 2014: 262). All three women

claim were coerced, lied to, and/or forcibly held against their will. They are victims of human trafficking.

The testimonies of Kim and the two survivors were met with much backlash and rejection from the Government of Japan and its conservative word; however, as Jong's research coincides with the stories of Kim, Plaintiff A, and Plaintiff B, this further supports that the comfort women system was a deceitful one. There may have been a variety of ways in which women were recruited, but each method of recruitment indicates practices of human trafficking. This is best explained in four categories: 1) recruitment by violence, including threats of violence and the misuse of power, 2) false promises of employment, 3) abduction, 4) human traffic" (Chung 1995: 19). According to international regulations available during this time, "taking anybody through deceit, violence, threat, misuse of power or any other coercive means" is an act of "forced drafting," or human trafficking (Chung 1995: 18).

It is significant the comfort women were part of an overall system. It matters little if the women were recruited by individual agents, the Army, or even the Government. Those involved shared the same goal of attracting women to *ianjo*. Methods and procedures in doing so may differ, but this does not suggest some are innocent while others are not. In other words, even if the Government did not directly recruit comfort women, it is still just as much at fault as would be a recruiter. Though it had yet to be branded a "crime against humanity" at the time, it falls nothing short of violation and defiance of basic human rights.

Who were the Comfort Women?

This following section will describe in more depth who comfort women were and where they came from, based on scholar Chin Sung Chung (1995), using the interviews of nineteen survivors, provides valuable information. Though it should be noted that the testimonies of these

nineteen do not provide a complete depiction of the all women and the comfort system, they do, to an extent, provide insight otherwise unknown.

Due to the lack of surviving comprehensive records, the total number of *ianfu* remains largely speculated, ranging from 20,000 to 410,000. These numbers have been estimated by extrapolating the number of soldiers during the War. Existing records suggest each *ianfu* would have served an average of thirty Japanese at any given time and that each *ianfu* was probably replaced and rotated about three times during the entirety of the war for various reasons, including escape, illness, maybe death. This suggests there to have been roughly 410,000 comfort women. Some scholars, however, argue there to have only been 20,000 women on the basis that there were about 2.5 million soldiers who had access to *ianjo* (Sato 2014: 262). Either way, Senda Kako, “one of the earliest researchers on military comfort women,” confirms roughly 90 percent of *ianfu* were Korean, and *ianjo* "existed in Japan, China, the Philippines, Indonesia, the then Malaya, Thailand, the then Burma, the then New Guinea, Hong Kong, Macao and the then French Indo-China" (Coomaraswamy 1996: 29). These findings, despite their vagueness, are supported by official documents, previous interviews, and information revealed by the Seoul-based Fact Finding Committee for Coercively Drafted Koreans (Chung 1995: 16).

Moreover, Japanese historian Yoshimi Yoshaiki suggests the Japanese Government targeted Korean women for legal reasons. According to the ratified treaties of the time, Japan could, if needed, construe the situation so that it was not violating international laws or bans. Japan ratified the International Convention for the Suppression of White Slave Traffic (1910) and the International Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic of Women and Children (1912), but purposely failed to include colonies in the agreements, effectively removing Korea and Taiwan (colonies of Japan at the time) from the agreements. Surviving Korean *ianjo* Park

Ok-sun explains this in response: “We were taken to the military brothel by the Japanese military mainly because our country, colonized by Japan, was not strong enough to protect us. Therefore, this is not our individual problem, but our nation's problem” (Min 2003, 945). Legally speaking, Japan was not violating international law. Having effectively created a loophole, the Japanese government was deceitfully authorized to traffic young Korean and Taiwanese women for sexual slavery.

While the legal age for prostitution in Japan was 18 and in Korea 17, such rules were ignored for comfort women. There simply were no age restrictions. One of the nineteen women interviewed by Chung was only 11 when she was taken to Taiwan. Though she spent the first four years running errands for the comfort stations till she was 15 years of age, she still lived and worked in a sex camp. A second woman was 13 when she was taken to a fabric factory in Tokyo. She worked here for two years until she relocated to a comfort station in Osaka, Japan. Chung continues that of the nineteen interviewed, ‘one was 11 when taken, one 14, two 15, five 16, four 17, two 18, two 19, one 21, and one 22” (1995: 17-8).

Most of the *ianfu* were the daughters of poor families. They also usually had very little education. Four of the nineteen had no history of education, four had attended night school, ten received elementary school-level learning, and one was still attending secondary school when taken from home. Furthermore, only one of the nineteen was married (Chung 1995: 18).

As sex workers, the women had a strict set of rules and fees. While the ratings differed for officers based on rank and commission, Korean women typically served soldiers of lower rank and file. The Japanese women were reserved for officers. In one particular station in 1942, those of lower rank and file were charged 1 yen/30 minutes and 2 yen/one hour while non-commissioned officers were charged 1.5 and 2.5 yen respectively. Officers, on the other hand,

were charged 3 yen and 4 yen. To stay overnight cost 8 yen. Despite this, comfort women were not always paid for their services. Only three of the nineteen women interviewed say they were paid with money or tickets. Seven women remember they were forced to give their earnings to the comfort station manager. Only one comfort woman was able to collect enough savings to mail home to her family. It should also be noted that while Korean women were less expensive than were Japanese. Chinese women were the cheapest (Chung 1995: 21).

According to the testimony of former soldiers, there would be between twenty to thirty soldiers waiting for their turn with comfort women. While soldiers were given visitations of thirty minutes or one hour, most men only needed a few minutes. In extreme cases, comfort women remember “serv[ing] 100 men in a single day” (Chung 1995: 21). Weekends were an especially popular time. Fees also varied according to rank and visiting hours.

Comfort women were also required to undergo medical examinations to prevent unwanted pregnancies and the spread of venereal diseases. Soldiers were sometimes requested to use condoms. Should a soldier refuse, comfort women were instructed to report this to proprietors. A common rule was to reuse a condom five times before discarding it. In some instances, women were asked to reuse condoms by washing them again and again. If injected or diseased, women were treated with an injection known as No. 606. Sometimes they would be given several days’ rest, but other times, *ianfu* were required to serve while still ill. Medical examinations ensured venereal diseases were kept at bay, but *ianfu* doctors neglected other pains and discomforts. Comfort women reportedly also suffered from malaria, jaundice, mental disorders, and/or vaginal swelling. In the case of a pregnancy, women were given abortions or instructed to give the children to an orphanage (Chung 1995: 22–3).

The experiences of three Korean *ianfu*, Kum Ju Hwang, Chong Ok Sun, and Hwang So Gyun, help readers better understand *ianjo* practices and medical requirements. Kum tells her story beginning with the moment of recruitment to her time as a comfort women. Seventy-three years old at the time of her testimony, Kum illustrates:

I thought I was drafted as a labour worker when, at the age of 17, the Japanese village leader's wife ordered all unmarried Korean girls to go to work at a Japanese military factory. I worked there for three years, until the day that I was asked to follow a Japanese soldier into his tent. He told me to take my clothes off. I resisted because I was so scared, I was still a virgin. But he just ripped my skirt and cut my underwear from my body with a gun which had a knife attached to it. At that point I fainted. And when I woke up again, I was covered with a blanket but there was blood everywhere.

From then on, I realized that during the first year I, like all the other Korean girls with me, was ordered to service high-ranking officials, and as time passed, and as we were more and more "used," we served lower-ranking officers. If a woman got a disease, she usually vanished. We were also given "606-shots" so that we would not get pregnant or that any pregnancies would result in miscarriage.

We only received clothes two times per year and not enough food, only rice cakes and water. I was never paid for my "services," I worked for five years as a "comfort woman," but all my life I suffered from it. My intestines are mostly removed because they were infected so many times, I have not been able to have intercourse because of the painful and shameful experiences. I cannot drink milk or fruit juices without feeling sick because it reminds me too much of those dirty things they made me do (Coomaraswamy 1996: 15).

Kum's experience is utterly distressing. Like many other *ianfu*, Kum was tricked with the promise of a job and wage. For three years she worked in Japan, till she was raped while unconscious by a Japanese soldier. Though she cannot remember being raped, she woke up bloody, presumably because she was a virgin. Young and new, Kum served high-ranking military men. As she grew older and more "used," Kum served low-ranking soldiers. She and the other women underwent medical examinations. Those who were diseased, simply "vanished," or were possibly killed. As if these women were sex toys or mere objects, *ianfu* were objectified and discarded. Dejected with emotional, physical, mental pain, Kum reflects she can no longer

have intercourse or eat certain foods. Even some animals receive better treatment than Kum did.

Kum's body, mind, and soul are irreparably damaged.

The next is Chong's story:

There were around 400 other Korean young girls with me and we [collectively] had to serve over 5,000 Japanese soldiers as sex slaves every day – up to 40 men per day [individually]. Each time I protested, they hit me or stuffed rags in my mouth. One held a matchstick to my private parts until I obeyed him. One Korean girl caught a venereal disease from being raped so often and, as a result, over 50 Japanese soldiers were infected. In order to stop the disease from spreading and to “sterilize” the Korean girl, they stuck a hot iron bar in her private parts (Coomaraswamy 1996: 13–4).

As if the horror of being raped an average of forty times a day is not already sickening, Chong and her associates were tortured and battered. Kum had her dress ripped off with a bayonet while Chong was inflicted with pain till she succumbed. Chong's counterpart was further mutilated. Attempting to encapsulate the hardship of *ianfu* is a near-impossible task. There simply are no words that can justly retell the comfort women struggle.

The last testimony of this section is Hwang's. She says,

When I was 17 years old, in 1936, the head of our village came to our house and promised me to help me find a job in a factory. Because my family was so poor, I gladly accepted this offer of a well-paid job. I was taken to the railway station in a Japanese truck where 20 or so other Korean girls were already waiting. We were put on the train, then onto a truck and after a few days' travel we reached a big house at the River Mudinjian in China. I thought it was the factory, but I realized that there was no factory. Each girl was assigned one small room with a straw bag to sleep on, with a number on each door.

After two days of waiting, without knowing what was happening to me, a Japanese soldier in army uniform, wearing a sword, came to my room. He asked me “will you obey my words or not?,” then pulled my hair, put me on the floor and asked me to open my legs. He raped me. When he left, I saw there were 20 or 30 more men waiting outside. They all raped me that day. From then on, every night I was assaulted by 15 to 20 men.

We had to undergo medical examinations regularly. Those who were found disease-stricken were killed and buried in unknown places. One day, a new girl was put in the compartment next to me. She tried to resist the men and bit one of them in his arm. She was then taken to the courtyard and in front of all of us, her head was cut off with a sword and her body was cut into small pieces (Coomaraswamy 1996: 14–5).

According to Kum, Chong, and Hwang, all three women faced relatively similar experiences. What is common in most of these *ianfu* narratives is that *ianjo* proprietors and recruiters would lure young girls with guarantees of work and money. Because many of these girls were daughters of poor families, they complied. If girls wanted to leave and return home, they were forcibly held against their will. Upon arrival to the comfort stations, *ianfu* were ushered into barracks resembling a series of individual rooms. Though the number of Japanese soldiers tend to vary, it seems comfort women were required to serve up to twenty or thirty men a day. All *ianfu* were subjected to medical examinations as well as physical abuse and torture. Chong says girls with diseases “vanished” and Hwang reiterates this as well. She says disease-stricken *ianfu* were killed and castoff, they no longer served a purpose to the Government of Japan or its Imperial Army. When Hwang’s friend refused to submit, she was brutally killed in front of the other *ianfu*. She was made into a spectacle and example to strike fear and obedience.

Nevertheless, more than just female victims of war, *ianfu* are survivors. Lee Oksun says she did not survive the War because she wanted to. She lived because that is how her life unfolded. This was true for Kim Hak-sun as well. She also said because she lived, she told her *ianfu* story to the world.

The Comfort Stations

Ianjo were diverse, and Soh describes three different forms of comfort facilities: concessionary, paramilitary, and criminal. Concessionary refers to “commercial houses of assignation and prostitution run by civilian concessionaries to make money” (Soh 2008: 117). “Contractually regulated,” these comfort women fulfilled functions like sexual services and entertainment for military men. Civilian entrepreneurs, Korean and Japanese, usually profited off of concessionary establishments. In contrast, paramilitary *ianjo* “operated as not-for-profit

recreational facilities, run by the paternalistic military to control the troops through regulated access to sex” (Soh 2008: 118). These also made a financial profit of sorts, but this was not the main aim. Both the concessionary and paramilitary facilities were operated under strict medical restrictions to ensure venereal diseases and sex crimes were kept at a minimum. The third category, criminal *ianjo*, enabled sex crimes by Japanese troops against local women “employed” as *ianfu*. These facilities were “run by soldiers . . . in the battlefield [who] confined women in enemy territory in sexual enslavement after either rape and abduction or coercive procurement” (Soh 2008: 118). According to Soh, the motive behind this facility came from soldiers seeking to relieve their sexual needs at will and for free (Soh 2008: 118).

Concessionary *Stations*

The concessionary *ianjo* is a combination of two subtypes: the House of Entertainment and the House of Prostitution. The House of Entertainment originated from Japan’s original “pleasure quarters” and were often implicit and masked under the veil of ordinary businesses, like lofts, restaurants, etc. These establishments often provided goods, such as food and beverages as well as “heterosexual entertainment and prostitution,” for military men and personnel, both former and current (Soh 2008: 119). It was a business strictly regulated and controlled to ensure both safety and profit. Japanese women were paid 1.5 yen while Korean and Chinese were paid 1 yen. As the men visiting the entertainment houses were “most concerned with the prevention of venereal disease,” they required the women to undergo weekly medical checks (Soh 2008: 119).

Korean survivor Mun Myung-gum describes her experience in an Entertainment House. Mun was recruited as a comfort woman by a Korean man in his fifties (Soh 2008: 120). The room assigned to Mun was “simple yet clean” with Japanese style decorations. During the first

few days, Mun simply relaxed by the request of her employer. Having come from a rural Korean village, she remembers admiring the establishment's convenient bathroom facilities and clean running water. It was not till days later she understood the true nature of her work in the comfort station, and by then, it was too late to return home (Soh 2008: 120).

The House of Prostitution is the second form of concessionary *ianjo*. Though these facilities were organized and owned by civilians, they were closely linked with the State and military. The Government of Japan may presently deny such allegations, but there is convincing evidence that suggests otherwise. Former military policeman Ichikawa Ichiro claims that "military comfort stations were run by civilian entrepreneurs" and that he and other military men supervised. This is from Ichiro:

"I thought vaguely that *ianjo* was a place where soldiers went to relax and enjoy themselves. In addition to the two military *ianjo* I supervised, there were *minkan ianjo* [private or civilian comfort station] as well as many special restaurants where prostitution took place. However, officers also went to military *ianjo*, since they were cheaper than civilian ones" (Soh 2008: 121).

Ichiro's excerpt suggests that the military shares great responsibility in creating *ianjo*. The soldiers needed a place for relaxation and satisfaction, and as such, *ianjo* were created.

Paramilitary Stations

Soh's second category of comfort stations is the paramilitary *ianjo*, further divided into two subtypes: The Maiden's Auxiliary and The Quasi-Brothel. The Auxiliaries were located in remote frontline areas where women played a larger role than that of sex slaves. These comfort women, in addition to sexually serving men, were also expected to perform a series of feminine gender roles, including manual labor. In contrast, the Brothels differed slightly in that the women were not required to do manual labor. Both types of paramilitary facilities, as suggested by women's testimonies, were products of human trafficking (Soh 2008: 124).

The Maidens' Division is said to have started around the early 1930s following the Manchurian Incident. Local women were recruited to help around with odd jobs and tasks in service to the Japanese Army. Similar to the euphemistic term *ianfu*, the Maidens' Division was referred to as "special platoon" (*tokushu shotai*), or as "girls' army." These comfort women were so essential to the Army and State that they were even issued official navy documents required for international travels. As Soh explains, comfort women of this kind were known as "nurses as tender as wives" who tended to wounded soldiers" (Soh 2008: 145).

Korean survivor Ch'oe Il-rye worked in this Division. Ch'oe explains she and five other girls around her age arrived in Manchuria during the winter season. It was somewhere on a battlefield where soldiers had built poor semblances of shelter with plywood and tent material. These were the men's barracks. Off to the side, women had their own establishment surrounded by wire fences and male guards. Each woman had her own room. Ch'oe notes that she and the other Koreans were given new names. Ch'oe became Haruko, and this was meant to symbolize assimilation into Japan's colonialism (Soh 2008: 126).

Ianfu in the Maiden's Division, like Ch'oe, were assigned to tasks like nursing, cleaning, and laundering. Ch'oe explained she sent the men off to war and cleaned their wounds when they returned. If soldiers died in battle, she would attend the funeral service and pay her respects by wearing black hats and kimonos (traditional Japanese attire). In other instances, she took on the role of barmaid and served and drank alcohol with the Japanese soldiers. Though there was no regular form of payment, she did receive the occasional tip amounting to two to three yen (Soh 2008: 126). However, much more was required from her than the role of caretaker. To be an *ianfu* is to be a sex slave, and as such, Ch'oe was forced to have sex with soldiers and undergo

medical examinations. After her first examination, Ch'oe was summoned by a high-ranking officer:

Until then I had no knowledge about the male sexual organ, let alone about coitus. The officer raped me, and I tried to accept everything as my fate. I recall about thirty of us women resided scattered across the huge military compound. We gathered together for weekly medical examinations on a weekday when we did not serve soldiers (Soh 2008: 126).

For thirteen years, Ch'oe took care of the Imperial Army by doing a variety of “women’s roles.” She remembers life continued to worsen more towards the end of the War when goods were scarce and there was too little food. Luckily, Ch'oe was able to escape the War. She explains,

. . . an officer whom I served regularly told me to flee without telling the other women. He provided me with three white identification cards and explained to me in detail how to run away. I followed his instructions and was able to make it. By the time I arrived in Seoul, Korea was liberated. Then I returned to my hometown right away (Soh 2008: 126–7).

The second arrangement of the paramilitary system is the Quasi-Brothel, and it also started around 1938. Kim Hak-sun was located in a Quasi-Brothel. Though parts of her story have already been shared, her experience further supplements the comfort women case. After arriving to Beijing, Kim was hustled by Japanese soldiers and physically lifted and placed into a truck with about forty to fifty other girls. This is the rest of her experience:

During the journey, when shooting was heard, everyone got off and crouched underneath the truck. We were given balls of cooked rice during the ride. At dusk the following day we got off the truck and were taken to a house. Later in the evening, the officer came to take me to an adjoining room, divided only by a curtain. He forced himself upon me. During the night, he raped me again. . . .

If we wished to go out [of the *ianjo*], the sentinel of the military unit located next to the house would check us. Each room had bed covered by a blanket and a basic by the door. We wore cotton underwear that had been discarded by the soldiers. From time to time, they would bring us clothes acquired from abandoned Chinese houses. When the soldiers came to the house, they chose the rooms of the women they fancied. As a result, each of us had regular customers. They varied in the way they treated us. While some

would knock me around [with exhaustion] at the end of the thirty minutes, others would be quite gentle. One ordered me to suck his sexual organs while holding my head between his legs. Another asked me to wash his sexual organ after intercourse. Sometimes when I resisted out of disgust, I would end up being roundly beaten.

The women at my place were not furnished with condoms. Instead, soldiers brought their own. And once a week, a military doctor from the rear would come with an assistant to conduct routine medical check-ups. When he was busy, he would sometimes miss a visit. We had no set holidays and had to serve soldiers even during menstrual periods. After a month, I began to realize that the same men kept coming back, and that there were no new soldiers. Usually, they would come in the afternoon for about half an hour, but when they had been out on punitive expeditions, they would return in the early hours of the morning, singing as they marched, and we had to be up early to serve them, usually at about seven or eight. Soldiers who came in the afternoon would stay for about thirty minutes each. When they visited us in the evening, they would often come drunk and demand that we entertain them by singing or dancing.

After about two months, the military unit moved in a great hurry one morning. We were told to ride in the truck with the soldiers. The new place was not too far away, but it seemed to be further out in the countryside. We could hear much more shooting than in the previous location. The house was smaller, and a fewer soldiers came. The military doctor seldom visited the new place. Soldiers went on expeditions more frequently than before, and quite few of them brought bottles of alcohol with them when they visited us in the morning after such trips. Life seemed more miserable than before, and I continued to look for ways to escape as I did before the move.

One day a Korean itinerant merchant of about forty years of age managed to sneak into my room. Upon confirming that he was a fellow Korean, I appealed to his sense of ethnic solidarity, begging him to take me with him. After servicing his sexual desire, I desperately pleaded again with the rather reluctant compatriot before I was able to flee with him. We became man and wife, and I gave birth to a daughter and son before our return to Korea in 1946 (Soh 2008: 128–30).

Unlike the Ch'oe in the Auxiliary, Kim was not required to launder, clean, or nurse. Still, Kim's experience is not so different from other *ianfu*. She was kept against her will and repeatedly raped during her time as a comfort woman.

Criminal Stations

The final form is criminal *ianjo*. Criminal comfort stations were created on battlefield locations in occupied territories, such as the Philippines; however, unlike the two categories previously mentioned, this particular organization lacked in health regulations and “hygienic considerations” as formerly insisted by military authorities (Soh 2008, 130). What is especially

notable about these facilities is that they gained prominence during the last months of World War II. Personal accounts suggest that these women were “caught by soldiers and raped in the field before being brought to a garrison, where they were forced into sexual slavery” (Soh 2008: 131). Twenty-two Filipino women have described their involvement with criminal *ianjo*. While some endured the sexual violence for a few weeks or several months, other women were held for a year or more. Most of the women were able to escape in secret or when American forces intervened and began bombing Japanese territory (Soh 2008: 131). Like Kim Hak-sun and Lee Ok-sun, Filipina survivors are among the litigants demanding honesty from the Japanese government.

Maria Rosa Henson (1927-1997) was Filipina survivor. She, in 1992, was the first Filipina to out herself as an *ianfu* working in a criminal *ianjo*. Henson explains she “was carrying food and medicine to help the Filipino guerrilla movement when a Japanese soldier at a checkpoint took her at gunpoint to a comfort station . . . located on the second floor of the building that had been the town hospital but had been turned into the ‘Japanese headquarters and garrison’” in April 1943 (Soh 2008: 131). In what Henson describes as an “impromptu rape camp,” there were six other women living in small rooms with bamboo beds, curtains, and no doors. Soldiers stood guard, wielding bayonets and making sure no one escaped. The day following, a soldier entered Henson’s room, pointing a weapon to Henson’s chest and demanding sex. Henson claims the soldier “used his bayonet to tear her dress open before he raped her. When he was finished, other soldiers took turns” raping her as well (Soh 2008: 131).

Perhaps one way of deciphering Henson’s experience and criminal *ianjo* is by comparing it to another case study. Soh states Henson’s “rape centers” are similar to those witnessed in the Bosnian Conflict, “at least on the surface” (Soh 2008: 131). Though the crimes committed during

World War II and the Balkan War are fundamentally different, Korean activists and comfort women have, in the past, described the comfort women case as a mass execution of women (Soh 2008: 131; Park 2014). During the Balkan War, the Serbian military and its soldiers committed rape as a tool of ethnic cleansing. Women were forcibly impregnated and used as a public display to slowly yet effectively eradicate a people from the area. Some rapes were even recorded and exposed as “sexual spectacles” for war propaganda as mass consumption (Soh 2008: 131). The comfort women case, on the other hand, though it has been described as “a genocidal act,” was more about the “sexual release and satisfaction” of the Japanese soldiers in a time of war (Soh 2008: 131). Japan’s intent was more about sexual fulfillment.

During the outset of the Manchurian Invasion, comfort stations started as a form of entertainment in urban areas and later at remote front lines. These are the concessionary comfort stations. After the Rape of Nanking, however, the comfort stations transitioned to paramilitary ones. There was an increase of troops and local Japanese resentment increased, demanding a more closed, secure form of sexual labor. Finally, towards the end of the war, criminal *ianjo* emerged, embodying “violent military hypermasculine sexuality” (Soh 2008: 134). This depicts the complications of the comfort women system. No longer can this case be viewed as a simple incident with a simple solution. There were deep, underlying workings of corruption, coercion, and domination. Throughout the thirteen years of World War II, the comfort women system adapted and evolved to ensure Japan’s soldiers received their release and satisfaction.

This explains who *ianfu* were and what they endured in *ianjo*. Testimonies, like the ones used throughout this section, are the same stories shared with the current Japanese State in hopes of establishing peace and justice in the comfort women case.

The Comfort Women's Testimonies

Kim Hak-sun and other survivors have been repeatedly asked why they waited so long to testify. Those who are familiar with the consequences and aftermath of rape would not ask such an insensitive question. Though rape in war is not unique, the comfort women case is not unique, it is special. It is crucial to be considerate and patient when learning and understanding the *ianfu* issue. It is unfair for anyone, whether it be the Japanese Government or *ianfu* dissenters, to interrogate, chastise, and deny these survivors. Even if there is a point of disagreement, the least one can do is listen and simply respect the lives and dignities of the women.

Still, researchers, like Dr. Yolanda Moses of the University of California, have suggested answers as to why *ianfu* waited so long to testify. In some instances, societies tend to hold men to a higher esteem, consequently devaluing women. This is relevant within the comfort women context. The intricacies of the Korean history and culture provide some insight as to why survivors struggled to come out. Korea, like many other Asian countries, has been and still is for the most part intrinsically socially conservative (Fisher 2015). Considered to be “one of the leading institutions of modern society,” South Korea adapted in a way that “[brought] about women’s self-awakening and subsequent efforts to shake loose the yoke of patriarchy” (Soh 2008: 4). The twentieth century may have caused great changes for South Korean girls and young women in the form of formal education, but conservative notions and ideals remain dominant. In a society that is historically and culturally patriarchal and male-controlled, education was the channel needed to create female awareness and agency. This form of female empowerment came grave political implications.

Dr. Moses continues that when women victims accuse men of assault, the female accusers are sometimes reversibly blamed. The women become the guilty and are “accused of

‘ruining’ the man” who is actually at wrong (Miller 2016). This is more than simply assuming the aggressor is innocent or that the victim is lying. Rather, there is an underlying notion that the victim is at fault and to be blamed for the assault. The “outdated cultural belief that ‘good women don’t get raped’” is a pertinent one, continues Miller (Miller 2016). When the victim is pressured and blamed, this shifts sides with the perpetrator (Miller 2016).

Compiled and edited by Keith Howard, *True Stories of the Korean Comfort Women* describes life after the War and Korea’s liberation. Many of the Korean women who survived to return home were unable to re-adapt and remained unhappy. One of the women featured is Mun Okchu. She recalls being shunned and shamed for her past.

Nearing the end of her life, Mun speaks,

I had only been back a short while when my aunt by marriage – my uncle’s wife – visited and said they couldn't allow someone like me [an *ianfu*] to stay at home and disgrace the family. I was not treated as a human being by my relatives. I was sad and upset, but I quickly grew bold, telling them to mind their own business. I didn’t pay much attention to what they thought of me. . . .

But since I have now poured out my life story to you I feel much more easy. I will be able to sleep and eat much better. Until last year, . . . I kept China to myself. I was so ashamed of what had happened that I did not want to let other people know anything about it. So I told people what had happened sparingly. Now that everyone knows the story, however, I feel I have nothing to fear. So, now I have told you everything about myself, I can rest easily (Howard 1995: 113–4).

Just as Dr. Moses suspected, Mun was treated as if she had committed a wrong. Though her relatives did not directly accuse her, they did blame her for something out of Mun’s control. Mun lived in concealment, fearing isolation the negative judgments of others. While Mun fortunately felt elevated at the end of her testimony, not all comfort women experienced the same relief. Some women expressed fear of the consequences of revealing their past, worrying how family and friends would perceive (Howard 1995).

Dr. Moses continues, “speaking out about an instance of assault can be very painful and cause personal embarrassment” (Miller 2016). Testifying, explaining, and sharing an experience of sexual assault or violence is an act of verbally, mentally, emotionally reliving the incident. The act of reliving may be repeated over and over again when the victim is asked to retell the experience to the family and friends, police, juries, etc. This can be especially disturbing if others do not believe the victim and instead side with the aggressor. The situation becomes more complicated if the “victim is accusing a high-power individual in society, or something who has power over [his/her] life” (Miller 2016). Dr. Moses concludes that the “There’s a burden from society upon people who speak out” (Miller 2016).

This is true for Korean survivor Yi Sangok. Also in Howard’s collection of *ianfu* stories, Yi expresses her pains. Though her physical injuries are notable, her emotional and mental agonies are grave. Yi says,

Whenever I think of the events of the past or talk about them, I get headaches and am unable to sleep for many nights. Even if I cry aloud, I don’t think I can feel relieved. My anger has become a kind of disease. It shoots through me, and even in the depths of winter I can only sleep with my door open. The doctor who sees me often tells me I must not be upset about my past. . . . These days I feel tired and cannot be bothered to do anything (Howard 1995: 133).

The difficulties victims face when “coming out” is unmistakable in the lives and actions of the comfort women case. Now, many South Koreans, men and women alike, look back on the first half of the twentieth century as a moment of weakness under Japanese colonialism. As evident in Mun, Yi, and the other survivors mentioned, shame and fear are relevant in determining whether or not victims testify.

This is also true for Kim Hak-sun. By confronting Japan, surviving comfort women were also demanding a formerly forgotten issue to be remembered and brought into the present. Had it

not been for Kim, Korean Hwang Kumju never would have shared her own story. For Hwang, Kim was a source of power and inspiration:

As times, I thought of ending my life, for it was too difficult to continue living on my own. . . . I wonder how I can live the rest of my life without continually being looked down upon and without being ill.

I have lived my life with a resentful heart. I have wanted to tell my government what I have had to suffer, but I haven't been given the opportunity. In November 1991, at 1.00 p.m., I watched Kim Haksun tell her story on national television. The following morning, I rang the number which had been shown, and met up with her. She showed me how to report what had happened to me.

I left home thinking I was doing my duty as a faithful child. But that action ruined my life. From now on, I would like to live the rest of my days without being ignored by others. It is my wish to help poor people and eventually to die with being a burden on others (Howard 1995: 78–9).

Kim's testimony was not just a cry for help and recognition, or a personal awakening. By means of confronting Japan, surviving comfort women were also demanding a formerly forgotten issue to be remembered and brought into the present. But Kim was traumatized beyond repair because of the comfort women system.

International Law and Human Rights

In light of the comfort women case, it is important to understand that human rights innate. Each person is inherently born with basic rights. Though the comfort women case took some time in officially being recognized as a crime against humanity, it still falls purview of human rights. The comfort women incident was a widespread and systematic human rights violation.

The United States is also, to an extent, responsible for the lack of *ianfu* justice. In 1945, the allies of the War held and apprehended war crimes to not only “punish those responsible but also to force historical accounting, so that the victims might feel [they had] received justice” (Fisher 2015). Arguably, this process was relatively successful in the case of Germany, at least in

comparison to that of the *ianfu*. These war tribunals sought justice and delivered it to the victims. In the case of Japan, however, the tribunals were more or less “dominated by Western powers,” focusing on Japan’s crimes against the Western people and their interests than against others, like Koreans. This is evident in the details of the case. There were eleven judges and only three were Asian despite the fact that the majority of aggressors and victims are Asian. It should also be noted that none of these three were Korean (Fisher 2015).

Historian John Dower describes the trial to have been “fundamentally a white man’s tribunal” (Fisher 2015; Dower 2000). He continues, “It was especially perverse that no Korean served as judge or prosecutor. . . . [Japan’s Asian victims] were not allowed to judge their former overlords or to participate in preparing the case against them. The plight of the Koreans was, in its way, emblematic of the larger anomaly of victor’s justice as practiced in Tokyo” (Fisher 2015; Dower 2000). While Germany’s victims had a say and were allowed to partake in the war crime investigations, this same courtesy was not extended to Koreans or other comfort victims. The comparison goes further: “the German Nazi-era system was completely abolished and Nazis themselves banned” (Fisher 2015). They were forced, albeit slowly, to address and acknowledge their past wrongs and to admit reconciliation to the point that Adolf Hitler became a “reviled figure” in his own country (Fisher 2015). Because Japan was not subject to a similar process, Koreans, unfortunately, were robbed of justice and any sense of closure.

It may be unfair to place the blame solely on the U.S., but they were, at the time and still are now, the leading power dominating justice dialogues and negotiations. During the time of the War, the American military occupied and was very much involved in Japan. There was a fear that, by “abolishing the Japanese government entirely, as [they had] done in Germany,” the United States would lose its bearings. Americans had to be careful and act cautiously. It was

decided that punishing the Japanese Government and its wartime leaders would harm Americans in the region. Historian Herbert Bix explains this had a lasting impact on not only Japan but also the greater global world. America's efforts in preserving Japan figuratively swept the intra-Asia conflict under a rug, hiding it from future discussions and progress. Bix says this "had a lasting and profoundly distorting impact on Japanese understanding of the lost war" (Fisher 2015; Bix 2016).

Perhaps this is why some Japanese politicians, historians, and civilians claim the comfort women "were not slaves but rather happy volunteers" (Fisher 2015). It is undeniable that there is some misunderstanding of history and distortion of justice (Fisher 2015). The crimes of the Japanese State may have happened seventy-five years ago, but there is a reason why these crimes feel recent and topical. The crimes against comfort women endure and will continue to do so until something has been done.

With no choice but to, the Government of Japan responded to the *ianfu* issue. Though reluctant, the State issued the Kono Statement in an attempt to acknowledge guilt and past wrongdoings. It essentially stated that the former Japanese military was both openly and implicitly involved in "the establishment and management of comfort stations and the transfer of women" and that "the women were recruited against their own will" to live "in misery at comfort stations under a coercive atmosphere" (Soh 2008: 44; Kono 1993). It also established the Asian Women's Fund for survivors (44). However, as if adding fuel to the flame, Japan's statement and the Fund sparked greater controversy and disappointment. Not all of Japan seemed to agree that an apology was in order, and comfort women were unsatisfied with the Fund. Donations for the Fund came from the Japanese people, not the Government. Though appreciative of Japanese donations, *ianfu* still saw this as the Government's inability, or reluctance, to sincerely

apologize. With Japanese conservatives “condemning [and] disputing Japanese guilt” and comfort women rejecting the Fund, there were a strong resistances from both sides (Soh 2008: 44; Fisher 2015). The current comfort women controversy may stem from past crimes against humanity and wartime rape, but it also has to do with Japan’s refusal to apologize to its former colonial subjects. *Ianfu* express that it is their right to receive a confession.

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The United Nations Report (1996)

A few years after the Kono Statement, the United Nations appointed a comfort women commission. As the United Nations is reaffirmed in the faith of “fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small”, its purpose is to essentially establish, among nations, respect and equal rights (Claude and Weston 1989: 21). Hopefully, the achieved end goal will be cooperation among and respect for all in the international world. Perhaps optimistic or idealistic, the United Nations attempts to unite all regardless of race, language, sex, religion, etc. (Claude and Weston 1989: 21). This particular United Nations Commission will be used to analyze the comfort women case as a human rights violation and crime against humanity. As this is after *ianfu* testimonies and the defining of “human rights,” this report provides necessary information in light of international law. The United Nations report is basically a compilation of photographs, records of comfort station regulations, and the testimonies of sixteen women. Though little documentation exists, obtainable records are meticulous and thorough, accurately depicting what the life of an *ianfu* in and *ianjo* would have been like (Coomaraswamy 1996: 6). Conclusively, this includes the definition of “comfort women,” the testimonies of sixteen Korean *ianfu*, and Japan’s response and future responsibilities. It should be noted that some of the women included in the United Nations’ report have already been introduced.

The Commission attempted to thoroughly define “comfort women”, describe the stations’ conditions, and assign moral responsibility to the parties involved. Coomaraswamy, the Special Rapporteur, establishes slavery as “the status of condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised’ in accordance with article 1 (1) of the 1926 Slavery Convention (Coomaraswamy 1996: 4). She continues to define the comfort women case and its practices:

. . .the practice of “comfort women” should be considered a clear case of sexual slavery and a slavery-like practice in accordance with the approach adopted by relevant international human rights bodies and mechanisms”, and this includes “the sexual exploitation of women and other forms of forced labour during wartime, . . . [and] of systematic rape, sexual slavery and slavery-like practice during wartime . . .

These women and girls were employed in a comfort station situated between Shanghai and Nanking, operated directly by the army. This station became the prototype for later stations and photographs of the station, as well as regulations for the users, are preserved. This station’s direct operation by the army did not continue as the norm for comfort stations in the more settled environment which followed when the phenomenon became more widespread. There were enough private civilians willing to run the stations and to see to their internal operation; they were given paramilitary status and rank by the army. The army remained responsible for transportation and the general overseeing of the stations, and matters such as health and general supervision remained the responsibility of the military (Coomaraswamy 1996: 4, 5).

The comfort women case is, as decreed by the United Nations, is a violation of human rights. It is important to note that, under international law, Imperial Japan and its Forces are responsible for creating a system of sexual slavery that trafficked, raped, and killed women. This includes detaining women against their wills, subjecting women to never-ending sexual violence and rape, and deteriorating women’s wellbeing and health while in the comfort stations. *Ianfu* deserve “restitution, compensation and rehabilitation of victims” (Coomaraswamy 1996: 4).

One of sixteen to testify about her first day at the *ianjo* is Hwang Kumju, previously mentioned. She was 73 years old in 1996. Hwang says Japanese soldiers told her there were only five simple orders she had to obey in order to live and survive. Hwang repeats what she was instructed: “firstly, the order of the Emperor; secondly, the order of the Japanese Government; thirdly, the army company she was attached to; fourthly, the subunit within that company and finally, his orders as the tenant of the tent where she was serving him” (Coomaraswamy 1996: 17). The first three mandates reveal how *ianjo* and *ianfu* were linked to the Imperial Government and Army. The final two suggest the women were expected to fully comply.

Chong Ok Sun, at the age of 74, is another survivor to have shared her story with the

United Nations. Chong reveals the abuse she endured during her time as an *ianfu*. Like Hwang's, part of Chong's testimony has already been included, but this particular memory is of another Korean *ianfu* stationed with Chong. The friend is not given a name. Annoyed and dejected with life as an *ianfu*, Chong's friend questioned why she and other girls had to serve so many men a day. Relentless, she demanded an answer but was consequently punished and brutally killed:

To punish her for her questioning, the Japanese company commander Yamamoto ordered her to be beaten with a sword. While we were watching, they took off her clothes, tied her legs and hands and rolled her over a board with nails until the nails were covered with blood and pieces of her flesh. In the end, they cut off her head. Another Japanese, Yamamoto, told us that "it's easy to kill you all, easier than killing dogs." He also said "since those Korean girls are crying because they have not eaten, boil the human flesh and make them eat it" (Coomaraswamy 1996: 14).

The experience of Chong's companion is not to be generalized to all comfort women; however, it should also not be ignored. This individual's experience is not only one of sexual slavery but also of sexual abuse, torture, and murder. Japanese conservatives, such like Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, may claim the system was a voluntary prostitution, but this suggests otherwise. This indicates the comfort women institution was sex slavery. Though Chong was able to get away and live to share her story, others, like her friend, were not as fortunate (Coomaraswamy 1996: 14).

The testimonies of each Korean *ianfu* describe individual and personal accounts, but, holistically, they suggest the similar overall message. Within the comfort women system, *ianfu* were tortured, raped, and murdered. This is further supported by the United Nations; Imperial Japan was responsible for severe crimes and today's Government of Japan is bold enough to denies this.

Furthermore, the Special Rapporteur consulted Dr. Cho Hung Ok, the doctor responsible for caring for former comfort women after the War. Dr. Cho concluded that the survivors, as of

1996, were “physically and psychologically generally” weaker because they “endure[d] multiple rapes on a daily basis for many years” (Coomaraswamy 1996: 16). He additionally stressed that, greater than the physical scarring and damage done on their bodies, the mental pains are of larger consequence. Many of these women “suffer[ed] from lack of sleep, nightmares, high blood pressures and nervousness” and have been “sterilized since their reproductive organs and urinary tracts were affected by sexually transmitted diseases” (Coomaraswamy 1996: 16). Information provided by the Doctor further concludes the *ianjo* was, in fact, an organization of information sex slaves. In a regulated and restricted arrangement, comfort women were forced and ordered by the Japanese Imperial Army and Government.

Comfort Women’s Demands

It is no wonder, based on the experiences and pains of the *ianfu*, that they, the surviving women, demand some form of compensation. These are the five demands of the Korean comfort women in hopes of finding closure and peace: First, the Government of Japan should “[a]pologize individually to each of the surviving women for the suffering they have endured” (Coomaraswamy 1996: 16). Though former Japanese Prime Minister Murayama did extend an apology, this was apparently not sincere as “his statement had not been endorsed by the Japanese Diet” (Coomaraswamy 1996: 16). In the past and even more recently, the Japanese Government have made several attempts in alleviating World War II tensions, but Korean *ianfu* and their supporters want a genuine confession, not a statement issuing apology in an attempt thwart off the women. They have been silenced and forgotten for long enough, and now, the surviving comfort women demand a sincere and heartfelt vow.

Second, The Government of Japan and the Imperial Army ought to recognize that they are the parties responsible for establishing comfort stations and drafting about “200,000 Korean

women as military sexual slaves . . . in a systematic and forcible manner” (Coomaraswamy 1996: 17). Third, this sort of systematic recruitment for the use of sex slavery is “a crime against humanity, a gross violation of international humanitarian law, and a crime against peace, as well as a crime of slavery, trafficking in persons and of forced prostitution”, and the comfort women demand this be recognized (Coomaraswamy 1996: 17). This is especially insightful as it circumscribes and defines Japan’s crimes. It is one thing for the women to claim they are victims but another thing entirely for an intergovernmental organization to intervene in an attempt to settle an issue. Now, the Korean comfort women have an international entity supporting and assisting their cause. This report may be focus on Korean women specifically, but these terms demands extend beyond to all comfort women.

The fourth demand of the comfort women asks the Government of Japan “to accept moral and legal responsibility for such crimes” (Coomaraswamy 1996: 17). The final and fifth request is that *ianfu* also be compensated “from governmental resources to the surviving victims” (Coomaraswamy 1996: 17). It was additionally suggested that the Government “enact special legislation so as also to enable a settlement of individual claims for compensation through civil law suits at Japanese municipal courts” (Coomaraswamy 1996: 17). Though a specific amount had not yet been determined, the women emphasize that the compensation is more about its symbolic significance than monetary value. The Japanese Government has attempted to compensate comfort women by creating the Asian Peace and Friendship Fund for Women, but this was deemed sufficient or appropriate. This Fund was sponsored by contributions from civilians, not the Government. The women perceived the Fund for Women as the Government of Japan weaseling out of responsibility for its actions during World War II (Coomaraswamy 1996:

17). Coomaraswamy notes that within the realms of international law, seldom do the perpetrators face claim blame and responsibility for crimes (Coomaraswamy 1996: 17).

Japan's "Legal Responsibilities"

The Rapporteur concludes the Commission with two final sections covering the "Position of the Government of Japan" and "Moral Responsibilities." Based on the United Nations' investigation and interviewing of Korean *ianfu*, it is clear that the Japanese Imperial Government and Army have violated international law and human rights and should be held accountable for creating, controlling, and regulating *ianjo*. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights article 8 declares "everyone has the right to an effective remedy by the competent national tribunals for acts violating the fundamental rights granted him by the constitution or by law" while the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights article 2 claims

any person claiming an effective remedy shall have his right thereto determined by competent judicial, administrative or legislative authorities or by any other competent authority provided for by the legal system of the State, so that the right of the individual to an effective remedy is an international norm (Coomaraswamy 1996: 26).

As such, the government should take responsibility and act accordingly in respecting the comfort women's requests. These women have the right to demand a remedy by the law.

In August 1993, the Japanese State admitted, in the Kono Statement, that "the then Japanese military was directly and indirectly involved in the establishment and management of comfort stations and the transfer of 'comfort women' and further confessed taking part in "the recruitment and the transportation of 'comfort women' during the Second World War . . . against the will of the women" (Kono 1993; Coomaraswamy 1996: 22). It was concluded that "that this [the comfort women system] was an act that severely injured the honor and dignity of many women" (Kono 1993; Coomaraswamy 1996: 22). Nevertheless, during her visit to Japan, the

Rapporteur provided the Government with documented arguments made by the comfort women and records collected by the international community, and it was Japan's response that, though it has a "moral obligations", it is "under no legal compulsion towards the victims" (Coomaraswamy 1996: 22). The Special Rapporteur believes otherwise; in the case of the comfort women, Japan has both legal and moral obligations towards comfort women for their organizing and of military sexual slavery.

This is further supported by other international conventions and treaties. For example, the Fourth Geneva Convention further reiterates the topic of wartime rape. Rape during a time of war is determined an international war crime. Article 27 explicitly states "women shall be especially protected against any attack on their honour, in particular against rape, enforced prostitution, or any form of indecent assault" (Coomaraswamy 1996: 23). Additionally, article 5 of the Charter of the Tokyo Tribunal and article 6 of the Charter of the International Military Tribunal identify "murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation and other inhumane acts committed against any civilian population before or during the war" as crimes against humanity" (Coomaraswamy 1996: 23). The sufferings endured by *ianfu* fit the criteria.

From a legal standpoint, the Government of Japan is not technically wrong to deny legal responsibility. During World War II and the years immediately following, there was no set definition of "human rights," and, as noted in the 1949 Geneva Convention, there were no definitive international laws or instruments deeming Imperial Japan's actions as crimes against humanity. These simply did not exist at the time and, thereby, "the Government was not responsible for violating international humanitarian law" (Coomaraswamy 1996: 23). This was and still is the ongoing argument from the Government of Japan to this day. This is what Prime

Minister Abe declares in response to the comfort women case, and it is evident in his conservative opinions and policies.

Perhaps another way to better understand this enduring issue is to compare it to the former Yugoslavia and its corresponding International Criminal Tribunal. The report of the Secretary-General claims that

. . . the application of the principle *nullum crime sine lege* requires that the international tribunal should apply rules of international humanitarian law which are beyond any doubt part of customary law so that the problem of adherence of some but not all States to specific conventions does not arise. . . .

The part of conventional international humanitarian law which has beyond doubt become part of international customary law is the law applicable in armed conflict as embodied in the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 for the Protection of War Victims: the Hague Convention (IV) Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land and the Regulations annexed thereto of 18 October 1907; the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide of 9 December 1948; and the Charter of the International Military Tribunal of 8 August 1945 (Coomaraswamy 1996: 23).

There are certain actions and crimes that do not require a customary international law or court to be deemed a crime against humanity or a violation of humanitarian law. It is similar to common sense. A law, decree, or norm is not required to define what is and is not considered a crime infringing on an individual's basic wellbeing and essential rights. It should be obvious that human trafficking, sexual slavery, and rape are violations of basic human rights. As such, it is the belief of the Rapporteur "that States may be held responsible for the violation of these international humanitarian law principles even though they were not signatories to the particular convention" (Coomaraswamy 1996: 23).

It is unlikely that the Government of Japan will accept moral obligation but not legal responsibility. Within international law and the comfort women case, both the obligation and responsibility are more or less similar in that accepting blame is the "right" thing to do. Still, the Japanese State continues to claim it is not responsible. The Special Rapporteur sees the Japanese

State claiming moral obligation for its World War II crimes as a “welcome beginning”, and perhaps this is true. Though it remains shocking that Japan, despite the testimonies, official records and international commissions, would still refute the comfort women case, it seems promising that Japan accepts some obligation. These are some ways of compensating surviving victims, as suggested by the United Nations:

“(a) Raising of funds from the private sector as a means to enact the Japanese people’s “atonement” for the suffering of former wartime sexual slaves;

(b) Supporting projects in the field of medical care and welfare in support of former “comfort women” victims from governmental and other sources;

(c) Through the implementation of the Fund’s projects, the Government would express its feelings of remorse and sincere apology to all former “comfort women” victims;

(d) Collating historical documents on the “comfort women” establishment in order “to serve as a lesson of history”. The Special Rapporteur learned that these and other documents relating to modern Asian history will be exhibited publicly in a proposed Centre for Modern Japan-Asia Relations;

(e) Support projects by non-governmental organizations in the Asian region and, in particular, in countries from which “comfort women” victims were drawn, in the field of the elimination of contemporary forms of violence against women, such as trafficking and prostitution” (Coomaraswamy 1996: 30).

As of 1996, the future of the comfort women case seemed slightly optimistic. Though Japan still refused to believe the surviving women and accept past wrongs, there seemed hope for a reconciliation in the future.

The Comfort Women Today

This optimism, however, was short-lived. In 2012, Prime Minister Abe rejected the comfort women and their stories, declaring the claims to have been “overblown” (Fisher 2015). He passed a resolution appealing that “there was no official proof the women had been coerced

at all” (Fisher 2015). Likewise, Tomoko Tsujimura, “a Tokyo assembly member and a member of a ‘Japan Coalition of Legislators Against Fabricated History,’” released a statement in 2007 asserting, “I was convinced that the comfort women issue was completely fabricated by the South Koreans” (Sekiguchi 2014). She has also said at a news conference for foreign press that “she ‘felt happy thinking of the good deeds we’ve [the Japanese people and State] done to the Korean people’ during Japan’s colonialization, including ‘improving the circumstances for Korean women to raise children ‘because the population doubled during Japanese rule’” (Sekiguchi 2014).

In 1945, when the War ended and Japan surrendered, the Japanese Army and Government attempted to destroy official documents and records. This explains why so little is known about the comfort women and the comfort stations. Still, the women’s stories and experiences provide plenty of evidence. Despite Prime Minister Abe and his seemingly unjustified resolution, there have also been Japanese activists supporting and legitimizing the comfort women case.

The present-day controversy surrounding comfort women remain as contested and complicated as it was in 1991 when Kim Hak-sun spoke first. Extending far beyond the World War II and sexual slavery, the comfort women case has been and still is a grim political and social issue (Fisher 2015). Comfort women and their supporters demand that the Japanese Government take responsibility for its former crimes against humanity. Though there has been and still is a large-scale, international campaign, including mass demonstrations and protests in Korea and Taiwan, the Japanese State and its prime ministers throughout the years have only done the bare minimum to appeal and thwart off criticism. Japan may have offered its “profound” apologies and small funds to help surviving *ianfu*, but they are reluctant in their

actions and insincere in their apologies. As if a child being disciplined begrudgingly accepts his punishment, the Government of Japan likewise bitterly attempts to appease comfort women.

The comfort women case is one of darkness and secrecy. These women have been silenced and erased from history. Maybe it was the guilt of sexual abuse or the shame of coercing and manipulating, but the Government of Japan has essentially removed comfort women from the War, history, and the realms of international law. There are many historical records, documents, and literature from both during and after World War II, but there is “no mention . . . of the comfort women” (Goldstein 2001: 346). Even Japanese history books and textbooks have silenced a large portion of World War II happenings and all of the comfort women story. The Korean Government, soldiers of the Japanese Imperial Forces, or maybe even invading US soldiers all could have brought the comfort women case to attention, but all failed (Kang 2012; Goldstein 2001: 346).

As of 2015, Korean *ianfu* were still attempting to negotiate with the Government of Japan. *Arirang News*, an international network in Seoul, South Korea, broadcasted a segment titled “‘Comfort Women’ Disappointed by Korea-Japan Resolution: House of Sharing” detailing the situation. It begins by explaining, “No one has been hoping more for a fair deal than the Korean women victimized by Japan’s wartime atrocities, but their [the Japanese Government’s] response to today’s bilateral talks could be described as lukewarm at best” (Kim 2015). Then, reporter Ji-young Kim continues, the

[c]urrent Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe had previously wanted to revise the statement made by then Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono was based on the accounts of 16 Korean women who were victims of Japan's wartime atrocities.

The House of Sharing also said that Japan's offer to provide reparations as part of an aid project but not as direct compensation is redundant since there's already a fund set up by the Korean government to help assist the victims.

The organization plans to discuss the results of the deal with other local "comfort women" groups to coordinate a response by Tuesday.

It also plans to nullify the deal and demand the Korean government to come up with a better settlement that will clearly address Japan's legal responsibility on the sexual enslavement issue (Kim 2015).

Imperial Japan's crimes against *ianfu*, Korean and others, have never been fully resolved. Each time there seems to be progress, Japan shifts its stance and backtracks. This is especially evident with each passing Japanese Prime Minister. The few *ianfu* still alive today desperately ask the Government of Japan to finally and sincerely apologize.

The Imperial Government of Japan, along with various Korean institutions of the time, systematically controlled the girls and young women. Still, to this day, *ianfu* are denied their rights and truths. As if prolonging past abuses, the "metaphor for Korea's . . . national victimhood" remains (Fisher 2015). The South Korean government remains complacent while the Government of Japan twists international laws and norms to avoid addressing the comfort women case. More than the war crimes and crimes against humanity of World War II, the *ianfu* movement is an international one about how wartime rape victims were silenced and pushed aside.

In 2015, Japan and South Korea together drafted and released a statement concerning the comfort women case. In this statement, the Government acknowledges that the previous Kono Statement failed to recognize their past crimes against humanity and human rights violations. It goes on to acknowledge that Japan's past attempts in compensating (for example, the Asia Women's Fund previously mentioned) were insufficient. Japan's statement reassures the Government will "refrain from accusing or criticizing each other regarded in the issue in the international community, including the United Nations" (Haggard 2015). In response, South Korea also acknowledges Japan's attempts to alleviate the situation and hopes to work with the

Government of Japan in also refraining for accusations and criticisms (Haggard 2015).

In the following year of 2016, South Korea established the Reconciliation and Healing Foundation while Japan paid South Korea 10 billion yen, about 9 million US dollars, as an invitation to building a more cooperative future relationship. Japan has made it clear this money is given on “humanitarian grounds” (Kwon 2016). This, however, is complicated. Surviving victims are to get 90 thousand US dollars each while families of the deceased will get 18 thousand. Surviving women want a “concrete compensation”, or for the Government of Japan to take “clear legal responsibility to its past wrongdoings” (Kwon 2016). They are still waiting for the Government to “restore the honor and dignity of all surviving victims of the wartime sex slavery in Korea” (Kwon 2016).

This takes me back to my time with Lee Oksun. Lee tells me she does not have long to live but hopes to receive an apology from Japan before dying. Slightly chagrin, she says this unlikely to happen (Lee). Still, Lee says chooses to remain optimistic about the future and what is to come. She concludes with this parting message:

We [*ianfu*] don't hate Japanese, but it is the Japanese government that is bad. Students need to become great people to create a world without war and with peace. We suffered because we didn't know better, but now we do. We [all] have to make sure this doesn't happen again. Hardships are not simply a thing of the past. Especially women need to know this (Lee).

Surviving victims may die without getting the official apology they desperately desire and deserve. It is also likely that similar crimes against humanity will happen again and continue to occur in the future. Still, I would like to believe that these women have changed the face of international law for the better. These brave women created a movement that forced the Government of Japan and the greater, global world to listen. Lee's finishing statement is empowering, and I hope readers take it to heart.

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