The Comfort Women of Korea

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Submitted to the Board of Study in Political Science
School of Natural & Social Sciences
In partial fulfilment of the requirements
For the degree of Bachelor of Arts

Purchase College
State University of New York

May 2019

Accepted:

__Peter Schwab_____, Sponsor

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Abstract

In this thesis, I will center my focus on the long lasting social, psychological, and health impact that Comfort Women suffered due to the Japanese government's treatment of them before and during World War Two. Comfort Women are women from Korea and China who were forced into sex slavery by Japan between 1910 and 1945. Many of these women were kidnaped by the Japanese military or were coerced into becoming Comfort Women by Japan. A small number of Comfort Women are alive today and are still actively trying to get a formal apology from the Japanese government for what happened to them. My thesis is their story.

Introduction

South and North Korea were once a united country. Korea was ruled by the Joseon dynastic monarchy until 1910, when the Japanese empire officially took over. Japan had been planning on taking over Korea and it was finally achieved by a series of treaties between the two countries. It began with the Japan-Korea treaty of 1876 in which Japan forced the integration of Korea with Japan. The treaty that implemented the Japanese occupation of Korea was the Japan–Korea Treaty of 1905 where Korea was declared a protectorate of Japan. This treaty led to the official takeover of Korea which was legitimized by the Japan-Korea treaty of 1910. Some Korean citizens argue that the Korean government never actually signed the treaty, but rather Japan took over and used the treaty as a way to get the Korean people to join quietly and to avoid as much opposition as possible. Japan ruled over Korea until 1945 when World War II ended, and the United States of America, along with the Soviet Union, took over the peninsula and eventually caused the division of Korea into two different countries.

During World War II Korea became the Japanese government's new source of everything from its labor force to sexual slaves. Korean women were forced to work in Japanese military brothels. They endured horrible conditions and mistreatment by the military. Many were disfigured, rendered infertile by horrifying rapes and abuse that was inflicted on them. Many eventually died while they were in these brothels. It is estimated that between 80,000 and 200,000 women throughout South-East Asia were forced into sexual slavery by the Japanese government. A majority of those women were Korean, women who in reality were merely children, girls being as young as 13.

In this thesis I will center my focus on the long-lasting health, social and psychological impact that Comfort Women suffered due to the Japanese government's treatment of them during the war. I will analyze the issue from 1939 to 2015. The survivors of Japanese mistreatment are commonly referred to as Comfort Women. The term Comfort Women refers to women from Korea and China who were forced into sex slavery by the Japanese government between 1910 and 1945. They were originally called military prostitutes but the name changed after more sex stations around Asia were created. Comfort Women came from both the idea of what military prostitutes were supposed to do and what the places they were kept were called. The point of military prostitutes was to give military men comfort in times of war and when they were away from their homes. Due to their name, the places where the women were kept were called comfort stations. The Japanese army had comfort stations in every country they occupied. Many of these women were kidnapped by Japanese military men, or coerced into becoming Comfort Women by telling them that they were going to be working as nurses, or in other fields. Only a small percentage of Comfort Women are still living.

The issue of Comfort Women and their experiences is an ongoing political conversation that is not only being discussed in South Korea and Japan, but in other countries as well. Its duration was a short thirty-five years, which in the overview of history seems like a very meager part of it, but simultaneously it is something that affected almost two hundred-thousand women, twenty-eight who remain alive. These survivors are between eighty and ninety years old, and are still trying to get justice for what happened. A lot are worried that their stories will die with them and that Japan will simply get away with all the horrible acts. In the time of movements like "Me Too" it is a very important issue that needs to be talked about and not forgotten as the Japanese government wishes that it would be. Most of these women were children when they were forced into sex slavery. Their stories should not be forgotten.

Picture 1

Chapter 1: Comfort Women

Comfort Women is the name that was given to the women that were forced into military brothels to become sex slaves by the Japanese government before and during World War II. In this chapter I will give a more in-depth explanation about the comfort stations where these young women were kept. The comfort stations were what the military brothels owned by the Japanese government were referred to as. The brothels were houses, restaurants, or buildings that were taken over by the Japanese government and turned into stations where Japanese soldiers and officers could go and receive "comfort". The overall main point of comfort stations in the eyes of the Japanese government was a very practical one. The creation of these military brothels served three main purposes. The first was to prevent rape crimes against the women of the countries the armies were occupying. The Japanese government had concerns on how its image to the world would be affected after the Rape of Nanking also known as the Nanjing Massacre:

> …the Japanese troops commenced executions of men [in Nanjing] of military age on the pretext that many defeated soldiers had not surrendered. Groups of men, whether in uniform or not, were gathered and led to outlying parts of the city where they were executed by bayonet or machine gun. Shopfronts on the main streets were broken into by squads of men under the direction of officers. Thousands of private homes were plundered a street at a time. There were the first reports of rape on a large scale, and foreigners witnessed groups of young girls being abducted by soldiers. [1]

The action committed by Japanese soldiers during that attack raised concerns for the Japanese government about its image to the outside world. It wanted to avoid any extra anti-Japanese sentiment from the people within the countries they were occupying.

The second purpose was to try and limit medical expenses that were not related to combat. Japan wanted to prevent sexually transmitted diseases from spreading to Japanese soldiers. The third reason was security. The Japanese government was concerned about spies and

[1] Baker, Kevin. 1995. "The Rape of Nanjing." *Contemporary Review*, no. 1556: 124.

believed that un-regulated brothels posed a threat to its security.[2] By creating and running their own military brothels they hoped to minimize concerns.

The stations would operate on a schedule as if it were a regular business. [3] Some historical documents show that some comfort stations would be open from nine in the morning until ten at night. Other stations would be open until even later, and most had designated hours where soldiers were allowed to go and hours where noncommissioned officers were permitted.

Table 2. The Reality of the Korean Comfort Women's Lives

Name	Marital Status	Manager	Appellation of Manager	Other Names Assigned to Comfort Women	Income	Number of Comfort Women	Number of Soldiers Served Daily	Veneral Disease Contracted	Medical Check -ups	Condom	Physical Violence Incidents
Yi Pong-hwa	unmarried	Korean man & woman	father, mother	Akimi	military ticket/①	10	6–10	○	every week	○	violence by the manager
Yi Sang-ok	unmarried	Korean	man & woman	Nobuko	Japanese currency/②	10–12	2	×	every week	○, ×	knifing by the proprietor
Chang Ch'un-wŏl	unmarried	Korean man	uncle	Sumiko	Chinese currency/①	10	2	×			beating by the proprietor
O O-mok	unmarried	Japanese & Korean		Masako	money	30	10		every week	○	
Yi Ok-pun	unmarried	Japanese soldier		Haruko	military ticket/①	40	20–30		twice a month	○	
Ha Sun-nyŏ	unmarried	Japanese man		Odomaru	money/②	30	more than 30	×	once a month	○	beating by the proprietor
Kim Tŏk-chin	unmarried	Korean man			little ticket/①	50	30–40	×	once one or two months	○, ×	
Chŏng Hak-su	unmarried	Japanese man		Kaneko	nothing except some pocket money	20	2–3		every week	○, ×	beating by a soldier
Hong Kang-rim	unmarried	Japanese man		Yukie		15		○	every week		beating by the proprietor
Yi Sun-ok	married	Korean woman	aunt	Takiko	nothing except some pocket money	20	25		every week		beating by the proprietor, knifing by a soldier

Source: "Comfort Women" System: Understanding the Lifelong Consequences of Early Life Trauma. *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*

[2] Argibay, Carmen (2003). "Sexual Slavery and the Comfort Women of World War II". *Berkeley Journal of International Law*.
[3] The Life in Comfort Stations. (n.d.). Retrieved January 23, 2019, from http://www.awf.or.jp/e1/facts-12.html

Not all stations were run the same way. It all depended on what occupied country it was and who was put in charge of running them. During World War II the Japanese government had multiple countries in East Asia occupied by it's armed forces. In each country comfort stations were opened. To this day the exact number of stations that existed, is unknown.

The first official comfort station was created in 1932 in Shanghai, China.[4] That station was made up of Japanese prostitutes that had volunteered work in the comfort stations. It has to be noted that according to historical records the women who worked at the start of the stations were volunteers.

> Japanese military 'comfort women' rarely received money directly. Instead, they received military payment certificates or cash vouchers similar to today's sales slip to prove how many soldiers they had serviced. Although they were told that their vouchers would be exchanged for cash, in most cases they did not receive any money since they were under the management of contractors. Rather, deductions were made to their payments to cover expenses for their transportation, clothing, food in addition to living expenses in the 'comfort station'…[5]

[4] Mitchell, Richard H. (April 1997), "George Hicks. The Comfort Women: Japan's Brutal Regime of Enforced Prostitution in the Second World War," *The American Historical Review*, **102** (2): 503.
[5] http://www.hermuseum.go.kr/eng/PageLink.do?tabNo=2

The change from volunteers to victims was caused by the rapid increase in demand for more stations and women. It got to a point where there were not enough willing volunteers, therefore the people that were put in charge of recruiting young women started using different means to get women for the brothels.

Picture 2 Lining up for a brothel

Table 1. Ways in which Korean Women Was Forced or Led through Deception into Military Slavery

Name	Year	Age	Birth Place	Recruiter	Job	Ways in which women were forced or led away through deception	Promised Destination
Yi Pong-hwa	1935	13	Kyŏngsangbuk-do province	Korean man	student	"you might earn much money with a laundry job"	Hankou, China
Yi Sang-ok	1938	15	Seoul	employment agency	adopted daughter	"you can work at a Japanese firm"	Palau
Chang Ch'un-wŏl	1938	17	Hwanghae-do province	Korean man	no job	human traffic	Wuhan
O O-nok	1937	18	Chŏllabuk-do province	neighbor, Kim	no job	"you can get a job at a textile company"	Manchuria
Yi Ok-pun	1937	11	Kyŏngsangbuk-do province	Japanese	no job	abduction	Taiwan
Ha Sun-nyŏ	1937	20	Kwangju	Korean, Japanese	housemaid	"you can work at a Japanese company"	Shanghai
Kim Tŏk-chin	1937	18	Kyŏngsangnam-do province	Korean	housemaid	"you can work at a Japanese company"	Shanghai
Chŏng Hak-su	1938	14	Pusan	Japanese soldier	housemaid	abduction	Harbin
Hong Kang-rim	1938	17	Kyŏngsangbuk-do province	Japanese landlord	babysitter	abduction	Fengtian
Yi Sun-ok	1938	17	Kyŏngsangbuk-do province	Korean named O	no job	"you can get a job at a Japanese silk company"	Guandong
Yi Tŭk-nam	1939	22	Manchuria, China	Japanese man	scrubmaid	"you can make big money"	Hankou
Yi Yŏng-suk	1939	17	Kyŏngsangnam-do province	Korean couple	no job	"we will place you in a position"	Guangdong
Im Kŭm-a	1939	17	Hankou, China	Korean woman	scrubmaid	"you look poor, let's go together"	Hankou
Yŏk Yŏng-ran	1939	18	Chŏllanam-do province	Korean man	would-be-daughter-in law	human traffic by would-be husband	Hankou
Mun Ok-chu	1940	18	Taegu	man wearing	no job	abduction	Manchuria

The table above shows the different ways Korean girls would be forced to join a comfort station. It shows important information such as the names of the Comfort Women, what year they were taken, how old they were, and how they were taken. This information was gathered from interviews with multiple survivors who had spoken out about had happened to them.

Japanese authorities used different means to achieve their goals. They used policies such as kidnapping, false job advertisement in newspapers, legalizing prostitution in occupied countries. The women were even recruited from entertainment schools. [6]

> They said I could work at a silk fabric company in Japan. They said I could make a lot of money and would have a better life. They said I could also send some money back home to help my parents. It sounded very plausible. … I overheard someone' s talk and it sounded like we were not going to a factory. The guys touched some of the girls. I realized that I was not here to work at a factory. [7]

> A Japanese leader told us that we could make a lot of money if we worked at a munitions factory. He pressured that at least one person of each family had to go. I decided to go as a representative of their family and to pay back my adoptive parents' favor and kindness. … The soldier told us to take the military train. All the girls were in one railcar and there were soldiers on the other railcar. There were about 50 girls.[8]

A lot of the survivors that came forward years later to speak about what happened to them tell similar stories of being kidnaped off the street, or being misled about a job.

One day a Japanese guy pulled over his car and called me out. I couldn' t do

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[6] LEI, Wan (February 2010). "The Chinese Islamic "Goodwill Mission to the Middle East" During the Anti-Japanese War". *Dîvân Disiplinlerarasi Çalişmalar Dergisi*. **15** (29): 141.
[7] Park, J. H., Lee, K., Hand, M. D., Anderson, K. A., & Schleitwiler, T. E. (2016). "Korean Survivors of the Japanese "Comfort Women" System: Understanding the Lifelong Consequences of Early Life Trauma." *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, *59*(4), 332–348.
[8] Ibid.

anything. I had to get into the car. I was only 15 years old, so I couldn' t defy him. All of us in the car were very scared sitting there. Nobody said anything. Nobody tried to fight against or argue with them. We couldn' t because they were holding guns. … I was abducted on my way to do laundry[9]

When she was eighteen years old a Korean policeman came to her family to say that he was going to establish a bar in Beijing and that she should come with him because she could earn lots of money. The man was known to the family for whom her parents worked.[10]

Some of the documents that Yoshiaki Yoshimi discovered in 1992 proved the direct involvement of the Japanese government with these recruitment methods. Yoshimi is the person credited with proving the involvement of the Japanese government in the creation and management of the comfort stations.[11]

Before 1992 the Japanese government had publicly denied the existence of the comfort stations and any involvement on their part. One element Japan took advantage of was the financial situation of the people within the countries they were occupying. Korea was one of these occupied countries. Japan had drained its own manpower into fighting on the fronts of the war around the world, and so were then in need of workers at home to help with the efforts and production of war. Ordinary Korean men and women were ordered to work in Japanese factories, mines, and construction sites in places like Manchuria and Japan itself. By 1944, a year before World War II ended, an estimated amount of four million Koreans were living and working outside of Korea for the Japanese empire. That was 11.6% of the entire Korean population.[12]

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[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Argibay, Carmen (2003). "Sexual Slavery and the Comfort Women of World War II". *Berkeley Journal of International Law*.
[12] West, Philip, Steven I. Levine, and Jackie Hiltz. *United States and Asia at War; A Cultural Approach*. Armonk: Taylor and Francis, 2015.

This affected both the production of food and the textile industry within Korea. Many Koreans within the occupied country were living in poverty.

My family was very poor. My father used to do manual work, but the pay wasn' t great. My father was an alcoholic too. … One day my mother asked me, " There is an Udon restaurant by the Busanjin station. The owners don' t have a daughter. They have been looking to adopt a girl. Would you like to go there?" I decided to go to their family. Once I go there, the situation was different. I had to work for the family business and do house chores all the time. What did my parents do? Hmm. It is hard to say. They used to work for other families. We made rice porridge for meals every day. There was not much to eat. We had to fill the belly with water. I was sold to another family when I was 7 years old. [13]

Recruiters would be sent to small towns and offer young girls different jobs like being a nurse in the Japanese army or working in a factory. Once they would accept the job they would be shipped off to different parts of East Asia. In some cases recruiters would actually go and essentially buy these young girls from their families or be taken as a debt payment under the pretense of them being indentured servants. [14] In other cases Japanese soldiers would threaten to destroy entire villages if all the girls who were between the age of fifteen and twenty-three were not given to them. The circumstances under which they were taken would become the least of their worries once they reached a comfort station. The lives of over 200,000 women would be changed forever.

Chapter Two: Health Impact

Korean Comfort Women endured terrible things. Once the girls were taken to the different comfort stations they underwent physical abuse, rape, malnourishment, as well as

[13] Park, J. H., Lee, K., Hand, M. D., Anderson, K. A., & Schleitwiler, T. E. (2016). "Korean Survivors of the Japanese "Comfort Women" System: Understanding the Lifelong Consequences of Early Life Trauma". *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, *59*(4), 332–348.
[14] Argibay, Carmen (2003). "Sexual Slavery and the Comfort Women of World War II". *Berkeley Journal of International Law*.

constant invasive medical procedures. Medical care for the women in the stations consisted only of treatment for STDs, preventing and ending pregnancies.

It was believed by the Japanese that Korean women were submissive and abided by strict moral codes, which meant to them that Korean women were disease free.

Asou Tetsuo, an army surgeon, who inspected for venereal diseases on 100 women, 80 of whom were Korean women rarely had diseases. This report influenced high-ranking army officers to consider Korea the best country to 'draft' Comfort Women and to decide on the policy to draft Korean women as sexual slaves for the army in the potentially long war.[15]

The reason why most of the Comfort Women that have come out and spoken about what happened to them are Korean is because they made up the largest percentage of those who were forced into stations. They were specifically targeted by the Japanese military. One of the purposes of the stations was to try and limit medical expenses that were not related to combat. Japan wanted to prevent sexually transmitted diseases from spreading to Japanese soldiers. In reality STDs were one of the major causes of health complications the women suffered.

Becoming sterile was the most common outcome for survivors from their years of physical abuse. When a Comfort Woman was found to have a venereal disease she would be injected with a chemical called No.606. That chemical is believed to be one of the factors that caused sterility in so many of the women. Another issue that played a major role is the numerous abortions the women were forced to endure if it was found that they were pregnant.

Today I have constant pain all over my body and frequent dizziness, but I cannot even afford over-the-counter drugs. My monthly income is 45,000 won or about $55, from the Korean Government. I have no possessions, relatives, or offspring. I am alone… Whenever I see an old lady of about my age walking hand in hand with her grandchild, my heart wrenches. I became a Catholic, but I still cannot find solace in religion…I live [d] by myself in a small squalid room with space only for one person to lie down in. You could call the room a cave for an animal

[15] Hye-ran Cho, Young-sook Shin "On the Characteristics and Special Nature of the Korean 'Military Comfort Women' under Japanese Rule" Korean Journal 1996.

rather than a shelter for a human being. I wish I could have a cozy house so that I could sleep comfortably.[16]

The testimony above was given by a woman named Kuhma Lim who just a year after giving her testimony died alone in her apartment of heart failure.

The military doctors or the physician in charge of administering medical care to the Comfort Women would make the decision to sterilize some women. In the cases where one of the women actually gave birth and it was not a still birth (which was very common according to the testimonies of some of the survivors) they would not be able to financially take care of the child so they would leave them in an orphanage.

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I was beaten a lot. They burned me with a soldering iron too. I got scars all over my body, including my breast and hip. They were trying to kill me. … A few months later, I got pregnant. They asked me what I would want to do. I told them that I didn' t want a baby. They removed the baby and also my uterus. I was only 18 years old at that time. I was hospitalized for the surgery. Within 2 weeks, however, they forced me to work again. … The Japanese soldiers were like animals. They were animals.[18]

[16] Ibid,.3
[17] https://www.history.com/news/comfort-women-japan-military-brothels-korea
[181818] Jee Hoon Park, KyongWeon Lee, Michelle D. Hand, Keith A. Anderson & Tess

Still I feel like I have got a bee sting. My body aches while I am sitting. … I have osteoporosis because my entire uterus was removed when I lived in a comfort house when I was younger. I had my uterus removed before I was 30 years old. I have had a big surgery on my belly three times. My intestines, gall bladder, and a gallstone were removed before my 40s. … I couldn' t have my own child. I couldn' t do anything that normal people do in their lives. My life was different from any other people. As someone said, my time has passed like the wind or waves[19]

Furthermore, in some cases, the treatment for STDs would depend on the comfort station and whatever country it was located in. Specifics on medical treatment within Korea are hard to find due to the fact that after the Japanese government surrender it tried to destroy all incriminating evidence including any documents related to comfort stations. Survivors have testified that if a woman was found to be infected with an STD she could be murdered instead of receiving treatment.

It was my first time and I was very young. I hadn' t dated before, but I still had to deal with a lot of guys. On my first day, I had seven guys in a row. At first, they couldn' t even put theirs into my vagina. I even had to go to the hospital. … I also got syphilis, but it was not around my vagina but inside of my belly. I got bumps on my belly. It was as big as my fist. One was right on my ribs, and the other two were on my crotch. They hurt a lot. … If girls got an STD, the medical office tried to treat it only up to the second time. If girls got an STD for the third time, soldiers took them out somewhere and girls never came back.[20]

Additionally, women would get infected with different diseases such as like pleurisy, malaria, cystitis.

There were five rooms in the house. Each had a bed, blankets and a basin by the door.

E. Schleitwiler (2016) Korean Survivors of the Japanese "Comfort Women" System: Understanding
the Lifelong Consequences of Early Life Trauma, Journal of Gerontological Social Work, 59:4, 332-348

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

Sizue gave us bottles of an antiseptic solution, which went pink when diluted, and we were told to wash ourselves with it after serving a soldier.[21]

In other cases women also ended up with tuberculosis, which in their time meant a very painful death.

Comfort Women were categorized as military goods. As they were not considered of major importance to the army they would only receive only small rations of food. On most days they would eat plain rice with vegetables but when the food supply line would be disrupted by whatever was happening at that moment in the war it was less then that. On occasion where that would happen they would only have rice balls to eat.

The cubicle had a wooden floor covered with a blanket and was just big enough for one person to lie down, leaving sufficient room for another person to stand at the side…It was bitterly cold there with just a single blanket to cover us…The meals were mainly rice, soya bean soup and pickled radish… When we entered 1945, the supply shortage became so serious that we were not given any clothes anymore. The supply of vegetables also stopped, as did that of soy sauce and soya bean paste. We had to eat balls of rice cooked in salt water. That was it.[22]

Not only were their living conditions deplorable, but they were just given enough food to be kept alive. The malnourishment caused by the lack of proper food would later cause health issues such as heart problems or weak bones.

Physical abuse was a constant fear and reality that the women had to live with on top of often being raped more then twenty times a day by different men. Survivors talk about the different ways the women in the stations would be physically punished for refusing a soldier. Most of the time it would be the soldier himself who would carry out the attack, but in some

[21] Ibid.
[22] Keith Howard, ed., True Stories of the Korean Comfort Women (London: Cassell, 1995), v.

stations it would be the person or people in charge that would punish them. The most common punishment used by the management of the stations was wrenching their arms until in some cases their arms would break, or they would use electricity cables to shock them. In some other cases they would simply cut off a woman's fingers in an attempt to get her to "behave".

When interviewed, many survivors told similar stories of being beaten, or bearing witness to another girl's death at the hands of an angry Japanese soldier.

> …The day, after receiving so many solders, my vagina was swollen and painful. So I tried not to receive any more soldiers that day. A soldier who was turned away became so angry he ran to a 'pechika,' a Russian coal burning stove, scooped up burning coal and threw it at me. It hit me and burned my back. It took three months to heal.[23]

Soldiers would almost never get in trouble for the attacks on the women, and depending how bad the injuries were, she would still be expected to receive customers.

> … But I didn't care if I died, and in the end he stabbed me. Here (She pointed her chest) …I was treated in the infirmary for twenty days. I was sent back to my room. A soldier who had just returned from the fighting came in. Thanks to the treatment my wound was much improved, but I had a plaster on my chest. Despite that the soldier attacked me, and when I wouldn't do what he said, he seized my wrists and threw me out of the room. My wrists were broken, and they are still very weak. Here was broken.... There's no bone here. [24]

The statement above was taken from the testimony of a Korean Comfort Woman called Kimiko Kaneda who was taken from her home at the age of sixteen. Due to her injuries not being

[23] Hye-ran Cho, Young-sook Shin "On the Characteristics and Special Nature of the Korean 'Military Comfort Women' under Japanese Rule" Korean journal, 1996.
[24] Testimony I Kimiko Kaneda (South Korea) http://www.awf.or.jp/e3/oralhistory-00.html

properly treated she continued to live with pain from that attack, and later became an opium addict. Eventually, she was allowed to return to Korea where she had to have a hysterectomy at the age of twenty-one due to the extensive damage done to her after being forced to service an average of twenty men a day during her confinement in one of the stations in China. In 1997, Kimiko was one of the first women to be part of the atonement project of the Asian Women's fund in South Korea. She died in 2005.

The Asian Women's Fund(AWF) was created after the 1993 Kono statement. The Kono statement was named after Yohei Kono who was the chief Japanese Cabinet secretary. He published the findings of a study proving that the Japanese imperial army was directly implicated in the creation and management of the comfort stations, the kidnapping of thousands of women from all over Asia, as well as forced sexual slavery. This was important because up to this point, as I have mentioned previously, the Japanese government denied both the existence of the Comfort Women, as well as any potential involvement in the creation of the many comfort stations. In the Kono statement, Japan officially acknowledged the role it played in the creation and management of the comfort stations. It further admitted that It resorted to kidnapping to get women in the stations. The fund was created to try and provide the remaining Comfort Women with financial support.

…As such, the majority of the surviving Comfort Women refused to accept money from the fund. Following the dissolution of the AWF in 2007 in light of the "completion of its Atonement Project" the Japanese government has repeatedly referred to the organization as evidence of it having fulfilled its moral obligations toward the Comfort Women… [25]

[25] Journal of International Women's Studies Vol. 19, No. 1 January 2018.

It was meant to be compensation for everything the Japanese imperial army did to the Comfort Women. The fund was not official until 1995. There were many concerns and criticism about the fund because the money did not directly go to the Comfort Women. It was meant to be the Japanese atonement. One of the reasons the survivors were against using the fund was because it was made up of donations from Japanese citizens and budgets from different aid programs in Japan. The money did not actually come from the government directly. The Comfort Women saw it as just another way for the Japanese government to disrespect them.

Kimiko Kaneda

Even after the war was over the survivor's hardships would not end. The ones that survived had to go back and try to create a version of a normal life or as close to one as they could get. They had to find a way to integrate into a Korean society that would look down on them if they were to find out their stories. They now had to learn to live or at least survive with what happened to them.

Chapter Three: Social Impact

Korea was occupied by the Japanese empire for some thirty years. But in those thirty years the Japanese empire did everything within its power to erase Korean individuality. It tried to reshape every aspect of Korean culture into something that would more resemble Japanese society. The reason I mention this is because understanding this and both the major and lasting impact it had on Korean society and the way it developed, will help understand why the Korean Comfort Women were the way they were socially. It will also help explain the reasons behind why it took so long for the Comfort Women to come out and tell their stories. As I mentioned previously, it wasn't until 1991 that the first woman came forward and told her story to the public. Her name was Kim Hak-Sun. She died December, 1997.

Religious reforms are one of the first things the Japanese empire initiated against the Korean people in order to gain full control of them, assimilate them, and turn them into imperial subjects instead of colonial people. It wanted to make Korean people "true Japanese" not only in their everyday lives but in "spirit" as well. It became obligatory to worship at Shinto shrines on all important national days. The Japanese empire had Presbyterian churches shutter their schools and had the Presbyterian General Assembly pass a resolution that participating in Shinto ceremonies would be considered patriotic, not religious. The Japanese Empire came up with a policy called Sōshi-Kaimei in which it pressured the Korean people to change their Korean names to Japanese names. By August 11, 1940, more than 3.17 million Korean families had new

Japanese names. The point of all of this was to re-shape Korea. Morality views within Korea also changed to reflect those of Japan.

Prostitution was legal in Japan which is why when Japan took over it also legalized prostitution within Korea which was a stepping stone to the creation of the Comfort Women issue.

> The modern capitalist system of licensed prostitution emerged in Korea in the late nineteenth century after the pressured signing of the 1876 Kanghwa Treaty with Japan. Prior to Japan's colonization of Korea in 1910, licensed prostitution using Japanese women was practiced for nearly thirty years exclusively within the Japanese settlement communities located in major Korean port cities, including Pusan and Inchon. After Japan annexed Korea in 1910, the system of licensed prostitution as a sociocultural institution of commercial sex became firmly grafted in the soils of colonial Korea by the mid-1910s… By 1920, Korean women were working at restaurants in Japan, serving as 'industrial Comfort Women' for Korean male laborers. [26]

The legalization of prostitution within Korea did not mean that the negative connotations around it were erased. Korean society saw women who were prostitutes as a disgrace to their own families and themselves.

> Even today, women in sex industries are stigmatized as prostitutes in their own societies. Even if they are able to escape their return to their homeland, many of them find themselves so stigmatized that they go back to Japan. Many survivors of sex slavery wartime and the present have been harmed severely.[27]

When Japan occupied Korea, it encouraged Japanese prostitutes to come to Korea to work, which some did. Those Japanese women would be the first military prostitutes. As

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[26] Soh, C. S. (2004). "Women's sexual labor and state in Korean history." *Journal of Women's History*, (4), 170.

[27] Watanabe, K. (1999). Trafficking in women's bodies, then and now: the issue of military "comfort women." *Women's Studies Quarterly*, (1–2), 19.

previously mentioned in the first chapter, the demand for more prostitutes for the military brothel—which would later be the comfort stations—and the lack of willing women were the two major factors in the creation of the Korean Comfort Women's program.

Women in Korea had a very specific role within society. In the more traditional society, women were expected to be nothing more than housewives. Korean women's life goals were to be a great wife who obeyed her husband, and to be a perfect mother. They were expected to have sons, but not daughters. The woman would be blamed if the child was born a girl.

> I helped raise my younger brothers, fed cows, and walked with them and stuff. … I had to stop schooling, but my brothers entered middle school. Sons were prioritized back then. My older sister didn' t even go to school at all. I spent at least three years in my elementary school because I am the second one.[28]

It comes to no surprise that women were also expect to be virgins before marriage. Something as insignificant as a bad rumor about a woman's purity, could insure she never find a suitable husband, which in societies eyes, was the worst thing that could happen to a woman.

This information helps understand the fear and extreme shame the women felt about their time as Comfort Women, fearing the thought of any others finding out their truth, and further affecting their ability to move on and heal.

> Several survivors remained separated from their families to spare them further suffering and grief, as some families had thought their daughters had died during the war. They felt that returning to their families would reintroduce grief and suffering.[29]

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[28] Park, J. H., Lee, K., Hand, M. D., Anderson, K. A., & Schleitwiler, T. E. (2016). "Korean Survivors of the Japanese "Comfort Women" System: Understanding the Lifelong Consequences of Early Life Trauma." *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, *59*(4), 332–348.
[29] Ibid.

For some of the women, it prevented them from ever having what in Korean society would be considered, a normal life. Having a husband and children became impossible for the women later in life.

I was born as a woman but never lived as a woman. ... I feel sick when I come close to a man. Not just Japanese men but all men - even my own husband, who saved me from the brothel - made me feel this way. I shiver when I see the Japanese flag. . . Why should I feel ashamed? I don't have to feel ashamed[30]

Because of this chastity myth, Comfort Women had only two natives: either they could submit and become Comfort Women, could kill themselves to protect their chastity, which Confucianism taught them was more valuable than their lives.18 Accordingly, war, some survivors of sexual slavery committed suicide or stayed from their own families and led solitary lives because they ashamed of the loss of their virginity. [31]

I couldn' t have my own child. I couldn' t do anything that normal people do in their lives. My life was different from any other people. As someone said, my time has passed like the wind or waves.[32]

Some survivors spoke about telling their families what happened to them and were rejected and kicked out by those families. Some might think that having a husband or children are not that important if that is not actually what a woman might want but for some of these women, that choice was taken from them.

…it was culturally expected that women would marry and bear children… relationships with men and ultimately marriage were key challenges for many survivors of the "Comfort Women"

[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Jee Hoon Park, KyongWeon Lee, Michelle D. Hand, Keith A. Anderson & Tess E. Schleitwiler (2016) Korean Survivors of the Japanese "Comfort Women" System: Understanding the Lifelong Consequences of Early Life Trauma, Journal of Gerontological Social Work, 59:4,332-348

system as society viewed them as having "been 'sexually defiled.' Further, the ability to give birth was highly valued during their reproductive years…[33]

Not having children or husbands had future negative implications for their lives.

The Comfort Women still alive today are around the ages of eighty and ninety yeas old. Now at the age of retirement they can't work, so they have no source of income and in most cases they have no one to help take care of them. There are the lucky few who did have children later on in their lives or have family still alive that help them, but that is not the case for most. There are women that live in the House of Sharing which is a nursing home, museum, and advocacy center for Korean Comfort Women. The House of Sharing was founded by a Buddhist women's group in 1992. In total nine Comfort Women live in this nursing home. They are. for the most part, well taken care of, and their basic needs are met. They have a home where they are physically safe and never have to worry about homelessness. Almost everyday, these women have to retell their stories to strangers and have to endure people asking very personal questions about their lives, and everything that happened to them during their time as Comfort Women. Some even travel outside of Korea to speak at conferences around the world.

'They treated us like pigs, so I suffer now. I've had to have surgery all over my body, all because of the Japanese,' she says 'How can I forget? I have to think about it everyday.' And when her body doesn't remind her, the questions do. Rare are the days when there is no one asking Lee and the eight women she lives with to share their memories, asking if they are sad they can't have children or whether they can forgive. [34]

Lee moved to the House of Sharing last year from China, where she had lived since she was taken from Korea at the age of 16…'Its difficult for us because sometimes we don't have the

[33] Ibid.
[34] Mockenhaupt, B. (2002). "Seeking Comfort". *Far Eastern Economic Review*, *165*(1), 64.

strength to talk and we get tired of telling our stories over and over', she says. But it's important to talk, especially to the young people. 'We have to teach them well because when we die, that's it, that's the end. And no one else will be able tot ell them what happened.' [35]

On this Sunday, 78-year old Kang Il Chul is spending time with 30 students from a sexual-history class at Seoul's Hanyang University. 'I don't like to talk about it, but I have to because I'm one of the few grandmas who's willing to speak out,' she says away from the students. 'I was too embarrassed so I buried it deep, so it makes it hard to talk about what happened because I have to think about the past and it all comes back.' She adds 'If I had enough money, I'd get my own house.'[36]

Because they have no family and are too old to work they are essentially trapped in this situation. On average, about 5,000 people come every year to the House of Sharing to meet and hear the women's stories. Sometimes, as many as half of those people are Japanese citizens. Not only do the women talk about their life with strangers, but their art work is displayed around the area that is a museum. Most of the art work reflects their time as Comfort Women. They are forced to re-live everything that has happened to them in order to live in this nursing home.

The fear of what society and their own families would say about them became their new prison after being liberated from the comfort station. The physical scars never really healed for the surviving Comfort Women but neither did the psychological scars.

Chapter Four: Psychological Impact

[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid.

For some of the Comfort Women the physical scars did heal with time, but for most the psychological scar did not leave them, and it continued to affect and impact their recovery and their future lives. Many suffered from different mental health issues such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, depression and substance abuse Disorders.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is brought on by a traumatic event. The physical abuse, the sexual assault, and even the humiliation the Comfort Women experienced at the hands of Japanese soldiers was a traumatic event in the lives of all those women. PTSD can have detrimental affects on the human mind. Many were not aware that they were suffering from PTSD, which in part had to do with the lack of public knowledge. Suffering from PTSD made it difficult for some of the women to form healthy relationships with other people, including romantic and parent/child relationships.

I told him to forget about me. I said that he would live his life better without me because I couldn't have a baby and I would only make his life more difficult. He left me. [37]

Life is hard. I have emotionally suffered. I get sick all the time. … I don' t have my child and I am very lonely. I wish I had a son or a daughter. I am sad, so I still cry. … If I was married and had children, I would have been less lonely.[38]

When interviewed some survivors talked about how they felt ashamed because of the things that happened to them during the war.

I couldn' t say anything about what had happened to me. If I had said I am a comfort woman victim, they would have thought that I was a whore. I didn' t

[37] Park, J. H., Lee, K., Hand, M. D., Anderson, K. A., & Schleitwiler, T. E. (2016). "Korean Survivors of the Japanese "Comfort Women" System: Understanding the Lifelong Consequences of Early Life Trauma." *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, *59*(4), 332–348.
[38] Ibid.

tell them anything at all although I lived with them for about one year.[39]
My brother was killed at the war and I was abducted. My family was a mess. My dad passed away because of this.… My mom eventually found me. I finally came back home with her, but I couldn' t stay there longer because I was very shameful of myself. My parents knew what I had done. I just had to move out of their house.[40]

Some even blamed themselves, which is something that happens often in survivors of sexual assault. In some cases, survivors were not allowed back into their family others waited until most of their family members died before speaking out publically about what happened to them.

Their mental health and physical health were forever compromised. One of the effects of PTSD is depression. In severe cases, depression can lead to suicide. Many of the survivors have told similar stories of attempting suicide during their stay in a station, after being liberated, or of watching other Comfort Women kill themselves.

There were still a lot of girls who tried to escape from the house. Actually, I took rat poison and hung myself to kill myself. I wanted to die. My life was miserable. [41]

I determined to end my life. I tried to take drugs several times, but I didn't die. In 1961, I moved down to Cholla province. I had no definite plans, and didn't know what I would do. For roughly 20 years I did all kinds of hard work, drinking and smoking away anything that I earned. [42]

In the cases of Comfort Women trying to kill themselves, during the war the Japanese soldiers or the manager of the station would threaten the women with finding their families or loved ones, and killing them if they killed themselves. They had no way to escape.

[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.

The Japanese army did not only steal their bodies but they also tried to take away their identity. They tried to erase the women they were before the stations. They gave all Comfort Women common Japanese names and would punish them if they spoke in their native language. They were only allowed to speak Japanese.

There were five women in the house. They all had Japanese names. Sizue, at 22, was the oldest. Miyako and Sadako said they were 19 years old. Sizue gave us Japanese names: I was called Aiko, my friend Emiko.[43]

After surviving everything when the war ended in 1945 and the U.S. liberated Korea from Japanese imperialism the Comfort Women had to face life after the stations. Many of the Korean Comfort Women who tried to go home did not have the means to get back to Korea from the countries that the Japanese sent them off to. One of the most common problems the survivors had to deal with after the war was poverty. Many did not receive any money from their time as Comfort Women and the few that did did not actually make enough to even afford food. Those that did manage to make it back in some cases could not find their families because for one reason or the other they had to move. Others made it back to Korea to find that their families were dead and that they had no one left. They had to learn how to live a normal life or as close as they could get to one after everything they had to experienced which for most Comfort Women was from a young age. They had to deal with different feelings like grief, intense loneliness as well as resentment and anger.

Dirty bastards, they have to answer to me as soon as possible while I am still alive. They are waiting until all of us die. Even if we are dead, the history doesn' t go away. Even if we are gone, their sin will stay and issues won' t be solved. Whenever I think about my time in Japan, I only

[43] Ibid.

want to kill all of them. … They need to apologize to Korea and Koreans. They need to apologize to the Korean government. I want the younger generations to make better weapons to fight with other countries. … I don' t have any feelings left for this world. If I can ever be born again, I want to be a man who can fight for this country. That' s why I want to be a man in the next life. [44]

The resentment and anger directed towards the Japanese increased throughout the years for most of the women because of the constant denial from the Japanese government of the existence of Comfort Women, and the obvious lack of repercussions for the Japanese during the trials after World War II.

Conclusion

The long lasting social, psychological, and health impact that Comfort Women suffered due to the Japanese government's treatment of them during the war is not easily forgotten or forgiven. Korean women were forced to work in Japanese military brothels. They endured horrible conditions and mistreatment by the military. Many were disfigured, rendered infertile by horrifying rapes and the abuse they endured during their time as military prostitutes. Their humanity was taken from them by men because they simply could. There was no real valid reason for the creation of the comfort stations or forcing more than 200,000 young girls into sexual slavery. Not only did the program destroy so many lives of so many women but those of their families as well. Many parents died without ever getting to see their children again or ever

[44] Ibid.

getting to know what happened to them. Many of the children were forced to grow up into horrific lifestyles, their childhood brutally stolen from them.

The Comfort Women issue is something that should not be forgotten even after all the survivors are gone. As of April 15, 2019, there are only twenty-three registered surviving Comfort Women in Korea. They are all between the ages of eighty-five and ninety-five years old, and are still fighting to get a true apology from the Japanese government. Most believe that once they die, their stories will die with them.

My thesis is an acknowledgment, expressed sympathy, and apology for their tragedies, their stolen lives and their pain. No women should have to endure what they have and hopefully nations will work to treat women with the rights they deserve.

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