Reparations for "Comfort Women": Feminist Geopolitics and Changing Gender Ideologies in South Korea

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Abstract

This paper studies feminist geopolitical practices in South Korea in the context of "comfort women" forced into sexual slavery by the Imperial Japanese military around the Second World War. Although there has been a considerable amount of literature penned on the comfort women issue, existing discussions focus largely on the conflict between nationalist and feminist paradigms, while largely minimizing feminist activism and changing gender narratives within Korean society. Therefore, this research aims to expand the field by considering the struggles that comfort women have endured through the lens of feminist geopolitical scholarship. I argue that comfort women activism constitutes a form of feminist geopolitical practice in a way that challenges masculine gender narratives. It has opened up new spaces where comfort women survivors can produce a sense of "survivorhood" and move beyond passivity throughout their lives. The rise of their active voices signals the overturning of traditional patriarchal structures; consequently, along with other forms of activism, these narratives have eventually led to a shift in public attitudes. Unlike how nationalist accounts were dominant in the early 1990s, the increased public attention towards the feminist accounts in the mid-2010s has subsequently increased media coverage of survivors and feminist practices.

Introduction

Wars, political violence, and militarization have long-lasting effects—not only on nations and national identities, but also on individuals. These effects are also gendered. In the context of warfare and armed conflict, feminists have

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long argued that men are overwhelmingly viewed as heroes and fighters, while women are regarded as mothers, supporters, or as war victims.[2] While weapons kill both men and women without discrimination, women's bodies suffer from a different form of violence.[3] During warfare, enemy troops often coerce women's bodies into unwilling submission in order to exert control.[4] Similarly, sexual violence and trafficking have been used as a tactical weapon under the patriarchal assumption that such violence increases the morale of troops under arms. Although there has been increasing international awareness of wartime sexual violence, less attention has been paid to how sexualities and gender narratives are constructed and enforced through the masculine nature of geopolitics. In South Korea, largely due to masculine articulations of nationalism and the structural violence of Korean patriarchy, sexual violence by the forces of the Empire of Japan against Korean women was silenced and left unhealed for more than half a century.

This paper focuses on a matter that is particularly relevant to Japan's military influence in Korea, widely known as the "comfort women issue." The term "comfort women" is an English translation of the Japanese euphemism *ianfu*. It refers to females who were forced into sexual servitude to Japanese soldiers before and during World War II. Whether they were abducted or deceived with a promise of well-paid jobs, more than 200,000 Asian women, mostly Koreans, were unwillingly dragged into this mechanized system of sexual slavery.[5] These comfort stations served several purposes. One such purpose was to boost the fighting morale of the Imperial Japanese Army and Navy.[6] Another purpose was to ensure that the military remained healthy; to that end, the majority of comfort

[2] Lorraine Dowler and Joanne Sharp, "A Feminist Geopolitics?," *Space and Polity* 5.3 (2001): 168.

[3] Patricia H. Hynes, "On the Battlefield of Women's Bodies: An Overview of the Harm of War to Women," *Women's Studies International Forum* 27.5–6 (2004): 431–45.

[4] Lynn Staeheli, and Eleonore Kofman, "Mapping Gender, Making Politics: towards Feminist Political Geographies." in *Mapping Women, Making Politics: Feminist Perspectives on Political Geography*, eds. Lynn Staeheli, Eleonore Kofman, and Linda Peake (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 1-13.

[5] Kazuko Watanabe, "Trafficking in Women's Bodies, Then and Now: The Issue of Military 'Comfort Women,'" *Peace & Change* 20.4 (1995): 503.

[6] *See* Caroline Norma, *The Japanese Comfort Women and Sexual Slavery During the China and Pacific Wars* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015).

stations were operated with heavy controls and regular medical checks so that the bodies of comfort women could be efficiently controlled and the incidence of venereal disease minimized.[7]

After Japan surrendered in 1945, comfort women were either abandoned or murdered by Japanese troops. Although Japan committed a serious war crime, the issue remained taboo—both nationally and internationally—until the late twentieth century. Korean feminist scholars argue that Korean society has remained silent about the comfort women issue for geopolitical, social, and cultural reasons.[8] First, the passive attitude of successive Korean governments toward addressing the comfort women issue reflects the complex and unequal international power dynamics and geopolitical relations between Japan and Korea. The second major reason is related to what Raewyn Connell conceptualized as "hegemonic masculinity."[9] This "hegemonic masculinity" in Korea stems from Confucian influence and is embodied by strong patriarchal authoritarianism. Chastity is highly valued in Korean society, as women are expected to remain chaste until marriage.[10] As a result, for half a century, this social stigmatization and repression has dissuaded comfort women survivors from revealing and sharing their painful experiences.

When the issue of comfort women began to receive substantial public attention in 1990, the Japanese government initially denied any direct involvement or responsibility. Although Japanese Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa eventually apologized for the first time in 1992, the Japanese government largely failed to implement concrete follow-up measures. This enraged and further motivated activists in South Korea. As a result, survivor organizations, such as The Korean Council for Women Drafted by Japan for Sexual Slavery (hereafter the Korean Council), was officially established in 1990 to demand official reparations, an

7 Gabriel Jonsson, "Can the Japan-Korea Dispute on 'Comfort Women' Be Resolved?" *Korea Observer* 46.3 (2015): 492; Carmen Argibay, "Sexual Slavery and the Comfort Women of World War II," *Berkeley Journal of International Law* 21.2 (2003): 377.

8 Mina Chang, "The Politics of an Apology: Japan and Resolving the 'Comfort Women' Issue," *Harvard International Review* 31.3 (2009): 34-37; Na-Young Lee, "The Korean Women's Movement of Japanese Military 'Comfort Women,'" *The Review of Korean Studies* 17.1 (2014): 71-92.

9 See Raewyn Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995).

10 See Jeannie Yi, "Body Objectified—Historical Study of How Korean Women Were Forced into Sexual Slavery by the Japanese Military," Master's Thesis (Southern Connecticut State University, 2008).

admission of culpability, and apologies from the Japanese government. The Korean Council also supports survivors by recording their experiences as crucial evidence to prove the involvement of the Imperial Japanese military, as well as by providing welfare to those experiencing financial difficulties.

This paper argues that the Korean comfort women activism should be understood beyond the notion of a "movement for redress." Through such activism, the Korean Council and other activists believe in their power to induce social changes and, in that respect, the comfort women movement constitutes a form of feminist geopolitical practice. In order to examine why comfort women activism should be situated and examined through the lens of feminist geopolitical literature, and to respond to the call of feminist geographers to include marginal voices in mainstream geopolitical discourse, I will attend to the voices of comfort women survivors by examining their testimonies. Along with these personal narratives, articles published in the *Chosun Ilbo,* a major South Korean newspaper, will be used as secondary data to reveal the effects of this activism on the public sphere. Through these analyses, I believe this research can contribute to the development of scholarship on Korean feminist geopolitics by revealing how the narratives and activism of comfort women uncover masculine geopolitical discourse, as well as patriarchal narratives of gender and sexuality.

My initial analysis is anchored in the ways in which South Korea's traditional gender narratives have shaped the personal narratives of comfort women survivors. The second part of the analysis aims to reveal how rising activism on the comfort women issue signals the overturning of these traditional narratives. These analyses are structured in line with five research questions that examine how patriarchy, gender, and sexuality are narrated by comfort women survivors, and whether these testimonies have influenced the South Korean public. The questions are as follows:

1. What themes arise from the testimonies of comfort women survivors?
2. How does patriarchal power produce sexual identities?
3. How did the survivors understand or rationalize their experiences?
4. What were the effects of the initial testimonies given by former comfort women?
5. What are the effects of changing attitudes towards the comfort women issue in media narratives?

Methodology

Feminist scholars, such as Maeve Landman, Judith Cook, and Mary Fonow, have identified a common epistemological foundation of feminist research concerning the way in which the production of knowledge reflects the gendered nature of a society.[11] According to Landman, feminist epistemology criticizes the masculine underpinnings of dominant conceptual frameworks and the practices of modern-day science.[12] Similarly, Cook and Fonow have identified several foundational principles that feminist research should take into account.[13] They note that the starting point of feminist methodology is attending to the significance of gender. By acknowledging this significance, studies can look at the unequal power relationships and systems of oppression that are embedded within the everyday experiences of women. The principles of feminist methodology also emphasize the need to put women at the center of research and inquiry, as well as the importance of raising awareness on female empowerment. Following the principles of Cook and Fonow, this paper places the testimonies of comfort women survivors at the center of this investigation and shows how these testimonies can contribute to the development of feminist geopolitics and to changes in gender narratives. [14]

Personal narratives, such as testimonies, offer researchers an understanding of how personal "experience is framed and articulated in a particular context," thereby explaining how these narratives grasp the connection between self and society.[15] These stories are never entirely individual; while each personal narrative draws from an individual perspective, researchers must continuously establish linkages between the individual's relationship with others, dominant ideologies, social conceptions, religious beliefs, and so on. Although personal narratives cannot be acknowledged as objective truth since they inevitably rely on human memory, and thus something which results in continuous revisions over a period of time, these narratives can advance our understanding of how the survivors have

[11] Maeve Landman, "Getting Quality in Qualitative Research: A Short Introduction to Feminist Methodology and Methods," *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society* 65.4 (2006): 430; Judith Cook and Mary Fonow, "Knowledge and Women's Interests: Issues of Epistemology and Methodology in Feminist Sociological Research," *Sociological Inquiry* 56.1 (1986): 2.

[12] Landman, "Getting Quality in Qualitative Research," 430.

[13] Cook and Fonow, "Knowledge and Women's Interests," 5.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Marita Eastmond, "Stories as Lived Experience: Narratives in Forced Migration Research," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 20.2 (2007): 249.

been silenced and rendered invisible in everyday life.[16] Not only can these stories raise awareness and effect social change, but by sharing their trauma, survivors can also feel empowered.[17] This paper collects personal narratives as primary data to examine the ways in which comfort women survivors perceive and speak of gender narratives.

The study uses testimonies originally compiled by the Korean Council and by the Research Association on the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan, both of which are Korean organizations that strive to investigate the truth of the comfort women issue. Since these testimonies were originally delivered and published in Korean, I relied on a book called *True Stories of the Korean Comfort Women: The Korean Council for Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan,* edited by Keith Howard, which provides English translations of nineteen comfort women testimonies.[18] As the testimonies contain rich and in-depth information, I chose to analyze them using thematic narrative analysis, rather than a quantitative approach. The focus of this method is on the content of the narratives—on what the narrators have said in their stories.[19]

One of the methodological limitations was that of language. The testimonies I examined are English translations, rather than original Korean documents. One of the major misinterpretations that I found was the translation of the Korean word *cheonyeo* (처녀) into "virgin." For example, in the testimony of Yi Yongnyo, she testified that, "I don't mind whether I am well off or not, but I want them to compensate us for the sacrifices we were forced to make when we were still virgins."[20] Yi Sunok used the term similarly in her testimony: "I had been finding it hard to act as if I was married, with my hair up even though I was still a virgin."[21] Like a number of Korean words, *cheonyeo* is a double entendre: on the one hand, the word can be interpreted as "virgin," but on the other hand, it

[16] Margarete Sandelowski, "Telling Stories: Narrative Approaches in Qualitative Research," *Journal of Nursing Scholarship* 23.3 (1991): 165.
[17] Kristin Langellier, "Personal Narratives: Perspectives on Theory and Research," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 9.4 (1989): 264; Susan Armitage and Sherna Berger Gluck, "Reflections on Women's Oral History: An Exchange," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 19.3 (1998): 8.
[18] Keith Howard, *True Stories of the Korean Comfort Women* (London: Cassell, 1995).
[19] Lesley Birch, "Telling Stories: A Thematic Narrative Analysis of Eight Women's Experiences," PhD Thesis, (Victoria University, 2011), 37.
[20] Howard, *True Stories*, 150.
[21] Ibid., 116.

can be defined as an "unmarried single woman" without any sexual connotations. Testimonies reveal that in addition to unmarried women, married women also were drafted into comfort stations. For example, Kim Taeson, another survivor, testified that, "there were two or three rooms, and in one about 20 women waited. Some were young and unmarried while others had already had children."[22]

In addition, this paper also answers the aforementioned research questions by focusing on Korean articles published by the *Chosun Ilbo*, one of the most influential newspapers in South Korea. I have selected two different time periods to explore and compare the changing narratives of the comfort women issue. The first time period selected is the period after the survivor Kim Haksoon gave her testimony, on August 14, 1991. This period was selected to look at how the *Chosun Ilbo* initially represented comfort women in the wake of this testimony. Here, I identified 138 articles that were published between August 1, 1991, and August 31, 1992. The second period is when the comfort women agreement was struck between the governments of South Korea and Japan, on December 28, 2015. I identified 295 articles that were published between December 1, 2015, and December 31, 2016. Then, to investigate changing public attitudes towards the comfort women issue, I created a monthly breakdown of the number of published articles. I moved beyond comparing the number of articles published in each period, instead investigating the contexts of the articles—whether they focus on nationalist sentiments or on the stories of comfort women survivors. I argue that understanding these contexts are necessary when examining the relationship between survivor testimonies, gender narratives, and geopolitics, as the media often reflects dominant public opinion and the view of elite minorities, especially when controversial issues like these are concerned.[23]

Development of Feminist Geopolitics

While scholarship on feminist geopolitics has continuously looked at feminist practices in countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, and Britain, little is known about feminist geopolitics in South Korea.[24] This section begins with exploring

[22] Ibid., 152

[23] Derek Jones, *Censorship: A World Encyclopedia* (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001).

[24] Jennifer Fluri, "Feminist-Nation Building in Afghanistan: An Examination of the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA)," *Feminist Review* 89 (2008): 34-54; Jennifer Hyndman, "Feminist Geopolitics Revisited: Body Counts in Iraq," *The*

the emergence of feminist geopolitics as a distinct analytical approach that puts diverse feminist approaches and activism in geopolitical discourse. It is then followed by the argument that comfort women activism ought to be examined through the lens of feminist geopolitics based on their significant engagements with current geopolitical discussions between Japan and South Korea, and their empowerment of the survivors.

Feminist geopolitics initially emerged from the scholarship on critical geopolitics. It has, however, developed as a separate branch and as a critique of critical geopolitical scholarship. One of the major causes behind the rise of feminist geopolitics has been the call for the inclusion of those who were previously marginalized, as well as for female empowerment in the social, cultural, and political spheres.[25] The second wave of feminist understanding of the slogan—"the personal is political"—also facilitated the rise of female engagement with geopolitics. Feminist geographers, such as Lise Nelson, Joni Seager, and Jennifer Hyndman, sought to draw on the ideas of female bodies to argue that the personal experiences of women are rooted in masculine politics.[26] The rise of feminist geopolitics has begun to challenge the male-centric, state-centric nature of modern discourse, which has continuously ignored and excluded women.[27]

Furthermore, Vanessa Massaro and Jill Williams have pointed out that feminist geopolitics challenges the hegemonic and masculinist thinking prevalent in geopolitical scholarship. [28] This applies to both critical and traditional geopolitical scholarship, especially the way in which they cast geopolitics as a framework that is exclusively by and for the male elites.[29] These scholars emphasized the need for feminist geopolitics to attend to silenced voices and

Professional Geographer 59.1 (2007): 35–46; Sarah Mills, "Scouting for Girls? Gender and the Scout Movement in Britain," *Gender, Place and Culture* 18.4 (2011): 537–556.

[25] Wenona Giles and Jennifer Hyndman, *Sites of Violence: Gender and Conflict Zones* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

[26] Lise Nelson and Joni Seager, *A Companion to Feminist Geography* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2007); Hyndman, "Feminist Geopolitics Revisited," 36.

[27] Hyndman, "Feminist Geopolitics Revisited", 36.

[28] Vanessa A. Massaro and Jill Williams, "Feminist Geopolitics," *Geography Compass* 7.8 (2013): 571.

[29] Joanne Sharp, "Remasculinising Geo-Politics? Comments on Gearoid O'Tuathail's Critical Geopolitics," *Political Geography* 19.3 (2000): 362.

narratives of violence,[30] to produce alternative visions that take innumerable forms and places,[31] to examine the everyday experiences of gendered bodies,[32] as well as to analyze the traumatic effects of war on female bodies.[33]

Feminist geopolitics is not about merely inserting women into geopolitical discourse. Rather, it is about offering a lens through which individuals—male and female alike—can rewrite the narratives of everyday, mundane lives.[34] The scholars of feminist geopolitics have further adopted intersectional frameworks by which to analyze what Massaro and Williams described as: "gendered, racialized, classed, sexualized, and otherwise differentiated everyday spaces previously ignored in geopolitical analysis."[35] Such a framework enables examination of how different identities intersect to shape geopolitical relations and the daily lives of ordinary people.[36] Therefore, the development of feminist geopolitics suggests a new analytical framework that can anatomize previously unchallenged power relations in both traditional and critical geopolitical scholarship. It also emphasizes the geographies of the mundane to draw attention to the normalization of routine practices, which leads to continuous production, reproduction, and negotiation of uneven geopolitical power.

A wide range of feminist practices and activism have contributed to the development of feminist geopolitics in particular locales.[37] The shared aim of these feminist engagements is to decenter patriarchal relations and masculinized nationalism, and to relieve geopolitical tensions by exposing the gender hierarchies

[30] Hyndman, "Feminist Geopolitics Revisited": 35–46.
[31] Mary Gilmartin and Eleonore Kofman, "Critically Feminist Geopolitics," in *Mapping Women, Making Politics: Feminist Perspectives On Political Geography*, eds. Lynn Staeheli, Eleonore Kofman, and Linda Peake (London: Routledge, 2004), 113-125.
[32] James Tyner and Samuel Henkin, "Feminist Geopolitics, Everyday Death, and the Emotional Geographies of Dang Thuy Tram," *Gender, Place & Culture* 22.2 (2015): 288.
[33] Rebecca Patterson-Markowitz, Elizabeth Oglesby, and Sallie Marston, "'Subjects of Change': Feminist Geopolitics and Gendered Truth-Telling in Guatemala," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 13.4 (2012): 90.
[34] Lorraine Dowler and Joanne Sharp, "A Feminist Geopolitics?" *Space and Polity* 5.3 (2001): 165.
[35] Massaro and Williams, "Feminist Geopolitics," 570.
[36] Jill Williams and Vanessa A. Massaro, "Feminist Geopolitics: Unpacking (In)Security, Animating Social Change," *Geopolitics* 18.4 (2013): 754.
[37] Fluri, "Feminist-Nation Building in Afghanistan," 34-54; Patterson-Markowitz, Oglesby, and Marston, "Subjects of Change," 82–99.

that control the bodies of individuals.[38] In solidarity, more than thirty women's organizations in Korea have demanded official reparations from the Japanese government. These organizations have then been in under the name of the Korean Council from 1990 onwards. Since its foundation in 1990, the Korean Council has advocated various forms of activism, including a weekly Wednesday Demonstration, known to some as the world's longest protest.[39] This response to forced sexual violence represents active feminist engagement in geopolitical discourse and therefore shows Korean women's activism to be a form of feminist geopolitics.

This activism also encouraged comfort women survivors to participate in a truth-telling project, supporting them in speaking up and fighting against social stigmas, encouraging them to see themselves as survivors rather than as victims. In so doing, this activism successfully established a new space where these survivors could produce new subjectivities and a sense of "survivorhood."It also revealed the problematic power structures which have forced victims to conceal the violence they have endured. The survivors not only felt relieved after testifying about their internalized wounds, but they could also restore their dignity and produce new subjectivities by delivering their testimony publically. Likewise, this paper seeks to argue that such testimony has the power to open up new "public" spaces where survivors can share their "private" truths.

The Korean Council has often generated tension between the two strands of its discourse: the nationalist strand and the feminist one. Even though the comfort women issue exemplifies the complex relationship between postcolonial and feminist theory, the voices and narratives of comfort women have often been biased by earlier studies. Some scholars viewed the comfort women issue and its movement simply from a nationalist perspective, arguing that Japanese colonialism destroyed the chastity of Korean women, while other feminist scholars concentrated too much on the universality of women's issues, ignoring the wider problems of wartime violence and Japanese colonialism in

[38] Deborah P. Dixon and Sallie A. Marston, "Introduction: Feminist Engagements with Geopolitics," *Gender, Place & Culture* 18.4 (2011): 447.
[39] Chunghee Soh, "The Korean 'Comfort Women': Movement for Redress," *Asian Survey* 36.12 (1996): 1226-1240.

general.[40] Although some degree of tension is generated in the articulation of each narrative, the comfort women movement undeniably addresses the need to remove both national and gender-based oppression.[41] The movement, therefore, should negotiate for a middle ground which can accommodate both narratives.

Evidence and Analysis

By exploring gender and sexual narratives of former comfort women, this research investigates the ways in which sexual identities, patriarchal power, and hegemonic masculinity came to construct gender and sexual narratives in South Korea. It demonstrates how these narratives became institutionalized in the context of the comfort women issue. I also evaluate the ways in which the survivors rationalized their experiences of everyday oppression, and how some of these narratives gradually changed from passive to self-assertive. The latter part of the paper examines the effects of initial testimonies, such as the increase in public attention and the appearance of alternative geopolitical practices.

What themes arise from the testimonies of comfort women survivors?

Radical feminist theory interprets patriarchy as a social system that institutionalizes gender roles and influences every aspect of a woman's life.[42] With this definition in mind, this section analyzes recurring themes that appear throughout the personal narratives of the comfort women survivors, discussing how these themes are intimately shaped by the Korean patriarchal system.

The first recurring theme revolves around the survivors' childhoods and their access to education. Figure 1 shows that a majority of survivors were from rural, lower class backgrounds and had limited educational opportunities prior to becoming part of the comfort women system. Only two survivors said that they managed to complete primary school. The survivors' lack of educational opportunities was inextricably linked to the financial difficulties of their households and to traditional patriarchal ideology. Under the patriarchal system, Korean

[40] Na-Young Lee, "The Korean Women's Movement of Japanese Military 'Comfort Women,'" *The Review of Korean Studies* 17.1 (2014): 71-92; *see also* Yeonsun An, *Song Noye wa Pyongsa Mandulgi* (Soul-si: Samin, 2004).

[41] Hee-kang Kim, "Nationalism, Feminism and Beyond: A Note on the Comfort Women Movement," *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies* 17.1 (2015): 17.

[42] Imelda Whelehan, *Modern Feminist Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995).

society denied women the freedom to receive education and regarded them as inferiors who functioned only as passive homemakers and mothers.[43] I believe the economic oppression of women was facilitated by this androcentric framework, in which women's education was perceived as useless and where they were more likely to be involved in cheap labor or domestic work. This was evident in the survivors' testimonies (Figure 2), showing that access to education was highly restricted due to the rigidly fixed gender roles of the period. Fathers and brothers held power and were able to keep their female household members away from educational opportunities. While some survivors stated that they made attempts to resist by running away from home or by evading capture by the military, they eventually had to give up learning due to this continuous pressure.

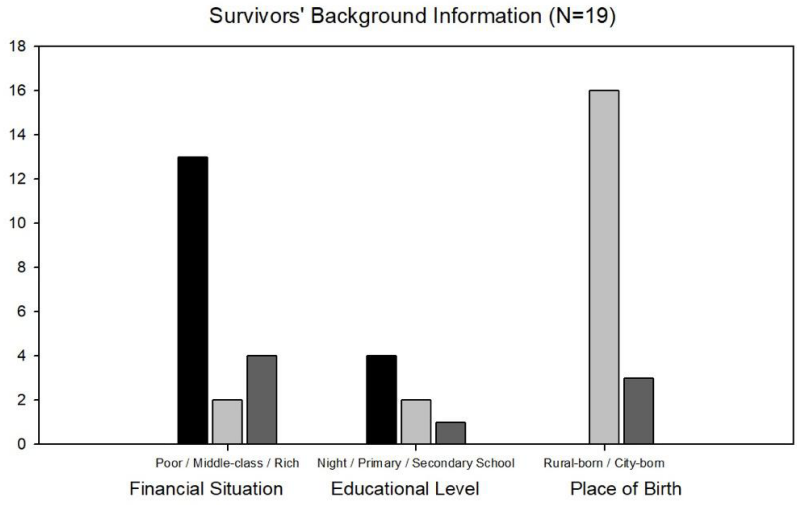

Figure 1: Survivors' Background Information

[43] Ji-sun Chung, "Women's Unequal Access to Education in South Korea," *Comparative Education Review* 38.4 (1994): 487.

- "One morning [father] caught me going out to school. He stared and said, 'A girl, studying?' He snatched my school things and threw them on to a fire." (Testimony of Yi Tungnam)
- "Whenever I tried to miss going to school, my father cajoled me into going, saying he was sending me there not because we could afford it, but because he wanted to bring me up like a son he never had." (Testimony of Ha Sunnyo)
- "[Father] said that if a girl studied she would become too foxy. He rushed into my classroom, dragged me home and burnt all my books." (Testimony of Mun Pilgi)
- "I started school when I was nine, and was soon able to read first-grade books. But my brother, who was three years older, stopped me going, saying it was useless to educate a girl." (Testimony of Yi Sangok)

Figure 2: Patriarchal Oppression and Education

The second recurring theme encompasses the ways in which survivors were recruited into the comfort women system. Figure 3 shows that a number of survivors, such as Mun Okchu and Yun Turi, testified to having been abducted by Japanese soldiers and forced to work at a comfort station. On the other hand, other survivors revealed that they volunteered to follow the officers who promised to offer them good jobs. For example, Yi Sunok testifies that she was deceived by an intermediator on the basis of a promising job in a silk factory.

- "He grabbed me by the arm and muttered something. As we were all afraid of the police in those days, I went with him. He dragged me along without meeting any resistance." (Testimony of Mun Okchu)
- "I was on my way home ... a policeman on guard duty called me over… and two soldiers loaded us on board. I asked where they were taking us, and the only reply was that they were going to give us good jobs. It was night and we didn't know where we were." (Testimony of Yun Turi)
- "My new friend told me there was someone locally promising work in Japan; she said she was going to go and asked if I wanted to go along with her." (Testimony of Yi Yongsuk)
- "Oh said he had come to recruit girls to work in a factory. Knowing what I wanted, Mr. Morita asked Oh if he knew a good place for me. Oh replied that there was a silk factory which needed many girls…and asked me if I wanted to go, and I answered that I would like to, give such good terms." (Testimony of Yi Sunok)

Figure 3: How Survivors Were Recruited

Two major factors that made them susceptible to this pressure were a lack of educational opportunities and financial hardship. The survivors who were deceived by the promise of jobs spoke about the pressures they felt from their families to support the household, either by marrying a rich man under duress or becoming a foster daughter of a rich family in return for money. Hwang Kumju, a survivor, testified: "He took pity on my father and gave us [100 yen]. It wasn't a free gift. In exchange for the money, I was fostered to him and started to help with housework at the house of his mistress in Seoul."[44] Similarly, Yi Tungnam attested that, "I had the impression that my father wanted to marry me off, as the eldest child, to reduce the number of mouths he had to feed. I felt like I was being sold."[45] These economic pressures from the household attracted survivors

[44] Howard, *True Stories,* 71.
[45] Ibid., 135.

through the prospect of earning their own income. It can be inferred that the comfort women system was facilitated by pre-existing dynamics of gender-based exploitation and inequality.

Another major theme that arose throughout these women's narratives is the effect that colonial-era policies and attitudes had on their lives. Among those who received only primary education (either complete or incomplete) or both primary and secondary education, a number of survivors stated that they had to learn Japanese in public schools and that some had to change their names into Japanese. For example, Hwang Kumju stated that, "I attended the first two grades, studying mainly Japanese and mathematics."[46] Similarly, Yi Yongsu testified that, "when I was 13, I went to evening classes for a short period, where I used a Japanese name, Yasuhara Riyosyu. I learned Japanese and I learned to sing, accompanied by the organ."[47] In the comfort stations, women were also forced to change their names to Japanese ones, sing the Japanese anthem, and recite the Oath of Imperial Subjects. Receiving Japanese education and being forced to use the Japanese language in comfort stations likely influenced their memory and use of language. Japanese words and expressions that they used in comfort stations such as irasshai, tatami, and koya frequently appeared in their testimonies (Table 2).

Table 2: Japanese Language Use in the Testimonies [48]

Japanese Words / Phrases	**Frequency**
Obasan (おばさん) *(Aunt, lady, ma'am)*	16
Tatami（畳）*(Japanese woven straw mat)*	13
Koya（小屋）*(Hut)*	9
Irasshai（いらっしゃい）/ Irasshaimase（いらっしゃいませ）*(Welcome)*	3

[46] Ibid., 71.
[47] Ibid., 88.
[48] Ibid.

How does patriarchal power produce sexual identities?

The previous section revealed that the lives of comfort women survivors were often driven by pre-existing dynamics of gender-based exploitation—in particular, by traditional patriarchal ideologies. Such dynamics kept women away from educational opportunities and made them susceptible to cajoling. Developing from these ideas, this section focuses on the ways in which patriarchal power structures produced sexual identities of Korean females.

In order to anatomize patriarchal power structures in Korea, it is necessary to examine the role of masculinity in their formation. Masculinity is, to a considerable extent, socially constructed. Furthermore, it is inherently relational in the sense that without femininity, it would not exist.[49] Raewyn Connell's conceptualization of hegemonic masculinity recognizes that there are various kinds of masculinity, and that the relations between these masculinities form hierarchical relationships not only between women and men, but also between men themselves.[50] Interactions between individuals within this hierarchy further establish and gradually naturalize the hegemony of the ideological values and behaviors that characterize men. Through this process, hegemonic masculinity becomes a method through which social relationships are reproduced, and through which social dominance over women is legitimized.[51]

The concept of hegemonic masculinity is particularly useful in understanding the construction of Korean gender narratives. Korean hegemonic masculinity was initially established by Confucian patriarchal culture, amplified by Japanese imperialism, and later perpetuated by the nation-building process that took place after decolonization. Hegemonic masculinity was especially crucial in Korea, as it directly influenced the construction of identity and legitimized the exercise of power and social control over women.[52] It was not only colonialism that damaged the lives of comfort women, but also the hegemonic masculinity prevalent in Korean traditional culture. Patriarchal

[49] Raewyn Connell and James Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," *Gender & Society* 19.6 (2005): 836.
[50] See Raewyn Connell, *Masculinities*.
[51] Miranda Alison, "Wartime Sexual Violence: Women's Human Rights and Questions of Masculinity," *Review of International Studies* 33.2 (2007): 85.
[52] Richard Howson and Brian Yecies, "The Role of Hegemonic Masculinity and Hollywood in the New Korea," *Masculinities & Social Change* 5.1 (2016): 59.

capitalism reinforced by hegemonic masculinity and colonialism are not only similar in structure, but they also differ very little in their ideologies and the ways in which they dominate. Both perpetrate systematic and structural violence which eventually lead to violence against the bodies of women.[53] Such power has created a strict division of gender roles, thereby subordinating women by controlling their behavior and sexual identities.[54] What Confucian patriarchy emphasizes most is the virtue of chastity, which in practice took the form of regulation over women's sexual freedoms. Women were expected to maintain their chastity until marriage, and those who failed to do so were highly stigmatized by society. The survivors' testimonials were shaped by such social expectations. For example, Mun Pilgi testified that, "I had been brought up to value my chastity, and I believed it to be important. So I wept a lot. I thought I was ruined."[55] The emphasis on women's chastity can thus be seen as reinforcing the role of the obedient daughter or wife.

The majority of survivors testified that they had hardly talked to anyone about their pasts until they reported themselves as comfort women. They were afraid that their pasts would cause their family members to suffer or endure social stigmatization. Kang Tokkyong argued that this is because "there are still some who say that what we did is shameful."[56] This fear of social stigmatization was accurate, as family members tended to regard them as a disgrace to the family. As Mun Okchu attested, "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 to stay at home and disgrace the family. I was not treated as a human being by my relatives."[57] The survivors testified that they were abused by male members of their households because of their past as comfort women. Kim Haksun, for example, revealed her experience of being stigmatized by her husband – "When [my husband] was drunk and aggressive, because he knew that I had been a comfort woman, he would insult me with words that had cut me to the heart… when he called me dirty bitch or a prostitute in front of my son, I cursed him."[58]

[53] Akeia A. F Benard, "Colonizing Black Female Bodies Within Patriarchal Capitalism," *Sexualization, Media, & Society* 2.4 (2016): 2.
[54] Pil-wha Chang and Eun-shil Kim, *Women's Experiences and Feminist Practices in South Korea* (Seoul: Asian Center for Women's Studies, 2005).
[55] Keith Howard, *True Stories,* 83.
[56] Ibid., 184.
[57] Ibid., 113.
[58] Ibid., 39.

Likewise, under these conditions, the experience of being a comfort woman was not understood by their closest family member. Rather than embracing comfort women, these patriarchal structures have allowed for and reinforced the abuse and oppression of these women in both the private and public sphere.

This paper argues that this social stigma led survivors to devalue themselves and identify themselves as "ruined." Survivors overwhelmingly identified themselves as "ruined" human beings with low self-esteem; these notions were rooted in both traumatic sexual violence and patriarchal structures. For example, Yun Turi said she lost her chance to get married and, therefore, only had to think of earning money through her physical exploitation.[59] Other survivors also chose not to marry—either because they felt that they could never be with a man again, or because they were left infertile due to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or venereal disease. For those who did marry, the majority testified that they concealed their pasts. Choe Myongsun said that, for a long time, she lived fearing that her children and husband might find out about her past as a comfort woman.[60] A sense of self-degradation often discouraged survivors from identifying and registering as a comfort woman. Yi Sunok testified that "my brother and sisters encouraged me to register as a former comfort woman, but I felt so ashamed."[61] These narratives show that their past as comfort women has continued to undermine the survivors' mental and physical health, and that the consequences of their experiences have continued to shape their lives after liberation.

The dominance of male figures (fathers, husbands, and brothers) within the family in a patriarchal society symbolizes an institutional reproduction of male dominance.[62] This was also evident in Yi Sunok's testimony, where she recalled that, "[the proprietors] would say 'these girls are obedient,' 'girls in such and such a place wouldn't listen to us,' and 'it is easy to work the girls from Kyongsang provinces.' If a woman drank, Obasan reported her to the soldiers, and a soldier would come and give her a mighty beating."[63] These narratives

[59] Ibid., 192.
[60] Ibid., 175-176.
[61] Ibid., 123.
[62] Andrew Heywood, *Political Ideologies: An Introduction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).
[63] Howard, *True Stories*, 120.

reveal how traditional notions of male domination legitimized sexual violence over women and control their behavior. Stigmatizing women who failed to preserve their chastity was one way that the society actively constructed the idea of chastity, weaving it into the very fabric of female sexual identity. Another way in which patriarchal power produced and reinforced female sexual identities was by propagating attitudes of victimhood. Survivors actively concealed their pasts, as these attitudes caused them to perceive the sexual violence visited upon them as disgraceful.

Thus, this paper argues that the narratives provided by survivors were affected by a gendered framework shaped by patriarchal social structures. Their lives were significantly driven by the decisions made by their fathers, brothers, and husbands, showing that women were considered to be objects and subordinates, rather than equal subjects. Under these structures, women were considered unsuited for higher education, causing some to be forcibly sold or deserted. This gendered violence was possible only because Korean hegemonic patriarchy embodied powerful masculine authoritarianism in the form of Confucian ideology.[64]

How did the survivors understand or rationalize their experiences?

Following from the previous section, analysis of these narratives revealed that comfort women survivors understood and rationalized their suffering based on gender and sexual identities that were constructed by traditional patriarchal structures.

Korean patriarchal structures also produced a masculinist culture of sex, which, as Chunghee Soh argues, exerted influence on the gendered lives of men and women.[65] Unlike men, women were stigmatized if they lost their chastity or had children before getting married. Choe Myongsun, who was forcibly removed from her home by her first husband, said that she was harshly abused by her second husband and his family "simply because I already had a child and I was thrown out of the house many times…I was mistreated, and the backs of my hands were torn and constantly bled because I was never allowed to use warm water to wash

[64] Sun Jung, *Korean Masculinities and Transcultural Consumption* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press. 2010).
[65] Chunghee Soh, *The Comfort Women: Sexual Violence and Postcolonial Memory in Korea and Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

the cotton clothes with, even in mid-winter."[66] She continued by testifying that her husband married her just for her looks and had affairs with other women. However, since she was previously married with a child, Choe felt that she was in no position to raise her voice and to speak out against her husband. She also ascribed her family's misfortune to her past as a comfort woman, saying that it has mentally damaged her son and ruined his life.

Other survivors also testified that they had no choice but to either marry men who already had children, or to become a second wife. For example, Kim Taeson testified that, "[my husband and I] had two girls, and it was only when I went to register their birth on the family registration that I learnt my husband already had a wife."[67] Similarly, Mun Okchu stated that, "[my husband] said he was the same age as me, but later I found out that he was three years younger and already married, with a daughter and four sons."[68] Unlike how Choe Myongsun was mistreated for having a child before marriage, the testimonies of Kim Taeson and Mun Okchu reveal that men received little to no criticism or vilification for fraudulent marriage.

Despite stigmatization and maltreatment, few of the survivors challenged or resisted the actions or words of their male household members. Before she was drafted into the comfort system, Pak Sunae endured suspicion from her husband about her fidelity. He constantly criticized her whenever he found what he perceived to be faults and then beat her. He eventually took her child away and handed Pak over to an "introduction agency" and never returned. Pak testified that this introduction agency was where women were often deserted or sold by their husbands. Despite such domestic violence, she did not show any explicit resentment against her husband. Pak rather adapted to her situation and struggled to repay the debt charged by the agency.[69]

It can also be argued that the patriarchal structure of Korean society was reinforced by a gendered construction of the Korean nation. Nationalism and gender are mutually constitutive. A large body of feminist research on nationalism has concentrated on the role of gender in the construction of ethnic

[66] Howard, *True Stories,* 175.
[67] Ibid., 157.
[68] Ibid., 114.
[69] Ibid., 159-160.

and national ideologies, as well as on the conflicted relations between nationalism and feminism.[70] The gendering of nationalism has naturalized the male dominance of political institutions and of the military, and it is through this process that nationalism has labeled women as "mothers," rather than as active participants in nation-building.[71] Such process constructs a distinction between "us" and "them."[72] Conventional dichotomies, such as public-private, active-passive, and logical-emotional, empower masculinity over femininity. After liberation, Korea fostered the development of masculine nationalism. The construction of a nation after several decades of Japanese imperialism had aroused a social and political atmosphere of advocating for powerful and "masculine" identities as the national identity, whilst concealing any weaker and emotional narratives which they regarded as "feminine." The study of gender and nationalism, therefore, substantially explains why the comfort women issue was left largely unknown to the public for more than half a century.

Gender role theory is a useful approach in understanding why women often conform and fail to question the social roles produced by a patriarchal society.[73] This theory argues that when placed under patriarchal pressure, women are expected to act in accordance with socially prescribed gender behaviors and characteristics. Such expectations constrain their rights, to speak and to be respected as equal human beings, thereby discouraging them from resisting these societal roles—even they are perceived as unreasonable. At the same time, however, relying solely on gender role theory to explain gender inequalities should be avoided, as it may restrict "understanding of people's active participation in creating social structures of practices."[74] It was not until the 1980s that Korean feminist movements appeared as a part of a wider social democratization movement. However, these feminist organizations gradually showed interest in masculine nationalist discourses after the 1990s.[75] For the last few decades, Korean feminist activism has resisted the

[70] See Giles and Hyndman, *Sites of Violence.*

[71] Joanne Sharp, "Gendering Nationhood: A Feminist Engagement with National Identity," in *Bodyspace: Destabilizing Geographies of Gender and Sexuality,* ed. Nancy Duncan (New York: Routledge, 1996), 97-108.

[72] Tamar Mayer, *Gender Ironies of Nationalism* (London: Routledge, 2000).

[73] Jo Foord and Nicky Gregson, "Patriarchy: towards a Reconceptualisation," *Antipode* 18.2 (1986): 192.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Jin-sung Chung, "Minjok mit Minjokjuie ganhan Hankukyeoseonghakwi Nonui," *Journal of*

military state, Confucian patriarchal culture, and male domination of political institutions. These struggles gradually established women as influential political actors, notably increasing their participation in political parties and in the national parliament.[76] It is also notable that the comfort women issue initially became known to the public via several feminist activists in late 1980s. It was through these efforts that South Korea began to deconstruct the hegemonic nationalist narratives and to put previously marginalized voices back into the mainstream.

Thus, this paper seeks to contribute to feminist geopolitics scholarship by identifying this comfort women issue as an embodiment of the shifting nature of Korean masculine nationalism. Testimonies revealed efforts by feminist activists to challenge nationalist accounts and attend to previously unheeded voices. While survivors initially conformed to gender subordination, they were able to move beyond passivity and deliver active and expressive accounts (Table 3). It can be argued that the truth-telling project encouraged survivors to produce a sense of "survivorhood," thereby opening up new spaces where survivors can share their internalized trauma. Therefore, the rise of these active voices signals the development of challenges towards dominant patriarchal structures and traditional divisions of gender roles.

Table 3: Development of testimonies from passive to active accounts

Survivor	Passive	Active
Kim Haksun	"When he was drunk and aggressive, because he knew that I had been a comfort woman, he would insult me with words that had cut me to the heart."	"I began to reflect upon my miserable, wandering life. Yes, I would die when my time came, but in the meantime I realised that there was no need for me to squander my life so pitifully."

Korean Women's Studies 15.2 (1999): 34.

[76] Song-Woo Hur, "Mapping South Korean Women's Movements During and After Democratization: Shifting Identities," in *East Asian Social Movements: Power, Protest, and Change in a Dynamic Region*, eds. Jeffrey Broadbent and Vicky Brockman (New York: Springer, 2011), 189.

Choe Myongsun	"I have lived looking forward only to death, and without telling anybody my story."	"Now I have reported to the Council and I take part in various activities of theirs."
Kim Tokchin	"My father told me to go with her (elderly lady). I felt I had no choice. Later I learned that the lady had lent my father money which was supposed to be repaid by monthly earnings."	"I don't mind whether I am well off or not, but I want them to compensate us for the sacrifices we were forced to make when we were still virgins…I want to tell the Japanese government that they must not evade the issue any longer."

What were the effects of the initial testimonies given by former comfort women?

The survivors' physical and mental trauma finally gained international attention in 1991 when former comfort woman Kim Haksoon publically testified that the Japanese government played an active role in directing the military brothels. Her testimony opened the door for other survivors all over Asia to report their experiences. Statistical data collected by the War and Women's Human Rights Center indicates that 76.0% of comfort women survivors registered themselves between 1991 and 1994 (Figure 4).[77] This shows that the rise of an active comfort women movement and the first official testimony by Kim Haksun in 1991 greatly encouraged other survivors to reveal themselves to the public.

[77] War and Women's Human Rights Center, *Comfort Women Testimonial/Statistical Resources* (Seoul: Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, 2001).

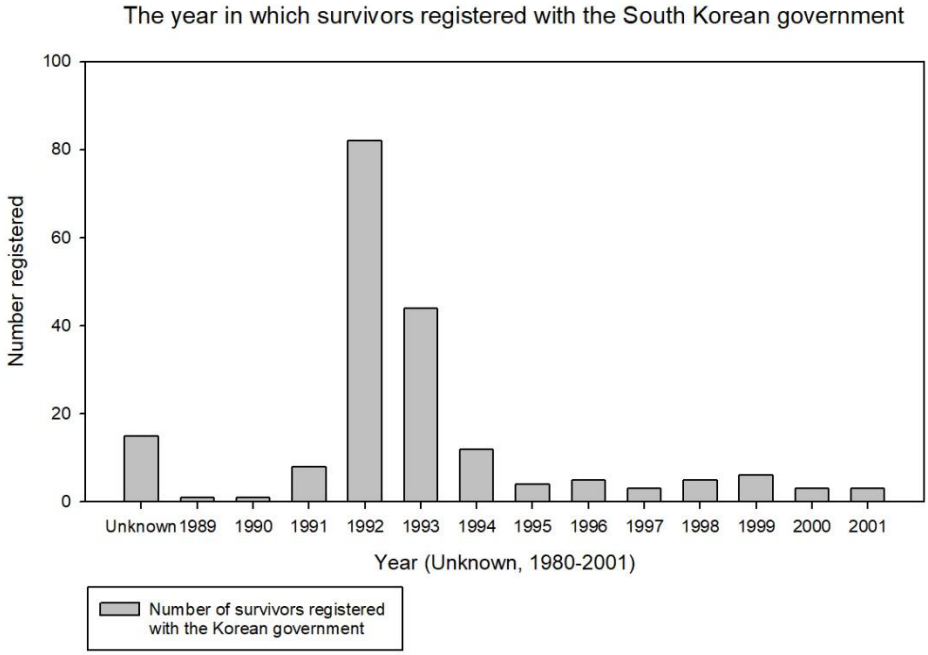

Figure 4: The year in which survivors registered with the South Korean government[78]

One of the indicators that shows an increase in public attention towards the comfort women issue is a sharp rise in the number of online news articles published in the *Chosun Ilbo* (Table 4). Before Kim Haksun made her first public testimonial on August 14, 1991, the issue received little public attention: only three news articles were published in the year before the testimonial. After the testimonial, however, there was a forty-fold increase in the number of these articles. This number then doubled when the Japanese and Korean governments reached an agreement on the longstanding comfort women issue.

[78] Ibid.

Table 4: The Number of Comfort Women Articles in the *Chosun Ilbo*

Time Period	Number of Comfort Women Articles
July 1st, 1990 - July 31st, 1991	3
August 1st, 1991 - August 31st, 1992	138
December 1st, 2015 - December 31st, 2016	295

The media, however, was not the only means through which awareness of this issue grew. Feminist organizations and activists played a crucial role in gathering evidence of the Japanese government's involvement in the sexual slavery system. They came up with geopolitical practices such as holding peace marches, crafting international petitions, conducting theatre performances, and writing books, all of which have contributed to the insertion of the comfort women movement into Japanese history and national memory. For example, in collaboration with the Korean Council, two Korean sculptors, Kim Seo-kyung and Kim Eun-sung, installed a series of comfort women memorial statues known as 'Statues of Peace' all over the world. One of these statues—installed in front of the Japanese embassy in Seoul in 2011—aroused significant political tensions between Japan and Korea, and could be thought of as a form of feminist geopolitical practice. The Japanese government demanded the removal of the statue, and even threatened to end bilateral trade deals.[79] Despite such disputes around the Statues of Peace and the political message they send, activists have stood firm, stating that the statue would remain in place, and even stating that new statues would be installed in different public spaces and on public transport.[80]

Beyond such increases in public attention and the geopolitical activism

[79] Sol Han and James Griffiths, "Why This Statue of a Young Girl Caused a Diplomatic Incident," *CNN*, Published February 10, 2017. https://edition.cnn.com/2017/02/05/asia/south-korea-comfort-women-statue/index.html.

[80] Elise Hu, "'Comfort Woman' Memorial Statues, a Thorn in Japan's Side, Now Sit on Korean Buses," *NPR*, Published November 13, 2017, https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2017/11/13/563838610/comfort-woman-memorial-statues-a-thorn-in-japans-side-now-sit-on-korean-buses.

of individuals and feminist organizations, this paper argues that the survivors' testimonies are themselves a powerful geopolitical practice. Through their narratives, the survivors have shown great determination: they have demanded official reparations from the Japanese government, criticized the lack of geopolitical power in the Korean government, and publicized the violations of human rights to the international community. For example, Yi Yongnyo demanded that the "Japanese government…must not evade the issue any longer."[81] Another survivor, Kang Tokkyong also showed belief that her testimony could effect positive social change: "I am telling my life story so that nobody else will ever have to go through the same thing as me." [82]

The process of offering testimony also served as a means for trauma recovery. According to psychological research done by Puvimanasinghe and Price, transferring an individual's private pain into the public and political arena allows the formation of a collective demand for justice.[83] In fact, a number of survivors have stated that they felt healed after telling their stories. Kim Taeson testified that she "feel[s] relieved, now, as I pour out the story of my past."[84] Mun Okchu said: "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."[85] Similarly, Yi Yongsu stated, "now having reported to the Council and after having poured out my story, I feel so relieved."[86] The formation of a collective demand for justice also encouraged other survivors to register themselves as comfort women, as Hwang Kumju indicated: "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 10pm, 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."[87] These accounts show that the process of delivering testimonies not only allowed survivors to regain their dignity, but

[81] Howard, *True Stories*, 150.
[82] Ibid., 184.
[83] Teresa S. Puvimanasinghe and Ian R. Price, "Healing through Giving Testimony: An Empirical Study with Sri Lankan Torture Survivors," *Transcultural Psychiatry* 53.5 (2016): 534.
[84] Howard, *True Stories,* 157.
[85] Ibid., 114.
[86] Ibid., 94.
[87] Ibid., 78.

also encouraged other silenced victims to overcome their degraded self-esteem and social stigmatization.

However, a number of survivors feared that their testimonies and comfort women registration might harm their families: "I have a husband and children", Choe Myongsun said, "so I cannot bewail my life and be so resentful in public. If, by any chance, my children's spouses and families discover I was a comfort woman, what could become of them?"[88]; Another survivor, Kim Tokchin testified: "I discussed the matter with another nephew…he wept as he listened to my story and advised me not to register. He said 'It will break our son's heart. What will your stepson in the United States say when he hears all this?"[89] These accounts show that additional efforts are still required to remove the last vestiges of the social stigmatization that continues to discourage further registration by survivors. I believe it is through such efforts that we can bring new dimensions and greater power to the comfort women activism.

What are the effects of changing attitudes towards the comfort women issue on media narratives?

The final section focuses on the ways in which the comfort women activism has contributed to a shift in public attitudes. Changing public attitudes towards comfort women were particularly evident in the increased number of *Chosun Ilbo* news articles that covered the comfort women issue. After dividing the number of articles published by month both before and after the initial testimony by Kim Haksun, , I selected one month from each time period when the largest number of the articles were published, and examined their keywords with the aim of examining whether those articles presented a nationalist or feminist account of the comfort women movement. Figure 6 indicates that the initial testimony given by Kim Haksun attracted little public attention. While a total of six articles were published in August 1991, only two directly focused on her testimony. Such minimal public attention can be put down to the indifference of a masculinized public. Media attention on the issue waned in the proceeding few months until December 1991, when the *Chosun Ilbo* produced a total of nine articles, none of which focused on the survivors' hardship, trauma, or pain, but rather on producing

[88] Ibid., 176.
[89] Ibid., 49.

and reciting nationalist accounts. These articles conveyed a nationalistic, rather than a feminist sentiment: they direct rage at the Japanese government for what was thought to be their evasion of their national responsibility. Korean nationalist accounts, then, strongly reflect masculinist nationalism and Confucian ideology.

The number of published articles sharply increased the following month, with thirty-five articles published in January 1992. Japanese Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa's visit to South Korea triggered both nationalist sentiment among the Korean public: his visit was considered geopolitically significant since he, on behalf of the Japanese government, adopted an official position on the comfort women issue and expressed his willingness to apologize to survivors. Table 5 shows that his name was mentioned forty times in articles around the issue during this time. The analysis of articles related to his visit revealed several nationalist accounts. For example, the Korean government described Miyazawa's reparations as the start of a trust-building process between the two countries. These articles also linked the comfort women issue to other bilateral issues which were likely to bring benefits to the Korean economy. Five out of the thirty-five articles focused on Miyazawa's comments about bilateral trade deficits and how the two nations could exchange technology. Almost none of the articles, however, focused on the physical and mental trauma experienced by the survivors, nor on the issues they were still facing in Korean society.

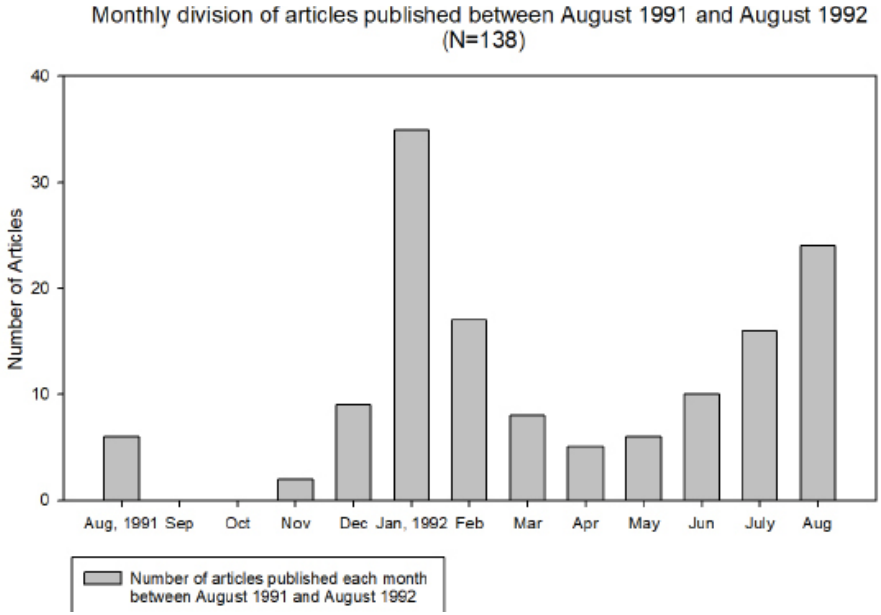

Figure 6: Monthly Division of Articles Published Between August 1991 and August 1992

Table 5: Nationalist and Feminist Keywords in Articles Published January 1992

Nationalist Account		**Feminist Account**	
Keyword	*Quantity*	*Keyword*	*Quantity*
무역 (*Muyeok*; trade)	5	김학순 (*Kim Haksun*)	0
경제 (*Gyeongje*; economy)	9	증언 (*Jeung-eon*; testimony)	9
미야자와 (*Miyazawa*)	16	인권 (*In-kwon*; human rights)	1

Comparing these articles to those published after the comfort women agreement in December 2015, I identified a striking transition in public attitudes between these two periods (Figure 7). Not only did the number of articles increase dramatically, but the lens through which the journalists described the movement changed. While the articles published in January 1992 primarily highlighted the effect of the movement on a political and national scale, those published in December 2015 focused more on the feminist narrative and the individual survivors. Table 6 shows that of the sixty-two articles published in December 2015, approximately one-fifth [twelve] introduced diverse feminist geopolitical practices that feminist activists were undertaking and ten of the articles criticized Japan's violation of women's rights. While Kim Haksun's initial testimony was hardly covered by the news media in the early 1990s, in December 2015, the *Chosun Ilbo* actively publicized the Statues of Peace, publications by women's organizations, and theatre productions about the comfort women movement. The personal lives of the survivors, including their obituaries and their receipt of national medals for promoting human rights, were also increasingly reported in these articles, suggesting changing public attitudes towards the comfort women movement and a greater appreciation for the hardship of individual survivors.

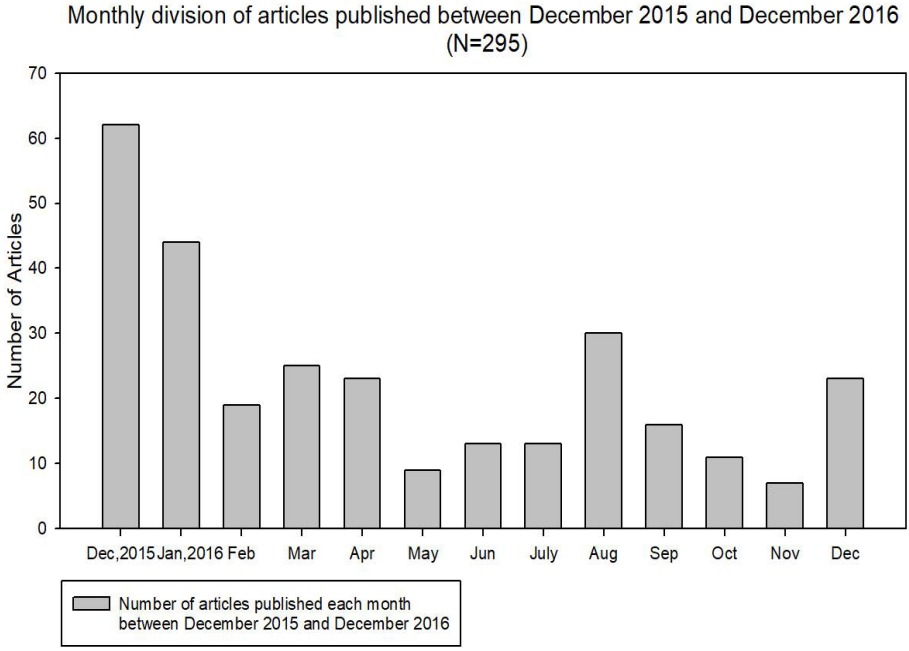

Figure 7: Number of Articles Published Monthly Between December 2015 and December 2016

Table 6: Nationalist and Feminist Keywords in Articles Published December 2015

Nationalist Account		**Feminist Account**	
Keyword	*Quantity*	*Keyword*	*Quantity*
무역 (Trade)	1	시위/책/연극/ 소녀상 등 (Feminist Practices)	12
경제 (Economy)	2	증언 (Testimony)	5
교과서 (Textbook)	9	인권 (Human Rights)	10

The *Chosun Ilbo* also increased their news coverage on how survivors reacted to the 2015 Japan-South Korea comfort women agreement. They published editorials that blamed the Korean government for not thoroughly taking survivors' demands into account and for acting too passively in their resolution of the issue. Such changes in the media's emphasis are linked to the public's increased efforts to include comfort women in the geopolitical arena. With these changing attitudes, Korean society has recently been more attentive to stories of survivors and feminist accounts. Unlike how articles published in 1992 highlighted Korea's potential short-term national benefits—as they were more conventionally masculine accounts referring to trade deficits, technological transfers, and trust-building processes—articles from December 2015 framed the comfort women issue as an important geopolitical issue to solve for the sake of the survivors themselves.

I argue that these changing attitudes signal a departure from the dominant form of masculinity, thereby answering the question of why the comfort women issue matters "now." The testimonies of the survivors, along with other movements for redress, played a significant role in both uncovering and challenging traditional masculine geopolitical discourses and patriarchal narratives of gender and sexuality in South Korea. However, it should be noted that survivors still lack spaces in which they can influence Korean-Japanese bilateral agreements on the issue. For example, based on the Korean government's continuous demand for official reparations

over unsettled war legacies, in 2015, the two countries agreed that the Japanese government would compensate the survivors with $8.3 million.[90] However, at no point during the negotiations were the survivors invited to the venue.

Conclusion

By focusing on newspaper articles and the personal narratives of comfort women, this paper concludes that traditional gender and sexual narratives have been institutionalized and naturalized by patriarchal structures, hegemonic masculinity, and the nationalist accounts prevalent in geopolitical discussions between Japan and South Korea. Here, I would like to list some of the major conclusions that emerged from this research.

The first is the novelty of this research in geopolitical scholarship. Previous studies have been biased towards traditional geopolitical discourses which necessarily omit the voices of marginalized populations. By challenging their positionality, I call for more feminist geopolitical scholarship that studies resistance by marginalized populations against the dominant cultural and political hegemonies constructed by state-elites and males. In this paper, I have shown the ways in which Korean patriarchal power provided opportunities for oppression and while rationalizing and naturalizing violence against women. I examine how comfort women activism resists masculine constructions of gender narratives, and how it contributes to the development of South Korean feminist geopolitics. By understanding the comfort women issue in relation to both gender and geopolitics, I believe scholarship on feminist geopolitics can open up new ways to discuss other forms of feminist activism in a manner similar to how this issue on comfort women has been discussed.

Secondly, analyzing comfort women's testimonies revealed recurring themes such as patriarchal abuse, lack of educational opportunities, and fear of social stigmatization—themes that embodied the masculine construction of gender narratives. They also revealed the paths that survivors had to walk until they were able to speak about their experiences. As Akeia Benard has argued, the testimonies reveal that Korean hegemonic masculinity and Confucian

90 Holly Yan, KJ Kwon, Junko Ogura, and Tiffany AP. "South Korea, Japan Reach Agreement on 'Comfort Women,'" *CNN*, Published December 29, 2015, http://edition.cnn.com/2015/12/28/asia/south-korea-japan-comfort-women.

patriarchal culture served to normalize systemic violence towards women, thereby acting as an unseen force that had a powerful and suppressive effect on the ways in which comfort women survivors negotiated their everyday lives after World War II.[91] Therefore, these analyses have demonstrated the ways in which the survivors experienced these forces and how they strived to overcome them. One of the most important findings was the fabrication of subjecthood. While the lives of former comfort women were previously directed by male household members, their testimonies revealed that the women gradually transformed into more active individuals that were less subjected to traditional gender stereotypes. What primarily motivated them was encouragement from members of their household, from other survivors, and support from women's groups. Their feminist practices also had a positive impact on public attitudes towards the comfort women issue. From a comparison of newspaper articles published between 1991 and 1992 and those between 2015 and 2016, it emerged that there was a forty-fold increase in coverage. This suggests that the public is now paying greater attention to the comfort women issue. The increased coverage of feminist accounts and activism from December 2015 also reveals the public's continuous efforts to include the survivors at the center of the discussion.

Thus, this paper emphasizes the significant role that feminist practices have played in deconstructing dominant discourses on the comfort women issue. Over the last few decades, women's organizations and feminist activists in South Korea have taken the lead by utilizing a variety of different practices. They have engaged in peace marches and weekly demonstrations, circulated international petitions, and produced books and theater shows to widely publicize the comfort women issue. In so doing, they have both criticized the Japanese government for objectifying female bodies and encouraged survivors to overcome self-deprecation. Initial testimonies delivered by these survivors have served to dismantle the traditional gender and sexual narratives that served to conceal the issue for decades. Finally, these testimonies also made progress—not only in trauma recovery, but also in removing the social stigmatization attached to other survivors.

Therefore, I argue that comfort women activism has opened up new possibilities for the development of feminist geopolitics scholarship in Korea by

91 Akeia A. F Benard, "Colonizing Black Female Bodies Within Patriarchal Capitalism," *Sexualization, Media, & Society* 2.4 (2016): 3-4.

resisting dominant accounts that have failed to put survivors' voices at the center of geopolitical discussion. I suggest that further research could be undertaken to emphasize the need to incorporate traumatic narratives into feminist geopolitical scholarship. Through narrative analysis of comfort women survivors' testimonies, this paper has identified the significance of traumatic narratives in revealing the many and varied forms of female oppression.

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