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# Victim Silencing, Sexual Violence Culture, Social Healing: Inherited Collective Trauma of World War II South Korean Military “Comfort Women”

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## Abstract

The unresolved reconciliation process for WWII South Korean military “comfort women” presents a case of nationally inherited collective trauma, in which South Koreans far removed in time and space from the historical tragedy feel its implications and obligations for reparations and social healing. In examining the South Korean comfort women redress movement and systemic concealment of WWII military sexual slavery, this study investigates a pattern of victim silencing, characterized by institutional patriarchy and ineffective government involvement, from 1945 to 2019. Following the South Korean government’s formal rejection of the 2015 agreement with Japan regarding a final and irreversible conclusion to the comfort women issue, South Korean and international women’s rights organizations have openly addressed a need for new reconciliation efforts with Japan; however, the current stance of the South Korean government, under President Moon Jae-in, remains hesitant to seek a renegotiation. Based on the effective methods of democratic reparations from South Africa, Germany, and the United States, this study proposes a new victim-centered approach to the reconciliation of collective trauma through the role of the South Korean government. The new approach encompasses the following: (1) organizing an official collection of victim testimonies, (2) fostering government relationships with women’s rights organizations, and (3) instating sexual violence education in university settings in order to facilitate long-term social healing.

**Keywords: South Korean Comfort Women, Inherited Collective Trauma, Reconciliation**

## 1. Introduction

On January 9, 2018, Minister of Foreign Affairs Kang Kyung-wha announced the South Korean government’s rejection of the 2015 bilateral deal for the issue of South Korean comfort women as a “true” resolution of the issue of Japanese wartime sexual slavery.<sup>1</sup> The 2015 agreement, which allowed for a Japanese donation of ¥1 billion (\$8.8 million USD) in exchange for a *final and irreversible* conclusion to the issue, served the purpose of acting as the last official deal between the Japanese and South Korean government regarding the issue of WWII comfort women. While Kang acknowledged the deal as an official agreement between the two countries, Kang expressed the South Korean government’s call for a genuine apology from the Japanese government that restores the “honor and dignity of victims and heals the wounds in their hearts,” suggesting that the trauma of former comfort women has yet to be healed and requires present action in order to do so.<sup>1</sup> The continuation of the conversation between the Japanese and South Korean government in 2018 indicates an ongoing issue of the unresolved reconciliation of South Korean military comfort women.

World War II Japanese military “comfort women” refers to an estimated 200,000 women who were coercively “recruited” by the Japanese imperial army during WWII under the banner of Chongsindae (“Voluntary” Labor Service Corps). Although the euphemistic phrase “comfort women” might suggest prostitution, these women were not military prostitutes, but rather forced sexual slaves who were used to supply Japanese comfort stations. The term “comfort women” will be used throughout this paper due to the term’s international recognition in Korea (위안부), Japan (慰安婦), and global mass media. According to Lay and Ward in a 2016 study of the international reaction to the comfort women controversy, approximately 80% of these women were Korean, contributing to the active call for a Japanese-Korean reconciliation of military sexual slavery since the conclusion of WWII.<sup>2</sup>

The unresolved reconciliation process for the issue of South Korean comfort women presents a case of nationally inherited collective trauma, in which South Koreans removed from the historical tragedy feel its burdens and obligations for healing. Inherited collective trauma, or the recollection of a tragedy in the collective memory of a group, correlates to a deficit in the social healing process of an entity: individual and group healing in which the ultimate goal lies in social justice and sustainability within a society. Since 2018, the South Korean government has formally rejected the latest Japanese-Korean accord. Thus, there is a need to facilitate a new means of social healing, ending the influence of cultural silencing and extending the impact of women's rights impacts in present-day governmental actions regarding South Korean sexual violence.

Existing background and historical literature have examined the nature of the issue in relation to South Korean nationalism and feminism, the relationship between Korea and Japan, and the direct psychological impacts on victims. The discussion has primarily focused on characterizing the historical truth in reference to the international clashes after WWII, rather than addressing inherited responsibilities and legacies and the trajectory of women's movements and activism. This paper's purpose is to investigate aspects of the reconciliation process through the role of cultural and sociopolitical silencing in the late 1900s and early 2000s. This perspective, which assembles previous actions and attempts for reparations by the South Korean government, is necessary to understand the issue as a dynamic and ongoing phenomenon in South Korea. Through an analysis of reparation methods from Germany, South Africa, and the United States, this paper will propose a new approach for the reconciliation of the collective trauma of the WWII comfort system through the role of the South Korean government. The proposal includes the creation of an official database for South Korean comfort women victim testimonies, governmental partnerships with activist organizations, and mandated university sexual violence and rape culture education.

## **2. Inherited Collective Trauma of South Korean Comfort Women**

The inherited collective trauma from the WWII Japanese comfort system exists in modern-day South Korea; Koreans far removed in time and space from the historical tragedy feel the societal impacts and obligations for the reconciliation and social healing of comfort women.

In a 2018 Israeli study focused on defining international inherited trauma and post-traumatic worldviews, Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya researcher Hirschberger states that collective trauma, sometimes referred to as cultural trauma, is the recollection of a tragedy in the collective memory of a group persisting beyond the lives of direct survivors and remembered by group members far removed in time and space.<sup>3</sup> Hirschberger claims that collective trauma is a dynamic process—an ongoing reconstruction of past events that take on different shapes and forms from generation to generation. Hirschberger's definition of inherited collective trauma fits Lay and Ward's description of the Japanese comfort system. According to Lay and Ward, the Japanese comfort system embodies the Imperial Army's treatment of over 200,000 female South Korean adolescents during the occupation between 1930 to 1945. This construction through time prompts a need to assess and create collective meaning and social identity, a basis for intergroup understanding.<sup>3</sup>

The presence of collective trauma within an entity presents two factors: (1) a disruption in the collective identity and, thus, meaning and (2) an evolutionary form of vigilance to transcend a painful past.<sup>3</sup> Following a model similar to Hirschberger's, Stamm et al., in a 2004 study of cultural trauma and revitalization, state that when a group forms a collective trauma, the group begins to question its core values, making way for new collective meaning, group adjustment, and historical presence.<sup>4</sup> Collective trauma is evidenced in the racial trauma of Japanese-American internment camps, the aftermath of the apartheid in South Africa, and the systematic discrimination following the Civil War and American slavery, with each historical tragedy prompting a new set of social identities within a larger cohort or population. In a 1991 study of national identity in Equatorial Guinea, Cusack states that traumas are translated through changes in the national or population identity, prompting the notion of inheritance among national and international traumas.<sup>5</sup>

The trauma of the "comfort system" is an example of a disruption in the cohesion of the South Korean population that allowed a new entity to take hold within the South Korean cultural views toward females, victimhood, sexual abuse, and human rights. Alexander, in a 2016 study of cultural trauma at Yale University, asserts that a culture trauma exists in South Korea after the colonial Japanese imperialism, leading to a lack of cohesive social identity within the nation during post-colonial periods.<sup>6</sup> The lack of the governmental actions to address the impact and magnitude of such trauma bolstered the presence of an intergenerational, collective tragedy that persisted throughout generations, prompting a delayed but necessary means to address stigma attached to the WWII comfort system and sexual violence against women.

### 3. South Korean Government and Sociopolitical Silencing

Because the South Korean government failed to recognize the importance of reconciliation immediately following the end of the Japanese comfort system, the Korean society lacked the formal platform, criminal trials, and compensation from which healing from trauma could and would occur. The missteps of the South Korean government enabled the sociopolitical silencing of the victims in formal reconciliation efforts.

Following the end of WWII in the 1940s and 50s, the newly liberated Korea was divided into two spheres of influence, the Soviet Union in the North and the United States in the South.<sup>7</sup> At the time, the South Korean government was focused on the teetering Korean War at the time, seeking to increase national and economic stability rather than address the process of reconciliation for former comfort women. In a 1996 study about the Comfort Women redress movement, Soh claims that former comfort women mostly came from rural and poor areas, bringing a level of illiteracy and poverty that contributed to their lack of political voice.<sup>8</sup> The government's immediate attention to Korea's political stability, the demographics of former comfort women, and the traditional silence that comes with sexual violence cases led to the initial marginalization of comfort women.

In a 2009 study regarding post-WWII feminist nationalism in South Korea, Kim states that the South Korean authoritarian regime's focus on the economy following WWII paved way for the organization of women during the 1960s to the 1980s. During this time, the South Korean government, under President Chunghhee Park, adopted strategies that supported the rapid growth of a labor-based economy that lacked resources for the protection of female workers in the industry. As a countermovement, the women's movement entered a new era, called the Second Movement, that sought for the "humanization" of women within a time of mass industrialization.<sup>9</sup> In a 2003 study on the relationship between South Korean sexual violence and the women's movement, Jung claims that women's rights organizations, such as the Christian Academy and the Korean Church Women United, rose up to establish protection against the growing economic disparity, destitution in urban and rural poverty, and rising class tension, bringing women into the collective voice against unsustainable national development in 1965.<sup>10</sup> Through these efforts, the Women Leaders' Consultative meeting in 1974 officiated the Declaration on Women's Humanization, stating that the unequal treatment of women in South Korea was the "most persistent and intractable barrier" to the progression of human liberation.<sup>11</sup> The growth of the women's movement in the late 1900s created a venue of female activism for the issue of comfort women, which took place in the 1980s and 90s.

Before the redress movement could gain momentum, however, the Korean government formulated one of the first international agreements for the issue of comfort women—an agreement that actively silenced the voices of victims. In 1965, the South Korean government finalized the "Agreement on the Settlement of Problems Concerning Property and Claims," a normalization treaty that settled WWII Korean conscript labor through \$300 million in Japanese economic aid and \$200 million in loans.<sup>12,13</sup> By initiating the executive decision to settle with the 1965 agreement, the South Korean government used the Japanese monetary donation as part of a national economic strategy, without addressing the victims of the military sexual slavery. As one of the first attempts at reconciliation, the 1965 normalization agreement successfully stifled any conversation regarding the issue of former comfort women. The moral and legal conversation surrounding the reconciliation of the comfort women issue only later gained foothold when Yun Chung-Ok of Ewha Womans University presented the issue in relation to the foreign sex entertainment tourism (kisaeng) in contemporary Korea.<sup>8</sup> Since Yun's presentation in 1989, new women's organizations, such as Korean Council for the Women Drafted into Military Sexual Slavery by Japan (the Korean Council), filed demands for the Japanese government to publicly apologize, investigate, and compensate accordingly but immediately faced rejection from Prime Minister Kaifu in 1990.<sup>8</sup>

In 1991, Kim Hak-sun filed a lawsuit against the Japanese for damages, becoming the first public former comfort woman. Following Kim, other former comfort women followed with individual lawsuits against the Japanese government but faced rejections to the notions of coercion and management of the comfort system until 1992 when Professor Yoshimi Yoshiaki discovered incriminating documentation that confirmed the Japanese government's direct involvement.<sup>8</sup> Since Yoshiaki's discovery, the Japanese government has made several attempts at reparations with the South Korean government, including Chief Cabinet Secretary Koichi Kato's 1992 investigation of WWII government involvement, the 1993 Kono Agreement recognizing comfort women, and 1994 establishment of the Asian Women's Fund (AWF).

### 4. Confucianism and Cultural Silencing

At the conclusion of World War II, the South Korean culture relied heavily on patriarchal Confucianism, leaving victims of the WWII comfort system to return to a "shaming" society without systematic support or encouragement

for the victims to heal from the trauma. Thus, South Korea's systemic reliance on Confucianism was one factor which led to the cultural silencing of the former comfort women.

In a 2019 study of the "Peace Girl" statue and related visual media for WWII comfort women, Kwon asserts that the postcolonial South Korean society relied heavily on the monoethnic, Confucian ideals that limited women's influence to motherland and ethnic purity. By contrast, men were labelled as the fighters of "national enemies," building inherently patriarchal nationalism that fueled the othering of women from the national conversation of the collective "we."<sup>14</sup> Through an analysis of South Korean gender discourse, Kim asserts that patriarchal nationalism is evident in the legality of South Korean laws, persisting through infrastructure of family law and the family-head system, referred to as the *hoju* system. Kim states that under the Constitutional *hoju* system, all South Korean citizens belonged to a family in which (1) the wife belongs to the husband's family, (2) the children belong to the father's family, and (3) the eldest son presumes responsibility of the family-headship. Thus, the South Korean government institutionalized concepts of patrilineal family dynamics and gender hierarchy through the male family-head system, in what Kwon calls "male-oriented nationalism."<sup>14</sup> A study of discrimination factors in the family head system by Yang furthers the collaboration between the state legal system and the patriarchal social order, claiming that the post-colonial patriarchal sexual culture interlocked with nationalism served as a hidden backdrop for the period of silence that followed in South Korea.<sup>15</sup>

Former comfort women, no longer retaining ethnic chastity, returned to a shaming society that deemed their forced sexual services for foreigners as "defiling of the nation's ethnic purity."<sup>14</sup> The increase in the popularity of this shaming culture in response to a foreign invasion has long been prevalent in South Korea. During the late 16<sup>th</sup> century Japanese invasion of Korea, raped women sometimes committed suicide—their deaths referred to as an honorable "yolyo"—in order to preserve the image of the "virtuous women." This preceded a series of silenced crimes with "raping robbers" (*kajong y' agoebom*) who took advantage of the Confucian outlook and raped women of a household in front of other members of the household as security so the robbery would not be reported to authorities. Similarly, the returning comfort women faced the burden of Korea's shaming culture and chose to remain quiet about their trauma, often resolving to find residence in a neighboring East Asian country (e.g. Japan, North Korea, China) or committing suicide.<sup>8</sup> The core of South Korea's cultural norms became the foundation for the silencing of female victims following the fall of the comfort system, contributing to the fifty-year gap between the end of World War II and the first public testimony of a former "comfort woman," Kim Hak-Sun.

In a 2016 study with 16 of the 59 known South Korean survivors of the comfort women system, Park et al. claim that victims reported psychological issues that may have exacerbated the development trauma that the women suffered in the comfort system, resulting in subsequent trauma. In effect, Park et al. suggests that South Korean attitudes towards the victims, founded on the ideals of Confucianism, and respective cultural silencing became secondary effects of early-life trauma, prompting a larger scope of disenfranchisement.<sup>16</sup>

## 5. Lack of Social Healing and Internal Cycle of Violence

### 5. 1 Cycle of Violence

South Korean comfort women suffered from long-term subjugation from the Korean government and societal traditions that created an essence of deep shame and humiliation within the marginalized group. A Pennsylvania State University study of defeat, national humiliation, and the revenge motif by Harkavy states that such depth of shame lent itself to an underlying cycle of "defeat, psychological humiliation or shame, and resultant quest for revenge" that is prevalent in ex-colonial peoples and national groups affiliated with military defeats.<sup>17</sup> Harkavy's implicit model of defeat, humiliation, and vengeance presents an understudied area of international relations that occurs in the aftermath of imperialism, colonization, and global conflict; Harkavy's model is particularly relevant to groups deeply rooted in a "shame culture"—a mass tendency for conformity in fear of collective shaming. The defeat/revenge motif in foreign policy is evidenced in Ecuador's defeat in the mini-war against Peru, Argentina's historical grievance in its territorial defeat of the Falklands/Malvinas islands in 1982, and France's loss of Alsace-Lorraine to Germany in the 1870s and the impact on its role against Germany in World War I.<sup>17</sup>

Beyond the recent historical examples, the issue of South Korean comfort women in the late 1900s to early 2000s matches the description of Harkavy's model. Kim Hak-Sun, the first comfort woman to come forward and sue the Japanese government, testified to the extreme feeling of ostracization from Korean society upon her return to her homeland after WWII, stating that "when I was younger, I felt so shameful." Kim furthered her testimony by stating that "the more I think about that [time], the stronger my anger and resentment become—it's probably why I have trouble breathing from time to time."<sup>18</sup> Through a deeply engrained sense of defeat in the forced sexual slavery of

adolescent females throughout WWII and the resulting shame due to the prevailing culture of monolithic Confucianism and traditions at the time, the issue of comfort women lends itself to a cycle of revenge and violence.

The case of the “revenge motif” within the sphere of South Korean comfort women takes form in political protest against the South Korean government. Reconciliation efforts on behalf of the comfort women have repeatedly excluded the voices of the victims as seen through the Treaty of Basic Relations in 1965. This is further demonstrated in the acceptance of the 1994 Asian Women’s Fund, a decision that sparked controversy in its use of private rather than public government funds, the 2011 Korean Constitutional Court decision stating that the government had a duty to pursue re-negotiations with the Japanese government regarding the issue of comfort women, and the 2018 review committee’s decision that rejected the 2015 accord between Abe Shinzo and President Park Geunhye. As a response, the 1980s and 90s female activism and call for national redress for the comfort women lay the foundations and exhibit intentions of the “revenge motif” with deep sociopolitical unrest. However, as the case for comfort women focuses on national discontent and organized protest rather than physical acts of revenge against the government, it does not perfectly fit Harkavy’s defeat/revenge model.

The failure to consider and acknowledge the voice of the arising comfort women movements in South Korea may result in accumulation of disenfranchisement on behalf of the South Korean government, as exemplified in Israel’s failure to predict Arab’s 1973 surprise onslaught due to “a lack of empathy among Israel’s leaders for the Egyptians’ and Syrians’ need to overcome past feelings of... damaged national honor.”<sup>17</sup> Without a reconciliation of the defeat and shame in the issue of South Korean comfort women, a compulsion and need for reconciliation will continue to play a part in contemporary affairs, straining the relationship between the people and the government. Thus, these values must not be alienated from current discussion of South Korean comfort women.

## 5. 2 South Korean Rape Culture

The missing social healing process has contributed to the current rape and sexual violence culture towards women in South Korea. Rape culture in South Korea embodies the complex relationships between gender, attitudes toward women, sexual double standards, and rape myth acceptance. Metacognitive scales, such as the Korean Rape Myth Acceptance Scale, the Attitudes Toward Women Scale, and the Sexual Double Standard Scale, quantitatively measure the perception of rape in South Korea, particularly focusing on rape myths: attitudes that are generally false but persistent and that deny and justify sexual aggression against women.<sup>19</sup> In a study in 2010, Lee et al. investigated the perception of sexual violence against women in a sample of 327 college students. In the study, Lee et al. found that in three of four models (rape survivor myths, rape perpetrator myths, myths about the impact of rape, and rape spontaneity myths), attitude towards women was the biggest predictor of rape myths.<sup>19</sup> This means that an individual’s opinion of women and their roles in society, home life, and academics determines his or her acceptance of rape myths, negating the influence of the individual’s gender and sexual double standards. This conclusion further indicates that a societal opinion of women contributes vastly to the members’ acceptance of rape myths—the more traditional views of women in society correlate to a greater acceptance of rape myths. The core values of South Korea, determined through legislation, policies, and Confucianist roots influence its citizens’ acceptance of violence against women, which makes up the essence of rape culture—a culture that breeds and facilitates the social healing process of South Korean women.

The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) notes that sexual violence against women, including rape, domestic violence, and spousal rape, is still one of the most underreported crimes in South Korea (2007). Especially for cases of domestic abuse and marital rape, the Republic of Korea’s Universal Periodic Review states that victims may not be fully protected under the law due to the poor legal and institutional safeguards and an emphasis on counseling rather than prosecution of perpetrators, leading to only 14.9% domestic violence arrests in 2003. Legal infrastructure on the topic of sexual crimes include the 1994 Act on the Punishment of Sexual Crimes and Protection of Victims, an increase in the number of counseling centers from 12 to 100 between the years 1995 to 2002, and the establishment of Hotlines.<sup>20</sup>

In 2005, the Constitutional Court ruled that the *hoju* system, noted above, was incompatible with legal provisions of gender equality.<sup>21</sup> The influence of the women’s movement in the collapse of the *hoju* system indicates that a method of resistance has formed since the collective trauma of the comfort women. The court ruling represented a breakage of the patriarchal barrier that was fundamental to the silencing culture of South Korea. In a review manuscript for ecological and social healing of women, Pereira-Ares states that such breakage of discriminatory barriers indicates social healing for victims who witness changes to the culture that once stifled their testimonies, especially with enforcement of the Civil Code amendment that would eliminate the provisions of the family-head system.<sup>22</sup> The removal of the *hoju* system has implications in the culture of sexual violence against women in the South Korean

culture of sexual violence against women, or Korean rape culture. Such processes of social healing act directly in opposition to the silencing that had interfered with the reconciliation of collective trauma from the “comfort-hood system” during WWII.

These reforms indicate that the movement against sexual violence has rapidly expanded within the past two decades, leading to policy reform and international outreach. However, the leading actions, including official partnerships with sexual violence organizations, database for comfort women victim testimonies, and national recognition of comfort women and growing South Korean rape culture in educational curriculums for the reconciliation of the trauma of “comfort-hood” have not taken precedence in the South Korean government.

## 6. Agenda for Action

### 6. 1 Current Status

In the last decade, the South Korean government has officially recognized the lack of victim voice in previous reconciliation processes. The government must now act to provide a new means of reparations for the tragedy during WWII. Based on effective methods of democratic reconciliation in Germany, the United States, and South Africa, the South Korean government may now facilitate actions toward long-term social healing.

The public rejection of the 2015 Agreement serves as one of the most recent case examples of how the modern South Korean population is pushing for a long-term social healing process rather than immediate remedy. In 2015, the Japanese government under Abe Shinzo and the Korean government under President Park Geunhye signed an agreement that included one final apology from the Prime Minister that recognized the responsibility by the Japanese Government, a donation of ¥1 billion, and the establishment of the Foundation for Reconciliation and Healing (FRH) in exchange for the removal of the “Peace Girl Statue” and the acknowledgement of the exchange as *irreversible and final*.<sup>14</sup> The secret agreement was met with mass public outcry, prompting a formal rejection by the Korean Council and weekly protests, called Wednesday Protests, in front of the Japanese embassy in Seoul. These hostile reactions toward the 2015 agreement suggest that the people of Korea have opted for a long-term reconciliation process rather than a short-term monetary fund and written apology.

As a result, the South Korean government in 2018 created a review committee for 2015 agreement, rejected the agreement as a conclusion to reconciliation, and created an official Memorial Day for comfort women. However, the South Korean government has not made any renegotiations with Japan nor has it fully disbanded the Foundation of Reconciliation and Healing.<sup>23</sup> In a 2016 study on the background of the 2015 Japan-Korea Agreement, however, Kumagai asserts that the South Korean government has currently dropped its initiatives to remove the “Peace Girl Statue.”<sup>13</sup> The hesitance to reopen negotiations with Japan suggests that the South Korean government has not taken a stance on its next course of action regarding the topic of comfort women. While the government has acknowledged the lack of victim voices in the 2015 Agreement, it has not provided further agendas on reconciliation, which prompts the topic of democratic processes for solutions.

The movement for the redress of comfort women stands in a nuanced yet delicate position for the South Korean government, considering both the formal rejection of the 2015 Agreement and contemporary international tensions. Kumagai states that the emphasized “irreversibility” of the 2015 Agreement, along with the explicit written apology, puts the Japanese-Korean relations regarding the issue of comfort women in a difficult position, a position in which one party must refrain from accusing or criticizing the other in the international community.<sup>13</sup> Kwon comments on the usage of the “comfort women” issue in South Korea as a means of furthering nationalistic values, rather than addressing feministic and human rights values.<sup>14</sup> Kumagai furthers the point by asserting that elements of dishonor, shame, image, and victimhood play on both sides of the negotiation, suggesting that the issue of comfort women must dissociate from the international tensions and evolve into a human rights issue that first seeks to clear misunderstandings and create solidarity within the South Korean population.<sup>13</sup>

### 6. 2 Official Database for Victim Testimonies

In a 2004 Washington University in St. Louis study of reconciliation in South Africa, Gibson claims that truth and reconciliation take on a complex relationship. The interlining of the two concepts are based on political and social constructionist psychology: specifically, the assumption that knowledge and the validation of that knowledge promotes forgiveness and, later, reconciliation.<sup>24</sup> In a study of narrative healing among Greensboro victims of violence, Androff supports this psychological concept, stating that social work practice has incorporated narrative

therapy into treatment for victims of violence to facilitate the healing of individuals.<sup>25</sup> The concept that victims and their testimonies, infused with public sympathy and validation, would allow for a cathartic release and recovery from trauma serves as a basis for “empowerment and strengths-based approaches.”<sup>25</sup> Taken to a global perspective, Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRCs) use and apply the concept of narrative therapy to marginalized groups to promote the reconciliation of a national entity.

TRCs, while based on a logical psychology theory, lack the support of empirical studies regarding the impact of TRCs on generational and collective trauma within a nation. Stein et al. present one of the first studies that attempt to quantify the impact of TRCs in nations—in this case, South Africa. In 1998, South Africa established a TRC with the power to grant amnesty in the topic of the apartheid—government-sanctioned policy that discriminated against non-whites—in order to foster consolidation in its transition to a democratic government. The TRC received approximately 15,000 statements from victims and 7,000 applications for amnesty, granting 216 amnesties and dismissing others for denied guilt, personal gains, or extended jurisdiction.<sup>26</sup> Six years after the TRC, Stein et al. surveyed a sample of around 4,500 South African citizens to measure their attitudes toward the TRC. Stein et al. found that while narrative testimonies were not necessarily helpful to South African survivors of the Apartheid, the South African population as a whole held a moderately positive attitude towards the TRC. This suggests that TRCs provide, to a certain extent, both the knowledge and acknowledgement of a traumatic event in the past that can help to facilitate a reconciliation of the trauma for a community.<sup>27</sup>

The concept of TRCs come into play through the testimonies of former comfort women that began in 1991 with Kim Hak-Sun. Thus far, the government of South Korea has not formally established a database or collection of testimonies of the registered sexual military survivors, prompting independent organizations or national councils to provide their own platform for testimonies. Without a united platform, the main advocates for the reconciliation of comfort women become private or independent organizations based in South Korea or internationally. South Korea’s plan for reconciliation should include a government-sponsored platform for testimonies of comfort women to establish validation for the truth of the past and provide a means of healing for the collective trauma passed through generations of women.

### 6. 3 Government Partnership with Activist Organizations

Reconciliation must encompass the cooperation between the South Korean government and women’s rights organizations. Such collaboration was evidenced in the process of reconciliation for the Japanese-American wartime internment camps in WWII. In a 2019 study of Japanese American wartime incarceration, Nagata et al. assess the long-term racial trauma of the approximately 33,000 Japanese Americans that suffered the discriminatory wartime incarceration during WWII, often called the Japanese internment camps.<sup>28</sup> Describing the “radiating” effects of the mass incarceration, Nagata et al. claim that the formerly incarcerated Japanese Americans carried psychological burdens and unwarranted stigma from the racial imprisonment after the War’s end, contributing to a change in the group consciousness and social identity of the Japanese Americans generations to follow. Similar to the prevalence of shame within the group of comfort women, the Japanese Americans in post-incarceration faced humiliation, detachment, open hostility in treatment, and economic disadvantages from the American workplaces and communities that later enabled a “conspiracy of silence.”<sup>28</sup>

Japanese American internment camp redress began with the 1980 Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians that assessed extensive documentation and gathered over 750 testimonies of witnesses across the country.<sup>28</sup> Stating that the incarceration was a “grave injustice,” the Commission recommended that Congress issue a public apology with appropriate compensation, which was later implemented through Congress’s Civil Liberties Act of 1988. Nagata et al. state that although the commission was a critical portion of the redress success, the 40-year collective silence that preceded the commission led to feelings of disturbance that persisted across generations. The previously suppressed Japanese American organizations continued the redress, working to repeal the Title II of the 1950 Internal Security Act, establishing the Japanese American National Museum, creating the Day of Remembrance ceremonies, facilitating race-informed clinical modes of trauma treatment, and the endorsing Japanese American communities. Similar to the way formal Japanese American organizations recruited and created a sense of solidarity across the United States, the South Korean government should promote the women’s rights organizations in their actions for social healing. Such governmental actions would include, but are not limited to, endorsing the Korean Council as a special committee in the executive and legislative body representing the victims of the “comfort system,” providing funds for the House of Sharing that houses the remaining living victims, and creating special forums for the voice of the organizations to filter through to the governmental body.



## 6. 4 Education for Sexual Violence and Perception

Another aspect of social healing is trauma education. In a 2006 case study of teaching traumatic history in Germany, Carrington and Short assessed the influence of Holocaust education on the perception of racism in secondary education. Carrington and Short found that education of traumatic history and biased narratives held significant correlation with students' ability to recognize and deconstruct stereotypes.<sup>5</sup> Another study in 2002 recognized the implications of Holocaust education on cultural awareness and prejudice reduction in the school setting. Specifically, Burtonwood investigated the nature of contents and teaching methods for the Holocaust, stating that the national German curriculum allowed for the deconstruction of misconceptions about Jews and Judaism but indicated a need for sustainable long-term instruction on the sensitivity and method of education.<sup>29</sup>

Trauma education, regarding the issue of South Korean comfort women, translates to education regarding the sexual violence culture towards women, stigmatization for victimhood, and rape myths within the 21<sup>st</sup>-century population, particularly generations in their early-to-mid 20s prior entering the general workforce. Rape myths prevail in four main categories: (1) Rape Perpetrator Myths, in which rape perpetrators are stereotyped with regard to their age, education, class, and marital status; (2) Rape Survivor Myths, in which women are held responsible for their rape; (3) Myths About the Impact of Rape, in which cultural myths regarding women's virginity and chastity are emphasized; and (4) Rape Spontaneity Myths, in which rape occurs spontaneously due to men's uncontrollable sexual drive.<sup>19</sup> These rape myths can be addressed through the availability and accessibility of sexual assault educational programs in South Korean colleges and universities. Coupled with a historical perspective of the former South Korean comfort women through the database for testimonies, the sexual violence education programs may serve as the foundation for correcting misconceptions about military sexual slavery and ongoing stigma for victims of sexual abuse and assault. The governmental implementation of such programs in diverse college settings would prompt a challenge to students' adherence to stereotypic attitudes toward women and beliefs regarding rape.

## 7. Conclusion

This study examined the South Korean government's role in the process of reconciliation for the inherited collective trauma of WWII comfort women, bringing cases for the cultural silencing of victims and the inherited impacts on the South Korean populace. The presence of collective trauma has led to a disruption in the collective identity of a national entity, prompting a need for a new approach to a government-facilitated social healing process to end the former influence of patriarchal Confucianism and extend sexual violence governmental actions.

As of late 2019, the South Korean government holds a complex and indecisive stance on the topic of comfort women, with the latest official statement articulating a need for social healing yet refraining from further negotiations with the Japanese government. With a history of attempted reparations and over \$9 million USD in donations from the AWF and the FRH, the South Korean government remains in a complicated position for future international conversations for legal and monetary reparations. Furthermore, the Council's demand for a victim input in reconciliation efforts shines light on inefficient communication between sexual violence organizations and the government. Thus, the South Korean government's next reconciliation approach must take a domestic approach that fosters solidarity and resilience within the country, with intercontinental support and guidance.

Formal organizations, state-directed influences, and interorganizational networks are the three structural conditions necessary in this study's proposal of a victim-centered approach. Specifically, state-directed legislation for the mandated education of sexual and rape violence educational programs, through an online or in-person platform, in the university setting will serve the educational pillar of the proposed approach. Such legislation must work in conjunction with sexual and gender discourse specialists and the database for victims of the WWII comfort system to build a research-driven curriculum for sexual violence towards women through the scope of history and current trauma. Additionally, a national committee that works with psychiatric and human rights practitioners to oversee the creation of a formal database for the collection of victim testimonies will allow for the open platform founded in the proposal. The committee would seek to publicize recollections of stories of former comfort women as a means of facilitating healing while avoiding re-traumatization among victims. The coordination of these structural sub-components will allow for the shift in the government's focus from nationalistic goals towards endeavors of human rights and women's rights.

Furthermore, the ability and willingness of the government to work with domestic and international women's rights organizations for the inclusion of victim voices remain critical in the endeavor of reconciliation. Within the broader sociocultural context, the national resources, international guidance, and practical framing of the proposal must be considered fully before exploring the implementation of the victim-centered approach in this study.

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