

On the Relation between Gender and Space: The Case of Japanese Military “Comfort Station” System in Asia and the Pacific

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Abstract

This research seeks a feminist interpretation of the Japanese military sexual slavery system through a discussion on gender and space. In considering the case of the Japanese comfort station system, it argues for the social relation between women's bodies and the male-oriented space from the perspective of international politics. Through the analysis of the case of Korean comfort women and girls in the comfort station system, my arguments draw upon Foucault's concept of 'docile bodies in the panopticon of panopticism,' 'performing gender' of Butler and 'politics of rape' by Rich. By noting that the comfort station system was a double-hierarchized web of relations of domination and subordination, of solidarity and co-operation under the dominant discourses in the matrices of male-oriented power, the case of Korean comfort women and girls exemplifies a double-hierarchized network starting from a local place of Korea to the global places such as Southeastern Asia and the Pacific Islands. In conclusion, this study mainly focuses on analyzing how the relations between gender and space interact within the society and further how this social relationship in the cross-borders strays into the realms of international politics.

Keywords: Japanese military comfort station; Korean comfort women; docile bodies of panopticon in the panopticism; performing gender; politics of rape.

Gender is inseparably intertwined with space since gender has been consistently applied in the spatial context and mutually interacted with space; however, it reveals in several cases that gender can be even dominated by space. Among genders, women's bodies, particularly, have been strongly affected by male-oriented space. The social relation between bodies of women and male-dominated space has the potential to link with the performance of sexual violence in the matrices of power. Cases of sexual violence on women's bodies have existed for many countries in the east and west (see the recently documented cases, for example, Bangladesh, Former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Bosnia, Sudan, Uganda, Democratic Republic of the Congo and even the Islamic States).

However, a remarkable historic and systematic case of sexual violence on women's bodies emerged in the first of the half twentieth century in Asia and the Pacific. The documented systematic sexual violence against women in modern history first appeared in China in the year of 1931.² The system for Japanese military sexual slavery was elaborately arranged soon after the Nanjing Massacre. This system was officially institutionalized under the name of the Japanese military brothels referred to euphemistically as “Japanese military comfort stations” (hereafter, comfort stations). Its spread rapidly increased in Asia and the Pacific such as Burma, China,³ Cambodia, the Philippines,⁴ Hong Kong, South and North Korea,⁵ Japan, Indonesia, Laos, Macau, Malaya,

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² There is a claim that in 1928, the 99 houses in Chungcheong city in North Korea were designated for the Japanese military brothels (Korean Research Institute for Jungshindae). However, the first official documented Japanese military comfort station was established in 1931. Japanese navy authority designated the Japanese military brothels located at the region of Hongkou in Shanghai operated until the year of 1945. The term of “comfort women” was firstly spoken in Shanghai as well. Yasuji Okamura, who was the chief of staff of Shanghai and later became the commander-in-chief of China, called the group of the women in the Japanese military brothels (Sejong university and Hosaka, 2018, p. 33).

³ The Japanese military sexual slavery system was started in China and accordingly, there has been a lot of important research and data collected.

⁴ Notable research for the Filipino comfort women is Mendoza's article. She insisted that the Japanese military sexual slavery system is different from other wartime sexual violence since this system was used to discipline soldiers into being more efficient tools for Japan's imperial project (Mendoza, 2003).

Manchukuo, Singapore, Vietnam, Taiwan,⁶ Thailand, Palau, Portuguese Timor, and New Guinea⁷ (Women's International War Crimes Tribunal Archives, hereafter, WAM). This Japanese system may be considered as one of the most successful rape systems in modern history. There has been a fifteen-year-long record (1931-1945) and still no conclusion between the assailant of the Japanese government and victim-survivors of "comfort women"⁸ after nearly a century.

Considering historical backgrounds and dynamics of international politics, how can the Japanese military sexual slavery system be defined? I attempt to answer this question, by arguing that the comfort station was the place for mass-rape against women's bodies and comparing the meanings and implications between wartime rape and genocidal rape. Although the proper definition of comfort stations is itself a matter of some dispute,⁹ the comfort station is generally understood as a rape center where comfort women were forced into being sex slaves (McDougall, 1998; Kang, 2004).

Given that there is no doubt that comfort stations were the places of (repeated) rape committed by members of the Japanese military, is the comfort station a place for wartime rape or genocidal rape? Rape is a form of abuse and arguably, there are many forms; wartime rape is the mass-rape against females as a prize for military victory or a strategy of war. However, genocidal rape is frequently practiced as deliberately planned to include mass-rape against its enemy (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy). Although the definitions of wartime rape and genocidal rape can be different, they both imply the act of mass-rape of a target group. When applying these two terms to the case of Korean comfort women, however, the boundary between these two definitions become ambiguous, and accordingly, genocide rape in the case of Korean comfort women cannot neatly be summed up and becomes easily marginalized. The colonization and decolonization in East Asia including Korea were applied by Western-oriented international laws and genocidal rape is also applied by the Western-oriented perspective. In this sense, the case of Korean comfort women is marginalized. However, recently, genocidal rape is also defined as the pre-planned and deliberate military strategy according to Amnesty International (Smith-Spark, 2012). In other words, Korean comfort women and girls were the victims of genocidal rape which was relevant to the enslavement of sex slaves in comfort stations in Asia and the Pacific to provide sexual service for Japanese soldiers and officers under the control of the Japanese military authorities.

The idea that Japanese rape system was different from genocidal rape emerged in the 1990s. Genocidal rape focuses on the actions of mass-rape against an enemy during wartime. The Japanese system, however, was institutionalized before World War II and the recruitment target was not all of Japan's enemies but mostly focused on a single specific ethnic group: Korean girls and women. In this regard, on the one hand, this system can be referred to as a wartime sexual crime; on the other hand, it clearly includes the characteristics of genocidal rape.

With the above understanding of genocidal rape, this study will pay a special attention to the male-oriented space of the comfort stations organized for the Japanese military. Through consideration of the case of Korean comfort women, this analysis will shed light on the social relations between gender and space. Based on the historical and political backgrounds in the Korea-Japan relationship while maintaining the feminist perspective for the case of Korean comfort women, I will present three arguments: First, that the case of Korean comfort women is the embodiment of 'docile bodies in the panopticon of panopticism' by Foucault(1995); Second, by using a ruling discourse in the matrices of power, social relations between ruled bodies and a male-dominated space construct the 'performing gender' of Butler(1990a); Third, the 'politics of rape' of Rich(1986) is represented

⁵ In South Korea, the comfort women issue has been publicized by the first testimonial of Kim Hak-sun (1924-1997). After her public testimonials, much more research and data has been collected in both Koreas.

⁶ Suzuki (2011) pointed out that the Taiwanese comfort women issue has been a struggle on both the international and domestic fronts. One of the reasons is the collective forgetting on the part of the victims' society which is fundamentally related with politics like the political conflict with China and necessity of maintaining good relations with Japan.

⁷ Nelson introduced the history of comfort women at Rabaul in New Guinea and there were 3000 comfort women in an Australian Territory. He suggested that more research is needed in the New Guinea and other parts of the southwest Pacific based on documents in both English and Japanese for a more substantial contribution to the international debates (2008).

⁸ The so-called 'comfort women' referring to as the euphemistic term, were females including teenagers taken by force and treated as sex slaves by the Japanese military before and during the World War II (e.g., Chung, 2001; Min, 2003; Kang, 2004; Gu, 2014; Park, 2015; Muta, 2016).

⁹ Since the 1990s, research on comfort women has helped establish the proof that the Japanese government and military was directly and fully involved in the recruit of comfort women and girls violating numerous international and domestic laws. However, ultra-rightist groups in Japan have been trying to distort the fruit of research on comfort women and revise Japanese history (Hayashi 2008; Park 2019). Concerning their recent academic effort, there has been a claim that the Japanese sexual slavery system was officially licensed prostitution which drew on the European models, primarily the French (Kumagai, 2016, pp. 57-58).

within the Japanese military comfort stations across the Asia and the Pacific. Overall, my argument will illuminate how the relations between gender and space have interacted within the society and even permeate boundaries of international politics by demonstrating the case of Korean comfort girls and women scattered in Asia and the Pacific.

Social Relations between Women's Bodies and Space

Within the existing body of literature, additional attention to the contested histories of gender and space is necessary, specifically a greater embrace of the contributions of social geographers and feminist theorists which are crucial to shaping the field of gender and space. Based on the historical facts outlined above, how can we interpret Japan's ethnic and gendered discrimination against Korea? Matters on gender must be considered as both cross-border relations and social relations.

"In a commonsense way, there is a transparent geography to gender relations because there are enormous variations between and within nations in the extent of women's subordination and relative autonomy, and correspondingly in male power and domination; there is as well an evident multiplicity in the social construction of gender, in gender divisions and the symbolic meanings associated with femininity and masculinity. Constructing geography or geographies of gender, as Pollock has noted, 'calls attention to the significance of place, location, and cultural diversity, connecting issues of sexuality to those of nationality, imperialism, migration, diaspora, and genocide' (McDowell, 1999, p. 12)."

This quotation suggests that gender relations should be discussed from an increased number of perspectives. Men and women have different experiences in space and these differences can lead to gendered social construction. Hence, the dynamics of gender relations should be understood in terms of the relationships between sexuality and historical incidents like imperialism and genocide. The definition of genocide is controversial. In terms of the colonized women, there is a limit in the official documents. For the case of Korean comfort women, there are two issues found; one is that the Japanese military systematically burnt a lot of official documents right before the defeat of the Pacific war (Min, 2003; Kang, 2010) and the other is that the Japanese government is still hiding the official documents (e.g., KBS news report). It can be only possible to conduct a statistical study when the Japanese government allows open access to all sources to researchers. In this sense, the matter of genocide or mass-slaughter can rely on testimonials at this point; according to the testimonials from the Japanese and American witnesses including survivors who were rarely found, there have been the forced suicides in Okinawa and mass-slaughter in southern China, in southeastern Asia and even the Pacific islands.¹⁰

In this respect, the case of Korean comfort women is closely relevant to colonial sexuality and gender relations. Japanese imperialism led to comfort women being held captive in the battlefields located in Asia and the Pacific. Particularly, Japanese dual imperial policies demanded Korean women and girls be taken to the locations of the Japanese wars where mass-rape against women's bodies occurred repeatedly. In this sense, Japanese dual imperial policies demanded Korean women and girls be taken to the locations of the Japanese wars where mass-rape against women's bodies occurred repeatedly.¹¹ They were treated as war materials in comfort stations. Throughout the Japanese occupation period, Japanese imperialists and Japanese forces justified the segregation of Korean girls and women among other colonized/occupied ethnic groups.

Gender issues show the extent to which men's power/dominance or women's subordination/autonomy reflects social relations even in colonized society during the era of imperialism. When the claim on the gender relations of the quotation above directly applies to the Korean comfort women, the issue of mass-rape should take precedence over the matter of genocide. As discussed, the comfort station is the rape center wherein the Japanese military conducted mass-rape of women's bodies. This mass-rape continued until the end of the Japanese wars; however, after the wars, mass-rape turned into genocide. Due to the circumstances in which the Japanese military deliberately murdered Korean comfort girls and women at war's end, the Japanese sexual slavery system also carries out the aspect of genocide (McDougall, 1998; Kang, 2010). In this regard, the Japanese system is not just limited to the vertical gender relation in society but to the scope of cross-border relations. The case of Korean comfort women not only unveils Japanese ethnic and gendered discrimination against colonized women, but it also shows the construction of war violence against women's bodies through male power and domination.

In the Japanese colonial era, Korean women were forcibly/illegally sent to the other Eastern and Southeastern Asian countries and even the Pacific Islands.

¹⁰The genocide of Korean comfort women will be discussed in the chapter titled Gendered Space.

¹¹ The Japan's discrimination on Korean females during the Japanese occupation period will be discussed in the chapter titled Performing Gender.

Their movement meant, in addition to the changes of state and region, the girls and women also experienced changes in their social space such as 'home-workplace-community.' The change in social space can lead to a change of identity. Women whose physical and geographical places were illegally or forcibly altered due to male-oriented power had to experience a notable change of their identity. Any social groups make a difference in the spatial context, and it can lead to social discrimination and ultimately results in the inequality of spatial patterns. Therefore, abduction and/or confinement in the male-centered place equates to restricting women's bodies through the agencies of gender, class, race, and ethnicity.

Bodies of women can be recognized as their space. The body is based on daily experiences. People can read age, lifestyle, politics, and identity through their bodies and this difference in bodies is the foundation of prejudice, discrimination, social repression, and (cultural) imperialism (McDowell, 1998). An exclusive attitude on the difference has been taken at all scales from individuals to state, and accordingly, this exclusivism on bodies keeps measuring off space and structuralizing physical and institutional places in a discourse. In this aspect, bodies can be a channel of connection to external areas of the world and particularly women's bodies are a space to shape their identity and a place to inscribe their social knowledge and meaning. In other words, differences of social identity proceed from physical differences such as gender, race, ethnicity and even age. Physical differences become the grounds for oppression and exclusion in society. For this reason, the control over bodies becomes a source of regulation and conflict at a national and even global level (Valentine, 2001).

Bodies of Korean comfort women and girls who experienced wars from the 1931 to 1945 can be used to exemplify this concept. Under the influence of the first Sino-Japanese war of 1931, Japanese imperialists and forces strengthened their regulation over the bodies of Korean females and institutionalized comfort stations by using a dual imperial policy like the national mobilization law, the effect of which can be seen during the second Sino-Japanese War of 1937. After all, even in the aftermath of the Japan's wars, bodies of Korean comfort girls and women have still remained as a source of the conflict in regional relations between Korea-Japan as well as an historic example of systematic sexual violence against women's bodies and women's rights at an international level.

Ruled Bodies

A notable contribution concerning the relation between space and gender is the work of Michel Foucault. He addressed how bodies could be ruled in the context of space which had a decisive effect on how discourses produce bodies and how, historically, bodies were ruled and conquered. In his book, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1995), he explained that through the disciplining power of the surveillant gaze, humans and society can be controlled. In other words, being able to be seen makes themselves have self-surveillance or self-discipline (Rose, 1993; McDowell, 1999; Valentine, 2001). Foucault insisted that bodies with relations of power and domination and led to "subjected and practiced bodies, docile bodies (1995, p. 138)." He introduced the concept of 'panopticism,' which is a kind of internal surveillance while the panopticon is the model for external surveillance. His idea of panopticism applies to not only the realm of instructional settings like prison and psychiatric hospital, but also a range of spatial contexts like the workhouse and workplace (Valentine, 2001, p.28).

In this research, places of the panopticism which Foucault also terms 'a hierarchized network (1995, p. 214),' can be referred to as comfort stations, as they are similar to the concept of asylum. The comfort station was a part of asylum but also a part of the prison. Bodies of comfort women in comfort stations were spaces constructed by internal relations and linked to the external realm. As bodies of a place connected to the society were embodied by the network of social relations and understanding (Valentine, 2001). In the same way, it is possible to think of 'dominance/subordination, Japanese/Korean, male/female' as social relations. The network of understanding can be interpreted with 'the recruitment of Japanese military sexual slavery,' which was a policy of the Korean Government-General as a complex web of solidarity and co-operation between the Japanese imperialist policymaker and the pro-Japanese/colonized Korean administrator.' In other words, Korean women's bodies in comfort stations represented an embodiment of the complex web in the matrices of male-dominant power at both local and international levels.

As Foucault argued, the meaning of 'subjected and practiced bodies, docile bodies' was manifested in the experiences of Korean comfort women. Comfort women, illegally taken to the comfort stations by way of abduction or job-scam, at first refused to perform the role of a Japanese military sexual slave. However, after experiencing repeated violence and rape, these girls and women eventually acquiesced.

For example, according to the testimonies of victims, more than a majority of women experienced continuous surveillance and repeated violence and rape (including suicide attempts).¹² In other words, Foucault's argument literally applies to comfort women as, "(Korean girls'/women's) bodies with relations of (Japan's imperial) power and (male) domination and led to subjected and practiced bodies, docile bodies (of comfort women)." The case of Korean comfort girls and women is a historical example of panopticism, of which surveillance on body and space emerged in the Japanese military comfort stations as the panopticon of the Japanese military sexual slavery system.

According to Foucault, the regulation of body and sexuality has played an essential role in modern history. Insisting on biopower having control over sexuality of women and children, he argued that via biopower, sexual politics took place in modern society (McDowell 1998, p. 50). However, in the first half of the twentieth century in Asia and the Pacific, under the influences of Japan's imperialism, beyond the sexual politics, 'politics of rape,' (see Rich¹³), occurred in the matrices of the male-oriented power as head of state of Japanese imperialists and Japanese military forces. Because in the restricted place (of comfort stations), politics of rape (as a kind of sexual politics but literally raped) was conducted by controlling bodies of women (as comfort women) by the male-centered power.

This different perspective on ruled bodies within the power structure argued in sociology gave further impetus to feminist scholars. Feminists argued that bodies of women had been the arena of struggle. Regardless of time, bodies of women show the place for the battle of power and accordingly, become the major talking point in politics, economy, and even culture. Since Simone de Beauvoir offered the notion that one is not born but becomes a woman, the feminist academy became interested in the awareness that bodies are also the concept and that bodies imply a degree of social significance and social value. If gendered attributes are socially constructed, how can femininity and masculinity can be different from time and place? In this sense, through the case of Korean comfort women, how has the space of comfort stations affected women's bodies and how can we interpret their reconstituted identity controlled by power in international politics?

Performing Gender

Feminists divide humans into sex (a biological difference between men and women) and gender (social meanings attributed to men/women and masculinity/femininity). Specifically, the term gender has the basic premise of gendered stratification in society. In the Western world, a biological difference attributed to blacks and whites was overemphasized, stratified, and socially produced. When examining 'blackness' in white society, the blackness is described as dirt, disease, death, and corruption. This description emphasizes not only the dangers of blackness but also tacitly serves to remind one of contamination. Recently, AIDS has been transmitted in Africa; anxiety about black bodies has been reproducing as racial prejudice (Valentine, 2001).

Japan produced the 'Koreaness (Chosŏnsŏng, 朝鮮性),' and this Koreaness was publicized and magnified. Like Western white society creating the definition of blackness, the Japanese tried to brainwash society with the idea of the Koreaness. Through the 'Korea and Japan are One (Naesŏnilch'e, 內鮮一體)' policy carried out by the Japanese Government-General of Korea, the Japanese continually produced and indoctrinated the negative images and identities of Koreans compared to Japanese. The Japanese discriminatory policies on Korea were rooted in the eugenic study (Kang, 2013). As Nazi atrocities carried out monstrous crimes based on the eugenic study, Japan performed atrocious acts of brutality on Asian women including European girls. However, the Japanese rationale of eugenic study stemmed from discourse, not from a study of science. Japanese imperialists and the pro-Japanese Korean intellectuals who had been parasitic to the Japanese dominant discourse consistently reinforced the inferiority of Korean and superiority of Japanese.

In the context of Japanese imperialism, when examining how Korean women and girls were defined as the 'other' and marginalized and excluded, an exclusive Japanese attitude appeared through not only Japanese formal law and government policy but also informal conversation, judgment, evaluation, joke and even stereotypes.

¹² e-Museum of the Victims of Japanese Military Sexual Slavery has 37 victims' testimonials. Twenty-one of them confessed their experiences of repeated assaults, rape and continued surveillance. Among them are those who attempted suicide.

¹³ Rose (2001) introduced the politics of rape (Rich, 1986), as politics of struggle against of control of women's body by men; however, both Japanese imperialists and Japanese military literally and systematically performed 'rape politics' on women's bodies in the first half twentieth century. Therefore, in this article, the politics of rape which may be employed as a metaphor in the feminist academy is used as the actual and literal meaning.

Notably, the Japanese military sexual slavery represents Japanese attention on Korean in terms of formal law and policy which became the foundation of prejudice, discrimination, social repression, and cultural imperialism. This issue implied the ethnic hierarchy within Korean females and other ethnic groups and the double gender hierarchy between Korean women and Japanese women.

Table1. Comparison between Korean and Japanese characters (Byun, 2003, p. 213)

Japanese	Korean
Honest. Faithful	Not honest, not faithful
(Thought or idea) simple	(Thought and idea) complex. Like to manipulate people
Kind and caring	Not kind and caring. Only helpful as long as it serves his/her interests
Very righteous	Not a fragment of chivalry
Gratitude. To show one's gratitude	No gratitude
Strong to the strong and weak to the weak	Strong to the weak and weak to the strong
Never to reveal the secret	Like to exaggerate the secret and spread rumors
Try to help the public while giving up the private affairs	No sense of duty/responsibility
Spirit of unity	No sprit of unity
A sense of the reality of God/consistent	No sense of eternal/temporary

As Table 1. shows, the negative characteristics of Koreaness, which were released by the Korean Military Command during the Japanese occupation. Japan quodidarily indoctrinated in the inferiority of Koreans and the superiority of Japanese. Outwardly, Japanese leadership insisted on the assimilation of the Japanese empire, but inwardly, they consistently produced the negative images and identities of Koreans and indoctrinated ethnic prejudice as Koreaness. By doing so, Japanese imperialists as colonizers inscribed the social stratification and domination on the bodies of the colonized, Koreans (Byun, 2003).

When it comes to the discriminatory policy on Korean females, the education system during the Japanese occupation can be taken as an example. In 1913, women were allowed to join the regular courses at universities in Japan, and in 1928, the university was open to the women in Taiwan. It was not until the year of 1935 that Korean women could join the university (Kim, 2018). Furthermore, the subjects and contents in the regular courses in school were divergent between Japanese females and Korean females in Korea, and accordingly, it was impossible for Korean females to join the specialized areas in society without extra courses (Lee, 2013). However, the most discriminatory policy was the application of national mobilization law. Japanese women and girls in Korea were not taken to the comfort stations while Korean women and girls were forcibly or illegally taken to the comfort stations scattered in Asia and the Pacific. In this sense, it is evident that Japanese polices led to the gendered ethnic stratification in the order: (1) Japanese women in Japan (2) Japanese women in colony (3) Taiwanese women (4) Korean women.

Even after the Japanese were defeated in World War II, support for ethnic prejudice on Koreans was not over yet. Through broadcast and print media, Japan has reproduced the Koreaness which was first created during the imperial period. Even today, Japanese media gives primary coverage to news that perpetuates prejudice against Koreans, and books which disparage Koreans continue to join the list of Japanese bestsellers (e.g., Park, 2009; Kang, 2012; Jung, 2013; Roh, 2019).

In other words, through mass media, the ethnic stratification and prejudice against Korea(ns) which has existed since the imperial period is still being reproduced and consumed by the Japanese public at this time. And above all, the first perception of the ideology of Anti-Korea (Hyōmhan, 嫌韓, けんかん) in Japan started with the Korean comfort women (Roh 2019). Korean comfort women lie at the heart of the anti-Korea sentiment which is deeply rooted in Japanese pop culture and politics. Not only the prime minister but several influential politicians in Japan have kept up verbal attacks on Korean comfort women.¹⁴

Then how did Japanese authorities and military forces stratify Korean women during the colonization period? Butler insisted on rejecting the idea that sex and gender originated from biology; instead, gender is performative (Butler, 1990a). Gender is an “effect of dominant discourses and matrices of power” (Valentine, 2001, p. 22). In this context that gender is performed and effected by the dominant discourse in the matrices of power, it is possible to interpret the case of Korean comfort women. By using the dominant discourse of imperialism and power matrices of the empire-colony relation, Korean women's identity was constructed as a prostitute by performing the role of Japanese military sexual slaves in comfort stations.

“Gender ought not to be constructed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts. The effect of gender is produced through a stylization of the body (Butter, 1990a, pp. 140-141).”

Butler observed the dominant approach to the notion of gender. According to her perspective on gender, the body itself is not as a sexed and pre-existing surface for a cultural inscription but as bounded and constituted by the political forces which constitute systems (Valentine 2001). Although Butler's gender theory cannot be used to describe all Korean women, it can be applied to the case enough of Korean comfort women. In the perspective of Butler, bodies of Korean comfort women were bound by the Japanese imperialist and military power, which constitute systems for Japan's wars during the 15 year-long period of the Asian and Pacific wars. In the middle of the wars, the comfort station system emerged as a recruitment center for sex slaves for the Japanese military throughout Asia and the Pacific. While Japanese prostitutes were recruited on a voluntary basis, ordinary girls and women in Korea were forcibly/illegally taken to the comfort stations.

In short, as ‘a stylized repetition of acts’ of sex slaves for the Japanese military, forcibly/illegally recruiting Korean young females ‘instituted as part of social relations’ closely connected with colonized power. Thus, identities of Korean comfort women ‘instituted in an exterior space (comfort stations scattered in Asia and the Pacific) through a stylized repetition of acts(mass-rape)’ embodied that of a prostitute. Japanese public continually reproduces and consumes the ethnic/gendered stratification and prejudice on Korean women and girls.

Japan not only spread the ethnic hierarchy and prejudice on Korea but also produced the negative image/identity of Korean comfort women being sexually promiscuous. As argued previously, there are different variations between and within nations in the extent of women's subordination/relative autonomy and men's power/domination. Nonetheless, this phenomenon of discrimination on Korean females in Japan explains why the case of Korean comfort women continues to be an unsolved matter.

Gendered Space

Enloe, who analyzed international politics with a perspective of gender, argued that the history of prostitution in the military post began in the British empire. According to her, under the influence of the British empire which had military presence all over the world by the late nineteenth century, the British military made a sexual relationship with women in colonies like Egypt, India and Hongkong. Moreover, the British government encouraged a marriage policy with colonial women and allowed authorities to forcibly examine sexual organs of women in order to determine if a sexual relationship was safe, without concerns of venereal infection (2000, p. 157).

The Japanese empire followed the same methods of the British empire's two policies; being involved in sexual intercourse with colonial women and forcibly examining sexual organs of colonial women. As Japan's wars extended, Japanese imperialists targeted the very young females of Korea, who were at low risk of sexual infection (e.g., Chung, 2001; Kang, 2002, 2010; Park, 2015).

¹⁴ According to Kazue (2016), Japanese right-wing attacks on comfort women should be understood as stemming from a systemic and embedded bifurcation of women in Japanese society that allows the adoration of some women to comfortably coexist with misogyny, powerful rape myths, and even a porn culture.

Military prostitution on bases has been rated as one of the most important policies; however, the policies were carefully calculated. Taken into consideration was the masculine context of the sexuality of men and readiness for battle, and, in the practical context, the location of the business, economic opportunity for women, and even public health affecting facilities both on and off base. This policy did not matter much in the bases of North American and Europe; however, the situation of the bases in the third world countries became severe (Enloe, 2000, pp. 157-158).

During the Japanese occupation period, for the Korean women and girls working in comfort stations in the Japanese military bases, this matter was dangerous. According to the testimonial by one of the Korean comfort women, they prostituted themselves to 15-50 Japanese soldiers every day during the war (*The New York Times*, 2019). By the end of the war, in the name of honor for the Japanese military, determination not to surrender, and in order to avoid the risk of punishment (Kang, 2010, p. 210), Japanese military gathered comfort women in designated places such as on a truck or in a cave, and genocide was carried out (National Institute of Korean History). It is not easy to find official records of genocide during World War II and correspondingly, it is hard to get a testimonial of survivors in genocide. However, a witness testified that the Japanese military massacred the comfort women in a way of self-determination as they did ahead of the defeat of Pacific war. Despite the restriction to access of the historical records, mass-slaughter of Korean comfort women by Japanese military was reported in the Saipan, Tinian, Palau of the Pacific, Burma as the Southeastern countries, Yunnan and Teng Chong in the south of China, Okinawa in Japan (Kang, 2010). If victims were lucky enough to escape mass slaughter, life after experiencing wartime sex slavery in comfort stations would never be the same as before.¹⁵

However, the comfort station is hard to define the place of prostitution even though there were several types of comfort stations. There were largely two types of comfort women in comfort stations; One was voluntary women to make money, and the other was abducted/confined women who were forcibly/illegally taken to. The fundamental problem of the comfort station system was that Japanese authorities and Japanese military made use of and threw away the sexuality of comfort women from colonies, mostly Korea. In fact, before the Sino-Japanese war, Japanese military authorities calculated thoroughly and meticulously. Japan's numerical target for the comfort station system was one sex slave per 70 Japanese military soldiers.¹⁶ A direct and official order from the Japanese imperialists, the military authorities, as well as the administrative powers of the Japanese Government-General of Korea including private owners of comfort stations (e.g., Han, 2013; Kang, 2018), represented all the Japanese military comfort stations. The map below identifies the locations of comfort stations spread out over the Japanese military posts across Asia and the Pacific.

Map1. Japanese military comfort stations (WAM)



¹⁵ According to the testimonials in the e-Museum, all the victims claimed that the experience in the comfort stations had destroyed their whole lives.

¹⁶ According to the recent news report, for a couple of years Abe government searched for all the diplomatic documents relevant to comfort women and hid all the documents, one of which asked for 110 of Japanese comfort women including 101 of Japanese prostitutes(geisha) and 228 of Korean comfort women by a consul general of Qingdao in China in 1938.

Representation of Rape Politics

“One of the simplest and most disturbing feminist insights is that ‘the personal is political.’ Disturbing, because it means that relationships, we once imagined were private or merely social are in fact infused with power, usually unequal power backed up by public authority. Rape, therefore, is about power more than it is about sex, and not only the rapist but the state is culpable.” (Enloe, 2000, p. 195).

The comfort station system organized under the Japanese powers, spread across Asia and the Pacific, demonstrates rape politics as a part of sexual politics. Rape politics, which arises from male-oriented power, should be defined as a crime regardless of time and space. Given that the Japanese military was directly involved in institutionalizing and assigning comfort women to comfort stations, the Japanese government is guilty. However, there has been no agreement between the perpetrators and victim-survivors and no official data released by the Japanese government. Even today, it is impossible to determine the exact number of comfort women and comfort stations. This is because the evidence of crimes systematically carried out by the Japanese military has been concealed. The silence of victims may be another factor. It is well-known that the majority of the reported cases of systematic rape have been of widowed or single, rather than married women (Yuval-Davis, 1997).

For example, Kim Hak-sun,¹⁷ one of the Korean comfort women, did not give testimony of her experience until she became a widow. Since Kim gave public testimony for the first time in 1991, another survivor-victims in China, North Korea, Vietnam, Netherlands, and Australia have broken out their silence of 50 years and started to give public testimony (Ruff-O'Herne, 1998). Despite uncertainty as to the exact number of comfort women, Korean researchers estimate that the total number of Korean girls and women victimized ranges from 80,000 to 200,000 in more than twenty countries (e.g., Chung, 1994; Kang, 2010; Park, 2015). When Japanese comfort stations are redefined, Korean comfort women mobilized by the power of the Japanese authorities in the cycle of domination and subordination in the web of the Japanese military forces.

“As a result of the fact that it is conceptualized as created out of social relations, space is by its very nature full of power and symbolism, a complex web of relations of domination and subordination, of solidarity and co-operation” (Massey, 1994, p. 265).

From this point of view, the conceptualization of social relation in the space of the Japanese comfort station system is a complex web of relations of solidarity and co-operation of the Japanese imperialists and the Japanese military. In other words, through the dominant discourses from the male-centered power matrices, Korean women's bodies became the docile (subjected and practiced) bodies and performed as comfort women and girls in the comfort stations captured by the double(ethnic/gendered) hierarchized web. This double-hierarchical network, starting from a local place of Korea to the global places such as southeastern Asia and the Pacific islands appeared as the representation of rape politics all over the comfort stations where Japanese military posts stationed scattered Asia and the Pacific. Correspondingly, the identity of Korean comfort women embodied Japanese military comfort stations in their relationships with the dualities of domination/subordination and solidarity/co-operation. The comfort station system may have begun locally, but through Japanese military posts across Asia and the Pacific, they came to represent rape politics on a more international level.

By Way of Conclusion: Beyond the Relation of Gender and Space

I have argued that Japan's comfort stations should be defined not only as a rape center but also as a panoptic on wherein surveillance of women's bodies and space was conducted by panopticism. Correspondingly, the Japanese comfort station system embodied rape politics by employing biopower that controlled the sexuality of comfort girls and women. Korean women and girls, captured by a double-hierarchy web during the period of Japanese colonialism, were made to perform the role of comfort women, instituted by dominant discourse and matrices of power of Japanese authorities and Japanese military. Now, this past gender role is being framed by the members of the Japanese political right-wing as sexually promiscuity. Within the Japanese imperial discourse, as it concerns Korean women and girls, negative imagery of Korean comfort women is still being reproduced.

By ignoring the origin of the ethnic and gendered discrimination of Korean females and the sufferings caused by memories of experiences in the Japanese military comfort stations, as well as hesitating to offer an apology for war crimes, a dangerous precedent for genocidal rape including wartime sexual crimes is being set for acts occurring even now all over the world.

¹⁷ Kim Hak-sun, who gave the first testimony in public as a victim-survivor of Korean comfort women is considered as the first #MeToo activist in Korea(e.g. *Ohmynews*, 2018; Norma 2019).

My suggestions for the future steps to be taken by Japan concern the arena of sincere apology and acceptable reparations for victim-survivors (e.g., Coomaraswamy, 1996; McDougall, 1998; European Parliament, 2007; The US House of Representatives, 2007; The United States Senate, 2014). Thereby, Japan can earn dignity as the only Asian G7 member as well as respect from the world, including victim-countries. I conclude by suggesting that it could be a turning point in the history of rape crimes if the Japanese government were to admit their wrongdoings, embrace victim-survivors, and recognize the comfort women case as the first documented instance of genocidal rape in modern history. The act of the Japanese government surely matters in human history since their rectified attitude on comfort women may become a role model for other assailants of genocidal rape such as Bangladesh, Former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Bosnia Liberia, Sudan, Uganda, Democratic Republic of the Congo and even the Islamic States. In doing so, Japan can take a leading role in offering reparations for war crimes and prohibiting the violation of human rights including genocidal rape.

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A brief Biography:

I received Ph.D. in 2021 for the study of Korean picture brides. Now, as a researcher of the Independence Hall of Korea, I have been interested in Korean women diaspora in the early 20th century. Particularly, my study focuses on analyzing how the relations between gender and space interact within the society and further how this social relationship in the cross-borders strays into the realms of international politics.