Japan and the memory of the Comfort Women System:
the complexity of War Memory and the Empowerment of Women

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1. Introduction

1.1. Foreword

Japan is a country with a very complex historical consciousness. The way the past is interpreted, acknowledged and remembered is extremely important to understand where Japanese society stands both internally and globally. A nation-state is able to shape its historical consciousness by defending a specific official narrative, meaning the version of the past promoted by the government. This is achieved through efforts to keep a certain memory alive and consequently choosing what to remember, commemorate and mourn. The creation of publicly funded museums or the content in approved history books are means to define a government’s official narrative and thus the country’s historical consciousness. This in theory translates to be the broad moral understanding of the past which helps setting a major ideology or world view in the present.

However, as reality often shows in many countries like in Japan, such a dominant memory can hardly be found. There are a lot of disparities among the interpretation of the events that took place during the expansionism of the 20th century as well as the Post-World War events. This causes many debates with neighboring countries and among Japanese. These disparities come to be an issue in what is considered War Responsibility. As a surrender in a peace-making situation, Japan had to face moral political and legal consequences of its war actions through Apology, Compensation, Reparation and Justice. The problem is that not everyone agrees with what actions were taken or are yet to be taken, which creates tensions among society groups and puts an apparently peaceful society in a delicate situation. As I will explain later, there have been progressist political statements that were later retracted by different cabinet offices which causes uneasiness to other countries Japan might have apologized or signed a reparation agreement with. On another hand, it is important to remind that most of these War Responsibilities were forced upon Japan by the allied occupation following the surrender in 1945. In general, War responsibility is often imposed by the winners to the parties having lost the war. Therefore, the actions undertaken in War Responsibility most often satisfy the winners, but do not particularly bring justice to the actual victims of the war. This is why there are many society groups that still do not feel satisfied with Japan’s War responsibility’s
actions and demand apologies, compensations or changes in the official remembrance, even more than 70 years after the war ended.

In this paper I will study the different positions and beliefs Japanese society has in reaction to the aftermath of a crucial War memory Topic: The Comfort Women Issue. From 1932 to 1945 the Japanese military exploited and abused Women in Asia sexually through a system of military stations, forceful recruitments and the abductions of young girls destined to “comfort stations”. This horrendous event can be seen as one of the most important crimes against humanity. This story of human trafficking, sexual slaves, and organized crimes by the military scarred and keeps hurting Asian International Relations. I will particularly study how this issue is dealt with domestically by exploring the views of the Japanese government, and the different positions the civil society has adopted (both former comfort women supporters and anti-apology activists). While studying in Japan during my exchange program I had the chance of coming across civil society groups whose work deserves prominence. One of them was closely involved with the Women's International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan's Military Sexual Slavery, a People’s trial that took place in 2000 in which a startling and dramatic conclusion was agreed on: Emperor Hirohito’s Guilt for the Comfort women System. Getting to learn about their mission and purpose made me realize the importance of ensuring access to information and the necessity of curiosity and interest in the past. It is our responsibility to learn and know about history in order to understand present issues caused by previous conflicts.

In 2018, the Norwegian Nobel Committee awarded the Nobel Peace Prize to Nadia Murad and Denis Mokwege for “their efforts to end the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war and armed conflicts”. Such practices have taken place in innumerable countries and continue to happen nowadays in many parts of the world. This is one of the reasons I chose to work on this topic, as I believe it is still very important nowadays and deserves to be talked about. History seems to keep repeating itself with small variations so that studying and understanding past events and how they are dealt with nowadays can help with current global issues that take place with similar scenarios in different locations.
1.2. Relevance of the Comfort Women Issue in the United Nations SDGs

The Comfort women issue involves important aspects of War memory and peacebuilding as well as being crucial to understand Gender Issues in Asian societies. Although severe crimes that deserve attention were committed, I want to focus on how this particular event took place and is acknowledged, recognized and remembered. I want to study this issue with a twofold perspective related to two United Nations Sustainable Development Goals: Goal 5. Gender equality and Women Empowerment and Goal 16. Peace Justice and Strong Institutions. According to the latter, “progress is being made in regulations to promote public access to information, albeit slowly, and in strengthening institutions upholding human rights at the national level”. As it aims to “provide access to justice for all and build effective, transparent, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels” (16.6) as well as “ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements” (16.10) I thought it would be interesting to study how far this is being accomplished with this particular issue. On another hand, the comfort women issue is also key in understanding gender roles in Asian societies that entered in contact with Japanese imperialism in the 20th century. I will try to prove that ignoring such an important and traumatizing past hurts and prevents advances in the fifth sustainable development goal which focuses in “gender equality and empowering all women and girls”. More specifically, Goal 5.2: aims to “eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation”. I am aware that through this paper I will not study how this may be happening nowadays in Japan (although it could perfectly be a topic of study, notably close issues such as the JK business), but I will study how it was definitely the case during the functioning of the comfort stations, and its implications in gender and historical memory.

1.3. The case of Japan and the comfort women issue

The abuse of women through comfort stations was not the first time the Japanese government exploited them. One of their precedents is the karayuki-san, Japanese girls and women from poor and agricultural areas that were trafficked during late 19th and early 20th century to Asia Pacific regions for prostitution. They were notably used to smoothen trade relations with China after it started boycotting Japanese products in 1915. In
Tomoko Yamazaki’s words, the *karayuki-san* were “the pathetic victim of modern Japan’s policy of aggression towards Asia”. In a similarly exploitative way, during its expansion across the Asia Pacific region, the Japanese military build and implemented comfort stations which they justified with wanting to appease the “sexual necessities of their soldiers” and prevent the rape of local women as well as control the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. Thus from 1932 to 1945 the Japanese managed comfort stations in “China, Taiwan, Borneo, the Philippines, many of the Pacific Islands, Singapore, Malaya, Burma, and Indonesia” using and abusing local women as well as Dutch women in the case of Indonesia. Although the numbers are not clear because of the lack of documents, it is said that between 20,000 to 400,000 women took part in the Comfort Women system¹, the majority of which (approximately 80%) were Korean women sent to different Japanese colonies and occupied territories. It is however important to note that many Japanese women were also used across this system which recalls the *karayuki-san* although the latter were destined to be used by foreigner and the former were for Japanese high-ranking officials. This puts Japan in a very difficult position as it is both a perpetrator and a victim of this crime, which increases greatly the complexity of the issue domestically and therefore, also internationally.

1.4. Terminology

I am using the term “comfort woman” acknowledging it is a euphemism since it refers to women exploited sexually in order to bring “comfort” to mobilized soldiers during war. The original Japanese term is *jūgun-iangū* (従軍慰安婦) which translates to military comfort woman. It is also the term by which the Japanese referred to this specific case of military sexual slavery so that as well as other scholars I will continue using it for precision purposes.

¹ Depending on the source the number changes: Soh (2008) and Yoshimi (2000) talk about 50,000 to 200,000 (p. xii), Naoko (2016) says 20,000 to 200,000 (p4), while Hyun Dae Song (2008) uses at least 50,000 or 80,000 to 200,000 at the most (p.217). Scholars specialized in the comfort women in China have a much different opinion, as according to their research, there were as much as 200,000 Chinese comfort women alone, setting the total number of comfort women as alarmingly high as 360,000 to 400,000 (Bernstein, 2017).
2. Situation of victimized women and countries.

2.1. Women as victims

In this tragic story the real victims are the women who suffered under the military sexual slavery coercion. In most of the cases they were young and were recruited forcefully. Apart from being forced to work through blackmail or threats, they were often deceived and convinced they would be working in industries that would be beneficial for the war efforts. Military comfort stations sometimes used buildings with previous different functions like schools or temples, anything that could fit a big number of rooms. Soldiers with carpentry and plastering skills would refurbish the interior, divide the space into small rooms, and add washrooms, bathrooms and a reception desk. The appearance of the rooms varied widely according to the ranking of the comfort women (basically who was to use her) but in some cases described by testimonies, it was 4 walls with no window and a straw covered floor with no bed. The registration process of the comfort women was done by non-commissioned officers and the weekly health checks to evaluate sexually transmitted disease infection were conducted by the army medical branches so that it is safe to say – contrary to what the Japanese government defended for a long time – that the military and the Japanese government were well aware of all this system. As Yoshimi Yoshiaki puts it, “not only was the army well aware of how comfort women had been brought there, it was managing the entire process.” Although I won’t enter in detail, comfort women were coerced to have sexual intercourse, suffered drunken violence, they had no days off, their remuneration was a fraud as it served entirely to pay off their debts or destined to “saving plans”. They were under strict surveillance as they witnessed and were sometimes aware of military strategy. Although one of the main functions of the comfort stations was to regulate the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, these women were extremely likely to be infected and the health measures to treat them were nonsensical as they had 3 days off to rest which were not even respected in most cases. This lead in many cases to death form illness. Under these horrendous conditions it was habitual for them to use drugs to escape from the torment or try to kill themselves. Coerced double suicide was also frequent as the soldiers, in despair because of the war,

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3 Yoshimi Yoshiaki. 2000. page 132-135
4 An Haeryong (2007) Our hearts are still not broken. 95 minutes. Japan
5 Yoshimi Yoshiaki (2000) page 135
forced them to die together. All of this adds to the suffering and agony of Women which were clear victims of exploitation and were later victims of silence.

2.2. Nations as victims and their demands

Comfort women were being treated very differently depending on their ethnicity. This affected both their recruitment, and their life conditions. The rules and regulations for the use of comfort stations and the recruitment of women such as requiring them to be of age and have previous experience in prostitution, were applied in most of the cases of Japanese Comfort Women. When dealing with foreign comfort women they completely disrespected the law, by taking underaged girls without any experience, and forcing them to engage in prostitution. According to Yoshimi Yoshiaki, this violated 4 International treaties to which Japan was a signatory at the time the events took place: the International Agreement for the Suppression of White Slave traffic (1904), the International Convention for the Suppression of White Slave Traffic (1910), the International Convention for the Suppression of Traffic in Women and Children (1921) and the International Convention for the Suppression of Traffic in Adult Women and girls (1933). There were however loopholes in these International regulations as there was a provision permitting not to apply these laws in the colonies which explains why foreign comfort women often had no experience as prostitutes and were most of the time underaged. This way, Japan inflicted a painful past to many countries of the Asia pacific with their abuse of women, using them to insert their colonial authority and domination over acquired territories. As Yuki Tanaka puts it:

“The ideology of masculinity is intrinsically interrelated with racism and nationalism. The conquest of another race and colonization of its people often produce the de-masculinization and feminization of the colonized. Sexual abuse of the bodies of women belonging to the conquered nation symbolizes the dominance of the conquerors.”

This dominance of conquerors over women and over the colonized countries insults the idea of equality in both Gender and International Relations. It has hurt the History and Memory of Asian women and nations. In some cases, it becomes even more

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6 Yuki Tanaka (2003)
7 Yuki Tanaka (2003) Introduction (7%)
complex as some countries agreed and collaborated with Japan to organize the comfort stations. A perfect example is Taiwan, which under the Japanese rule, issued special military IDs to comfort women to avoid issuing them passports to “export them” overseas. This was agreed between the Taiwan Governor general office and Japan ministry of foreign affairs and relays part of the responsibility to Taiwan even though it had no choice but to partake in such decisions as they were under Japanese domination. Thus, it could be considered a victim but also Japan’s partner in crime, which complexifies the country’s historical narrative. Another example of a questionable agreement with Japan comes from the dependence of former colonies on Japanese development aid. After the war ended, these countries gained independence and received some reparations from the Japanese government (often forced by the Tokyo Trial verdict). This economic dependence may have prevented the victim countries to claim justice for war crimes in fear Japan might stop helping them economically (Yoshiaki, 2000:5). In turn, this also hinders the peacekeeping process necessary after the war.

3. Position of Japan vis-à-vis the comfort women issue

3.1. Historical analysis

In this section I plan to examine and develop the relevant historical moments in which Japan is seen dealing with war atrocities such as the comfort women issue after the end of the second World War. Japan had to accept a series of settlements through which it hoped to put an end to the disputes caused by the war and its occupation of Asian territory. However, many of the issues it supposedly closed still stir up controversies in the international arena. I will explain in what measure the post-war peace-making procedures failed to install a stable and peaceful environment in which all parties are satisfied with the compensations and reparations for the war and occupation. In particular, I want to focus on the Tokyo War Crime Trials, the Japan-Korea bilateral treaty, the coming out of former comfort women in the 1990s, the Kono Statement, the 52nd commission on Human rights and the Tokyo tribunal 2000.

The Tokyo War Crime Trials

After the surrender in 1945, The Tokyo War Crimes Trials of 1946 to 1948 were supposed to judge war criminals to bring justice following the Japanese war atrocities of
the Second World War. However, many of those were disregarded and silenced such as the medical experimentation on prisoners and more importantly here, military sexual slaves.\textsuperscript{8} The reasons behind ignoring such a relevant crime is closely related to the Allied occupation of Japan which moved in on August 28\textsuperscript{th}, 1945. Indeed, previously, on August 18\textsuperscript{th}, “the Japanese government ordered on its own initiative the construction of comfort stations for the use of the Allied troops.”\textsuperscript{9} As the United States forces were partaking in these businesses whether comfort stations set by the Japanese or with “pan-pan girls” (a “derogatory term for street prostitutes who served the soldiers of the Allied forces”\textsuperscript{10}), both states are guilty of being involved with it. Moreover, the fact they were using and enjoying the exploitation of women is an easy explanation of why it was not specified as a war crime. Apart from the sexist exploitation, there was also a huge classist aspect in the comfort women system both during and after the war, as the Japanese often used women from poor origins in order to protect Japanese women of middle and upper classes from being raped. The Trials following the surrender of Japan made disappear comfort women from historical records, which lead to a great silence. This quiet period seems to fit the logic of the Cold War: although liberal at first, the US occupation government which had supported the Japanese radical left, turned to the Japanese right when the Cold War gained intensity. This in turn means that the successors of the people who had controlled Japan before surrender were once again favored. Thus the issue was buried temporarily, giving it no attention or priority. This is sadly not surprising as it has to do with women in a man-driven society, especially at that time. It seems they deemed sexual military slavery did not deserve attention and that it was best to keep it quiet as the Allied were also partaking in such criminal system. Although in 1946, the US gave orders to stop engaging with licensed or illegal prostitution\textsuperscript{11}, some authors like Yamazaki Tomoko criticized in 1999 a possible continuity of such practices by saying: “although Japan should have become an independent nation upon signing the peace treaty, the grim reality is that American bases are still located throughout the country”\textsuperscript{12}. As I have explained, although its primary function was to bring justice, the Tokyo Trials satisfy the

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{8} Kathryn J. Witt, 2016
\bibitem{9} Yoshimi Yoshiaki (2000) page 180
\bibitem{10} Sakamoto Rumi (2010) page 1
\bibitem{11} Yoshimi Yoshiaki (2000) page 184
\bibitem{12} Yamazaki Tomoko (1999) page 192
\end{thebibliography}
Allied powers, but do not particularly bring actual justice to the victims of the war or in particular to the victims of the Comfort Women System.

Silence and the 1965 Korea-Japan Treaty on Basic Relations

During the following years, no attention was given to the Comfort Women although Japan continued to deal with its wartime actions through the San Francisco Treaty signed in 1951, and other bilateral treaties with victim countries. However, not one of these treaties mentioned comfort women. Even the Treaty on Basic Relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea signed in 1965 focused the settlement of problems related to property and claims and established the functioning of economic cooperation and reparation, but did not include the issue of comfort women. Although the function of the treaty was to settle the issues caused by the war and the occupation, it completely disregarded a very painful and big issue but still silent at the time. Moreover, this treaty has for a very long time been used by the Japanese government to silence later claims from South Korea on comfort women, stating that according to Article II, Paragraph 1 of the Agreement on the Settlement of Problems Concerning Property and Claims and on Economic Co-operation between Japan and the Republic of Korea, “The Contracting Parties confirm that [the] problem concerning property, rights and interests of the two Contracting Parties and their nationals (...) is settled completely and finally” thus preventing the Korean government from any future claims. This however, is questionable as the treaty focused on “property issues” and even if Human Rights claims were somehow included in it, the treaty forbids the government of the Republic of Korea from reopening the issue, but not the individual victims from doing so. But these individual claims did not break out until later.

Former Comfort women going public and the Kono Statement

Indeed, during more than four decades there was only silence from both Asian governments and victims. As mentioned earlier, Japanese economic help may have prevented victims and their countries from claiming justice in fear Japan might cease it. None of the affected countries raised the issue until Korean former comfort women dared to do so in the 1990s. With different dictatorships in place, it is not until the 6.29

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13 Accessible at http://worldjpn.grips.ac.jp/documents/texts/JPKR/19650622_T9E.html
declaration of 1987 that Korean democratization takes on, encouraging the women’s rights movement. With it came shocking revelations by Korean former comfort women that little by little decided to break the silence and expose their very painful past. The first to speak was Kim Hak-Sun who led to other surviving victims from different countries such as North Korea, Taiwan, China, the Philippines, Indonesia (including Dutch women) and Burma to speak about their experience as well. The fact it came from personal stories of painful experiences is very crucial to understand how much it affected society, as it reached its emotions. As Youn Myoung-sook says, “the reality of the comfort women presented itself vividly before ordinary people’s eyes, rather than as a story from the distant past that exists only in history”\(^\text{14}\). Although part of the past, it moved the hearts of people so that it couldn’t be ignored anymore.

This civil movement had a governmental reaction in Japan expressed though the “Kono Statement”. On August 4\(^\text{th}\), 1993, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono announced the results of a study on the issue of wartime “comfort women” conducted since 1991\(^\text{15}\). This crucial statement finally revealed Japanese military ties to the issue and represented the first government apology and expression of remorse to the victims of the comfort women system.\(^\text{16}\) The following is a fragment of the statement:

> “As a result of the study which indicates that comfort stations were operated in extensive areas for long periods, it is apparent that there existed a great number of comfort women. Comfort stations were operated in response to the request of the military authorities of the day. The then Japanese military was, directly or indirectly, involved in the establishment and management of the comfort stations and the transfer of comfort women (…). The Government study has revealed that in many cases they were recruited against their own will, through coaxing, coercion, etc., and that, at times, administrative/military personnel directly took part in the recruitments.”

\(^\text{14}\) Hyun Dae-song (2008) Chapter 6 page 217
\(^\text{15}\) Statement by the Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono on the result of the study on the issue of "comfort women", August 4, 1993.
\(^\text{16}\) Tessa Morris-Suzuki, 2014 (p1)
This became very problematic in the following years, as it was one of the main targets of criticism from the Japanese political right.\(^{17}\) It even led the Abe administration to retract the “Kono Statement”, as I will later explain in further detail.

**International Society Reaction: the 52nd Commission on Human Rights and the Tokyo Tribunal 2000**

This issue has known 2 main international reactions, one from the United Nations and one in the form of an unprecedented international civil movement. The former one is the 52\(^{nd}\) Commission on Human Rights of the United Nations, in which the special rapporteur Radhika Coomaraswamy prepared a report on violence against women, its causes and consequences, specifically on the issue of military sexual slavery in wartime. This took place in 1996 as a response to the increasingly numerous testimonies of former comfort women and the revindications of apologies and compensations both by individual victims as well as by the victim countries. After gathering many sources of information and direct testimonies, she reflected each of the parties’ position and concluded on moral responsibility and recommendations. In the latter part she said the Japanese Government should accept legal responsibility, compensate the victims, disclose any governmental documents on the matter, make a public apology to individual women, amend educational curricula to raise awareness of the issue, and identify and punish the perpetrators.\(^{18}\) Although these recommendations were given and published in 1996, I will later explain how it can be argued that many of these actions have yet to be taken.

The latter international reactions I mentioned occurred when after going public, many former comfort women and their supporters gathered to organize an unprecedented civil movement. During the People’s Trial of the Tokyo Tribunal 2000 or the Women's International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan's Military Sexual Slavery, 20 women from 9 countries testified on their experiences as sexual slaves. More than 60 women victims participated in the tribunal. After gathering many testimonies and with the presence of lawyers and historians as the prosecutors’ teams for every country, the judgement found Emperor Hirohito guilty. This was completely unprecedented, although as it was a People’s Trial, it had no legal binding authority. Nevertheless, it is revealing of a

\(^{17}\) Tessa Morris-Suzuki, 2014 (p2)  
\(^{18}\) Coomaraswamy Radhika. 1996
movement in civil society in which not only former comfort women mobilize themselves, but where lawyers and historians also try to bring justice to an unfairly and shamefully ignored painful moment of history. As Yayori Matsui, one of the organizers of the people’s trial puts it, “this is a severe judgement delivered by the international civil society upon Japan for continuing to deny its wartime responsibility.” This was followed by international media as “200 media personnel form 95 agencies from abroad and 105 persons from 48 domestic agencies” attended the tribunal. According to Matsui, “coverage was made not only in victimized countries but also in the US, and others such as in Germany where the tribunal made front-page news. In contrast, Japanese coverage was strangely scarce as, for example, a major newspaper Yomiuri Shimbun avoided the coverage in its entirety”. This is significant in understanding the reception of the issue in Japan: it was vastly ignored which counters the main purpose of raising awareness to the issue. Many of the people who participated in the Trial were former comfort women’s supporters who continued defending their rights and demanding justice for them. Thus, the civil society movement former comfort women started got amplified by their supporters, and so, many different people got involved with the issue without being direct victims. In some cases, the supporters merged in groups that would back individual victims in lawsuits or even launch the creation of museums to keep record of the victims’ voices. This is the case of the Women’s Active Museum on War and Peace (WAM), the only museum in Japan focusing on violence against women in war and conflict situations, particularly Japan’s military sexual slavery. I will later talk about this museum as I consider it a crucial actor in understanding nowadays the comfort women issue in Japan.

3.2. Main Indicators of the remembrance

When talking about historical events it is difficult to measure quantitatively the effects of history through indicators. As mentioned before, historical consciousness can be shaped by defending a specific official narrative. This is done by promoting a specific version of the past and choosing which memories to keep alive or not and consequently defining what to remember, commemorate and mourn. This is why for this section I mainly focus on 2 categories that are relevant as to how the memory of the comfort women is kept. These are History textbooks accounts, and Memorials.

19 Yayori Matsui (2001)
3.2.1. History textbooks:

History textbooks are excellent indicators of how a country’s memory is preserved and how the focus of what is remembered changes. Japanese history textbooks are one of the main controversies that caused disputes both inside Japan and in the Asian region. Indeed, the explanation of many war related events cause many debates in the international arena. According to information acquired through Ms. Yang’s interview and Ms. Yamashita’s interview, after the comfort women issue went public in the 1990s, all middle school history textbooks published in 1997 included an explanation on comfort women. But from 1997 too, conservative activists and parliament members protested against this inclusion so that a decline in the inclusion of the topic of comfort women in the books is very visible. As we can see in the Annexed graphic, in 2002 there were only three books that included the issue, amounting to 19,3% of the shares of the books from that year, and in 2006 it decreased to two with 17,30% of the shares. As of 2012, none of the books included the terms anymore. Finally, in 2016, one textbook from the publishing house Manabisha decided to include it although it only represented 0,5% of the shares. It is important to note that during the governmental review of the book for its approval, it was deemed inadequate for children and most of the explanatory passage on comfort women got censored, leaving only one extract of the Kono Statement to which was annexed the government position stating there was no proof of forcefully taking women during the recruitment of comfort women. This might be a failure against the Japanese government for teaching about the history of comfort women although it also can be considered a “slight but big change”. Indeed, even in the case where only one book includes if only the terms “comfort women”, it gives an opportunity to the teacher to expand the notion and educate the students on this issue. That is why the first priority is for the term to be included while the explanation on the issue can be secondary as it can be expanded by the teacher or the student’s interest. According to Ms. Yang, it is crucial for the comfort women issue to be taught in middle school as it is the only time all students have to study history compulsorily.

Apart from this issue there is also the “new history textbooks” controversy in which books approved by MEXT and adopted by some Japanese schools caused a strong international reaction, mainly coming from the Korean government, as some Japanese government’s historical perspectives were questionable as they intentionally distorted and
belittled Korean history.\textsuperscript{20} This debate over “versions of history” pointed out by South Korea has caused many frictions in the bilateral relations of the two countries that continues nowadays. As we see in recent news “Japan has rejected calls from South Korea to include content related to so-called “comfort women” in school textbooks”\textsuperscript{21}

The textbook issue is extremely relevant as books and education are a very important tool for a government in order to shape them mind and ideology of its citizens. It gives the backstory of the history of the country. According to many of the recommendations Japan has received on how to deal with the comfort women issue, a very important and crucial part has been the importance of access to information and education on such matters. Different cabinets committed themselves to educate the population on the past in order to preserve and learn from such events. The following is a quote from the above mentioned Kono Statement: “We shall face squarely the historical facts as described above instead of evading them, and take them to heart as lessons of history. We hereby reiterated our firm determination to never again repeat the same mistake by forever engraving such issues in our memories through the study and teaching of history.” This, as we have just seen is not always the case. When chosen to be ignored, this subtly shapes the general ideology of society with ignorance and indifference towards the issue.

3.2.2. Memorials:

There exist different forms of memorials that can commemorate a past event. One of them is setting a national holiday in the memory of a moment in history, a person, or a population. Since 2017, South Korea set August 14\textsuperscript{th} as “comfort women day” to commemorate the Korean women who were forced into brothels by the Japanese military before and during the war. This however is not the case in Japan because although some civil society groups use the Women International day to speak about this issue, Japan as no public holiday in memory of the comfort women. Apart from special days, many countries have chosen to honour comfort women in the form of memorial statues. A very extended memorial for sexual military slaves spread across Asia and some parts of the world are Comfort Women Statues. These are present in Asian countries such as China,
Hong Kong, Taiwan, the Philippines and very spread in South Korea, but also exist in Canada, Australia, and the United States. The statues are generally represented by a young adult woman sitting on a chair or a bench. They have closed fists to show their determination to fight for justice and their feet do not usually touch the ground to represent how unstable their lives were since they were forced to be prostitutes and moved to different territories. Most often there is a space to sit next to the statue so that the person who visits the memorial can put themselves in her position and empathise with her experience. People often decorate the statues in winter with a knitted scarf, gloves, a hat and even blankets to show their support and take care of them. There are also support groups that organize demonstrations defending former comfort women and their revindications. Some of them set purchasable goods near the statue in order to collect money for their activities. It is thus a great space for the civil society to express itself.

This being said, not all activists are comfort women friendly. In Taipei, a Japanese activist was caught kicking a comfort woman statue after having a meeting to try and argue for its elimination.22 Such violence reflects a position that is very much popular and spread in Japan too: The anti-apology activists. These are people that deem Japan should not apologize for the past events and often think that whether the women were coerced or deceived into working in Comfort Stations, they were just prostitutes with a contract so that no justice is claimable.

In October 2018, a controversial issue took place between the United States and Japan concerning the comfort women issue. This was caused by the elevation of a comfort women statue in San Francisco, to which the mayor of Osaka, Hirofumi Yoshimura, protested against. He threatened to terminate San Francisco and Osaka’s sister-city relation that existed for 60 years, saying the elevation of the memorial presented a one-sided message. Activists in San Francisco that worked for years to erect the statue and funded it through private donations responded: “it is not coming down”. This drastic and symbolic rupture is significant of how much this issue is still taboo and difficult to address in Japan and how it can affect international relations.

Memorial statues thus set an important space for civil society to express themselves whether in favour or against the issue it concerns. I also enables future

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22 Chung, Lawrence (2018)
generations or even foreigners who might not know much about the history of set country or region, to learn about the past, to understand and even participate in activities to preserve such memories.

3.3. Adopted measures and positions

After understanding how the events took place and how some indicators might help get a grasp of the situation, I will comment on the measures the Japanese government took while tackling the issue of comfort women, specifically referring to treaties, conventions, statements, atonements and compensations.

On the 1965 Korea-Japan Treaty on Basic Relations

As mentioned before, Japan and the Republic of South Korea signed in 1965 a treaty supposedly putting an end to any disputes the countries may have on property and claims. It has been used by the Japanese government to stop any claims the Korean government would have later on regarding occupation and war related events and conditions, arguing it all got settled at that moment. This is questionable as the treaty focused on “property issues”. The treaty also mentions “claims” although it is not specified what type of claims it refers to. This is why, according to the interview I conducted with Ms. Yang, some activists in South Korea decided to file a lawsuit against the South Korean government asking it to disclose all the documents of the negotiations that took place before the signature of the treaty to verify the specific nature of what it referred to. They found out that there was no reference to comfort women or to Human Rights issues in general. Therefore, this treaty should not serve as an excuse for the Japanese government to avoid dealing with the comfort women issue with the South Korean government. Even in the case Human Rights claims were somehow included in this treaty, it would unable the government of the Republic of Korea from reopening the issue, but not the individual victims from doing so. Following the same line of thought, even if the South Korean government reached a solution with the Japanese government, this continues being a solution between two governments which may not satisfy its citizens or direct victims. Thus, individual claims are completely legitimate. In fact, many former comfort women decided to file lawsuits against their respective governments with the help of supporters.

On the Convention on the elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women
As I previously mentioned above, after the end of the war, a long period of silence fell upon the victims of the comfort women system, both in Japan and the occupied territories. During that period however, Japan signed International Treaties such as the Convention on the elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1979 (CEDAW) without having even mentioned comfort women or apologized for organizing such an inhumane system. Although it represents an advance for Gender rights, signing this convention without taking a stance to recognize the issue, disclose it or apologize to the victims can somewhat mock the discrimination comfort women suffered when they were forcefully taken to stations or the silent shame and discrimination they felt in the following years.

**On Kanita Women’s Village**

Previously, although it is not extensively known nor given importance to, the Japanese government authorized in 1965 the creation of a women’s rehabilitation centre for former prostitutes to help social reinsertion in Tateyama bay in Chiba Prefecture.\(^{23}\) This however only served very few Japanese, little of which were former comfort women. It was founded by a Christian pastor, Diakonisse Mutter Haus who created a wooden monument to mourn the victims of the comfort station although what was written on it was “monument to soothe the spirit” so that the victims of the comfort women system were not explicitly mentioned in it. This can give a hint of how unspoken and taboo the topic was in Japan.

**On the Kono Statement**

It is not until the Kono statement\(^{24}\) in 1993 that we see the first form of Japanese apology. As explained before, the statement by Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono finally revealed Japanese military ties to the issue and represented the first government apology and expression of remorse to the victims of the comfort women system.\(^{25}\)

> “Undeniably, this was an act, with the involvement of the military authorities of the day, that severely injured the honor and dignity of many women. The Government of Japan would like to take this opportunity once again to extend its sincere apologies

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\(^{23}\) Soh Sarah (2008) page 198


\(^{25}\) Tessa Morris-Suzuki, 2014 (p1)
and remorse to all those, irrespective of place of origin, who suffered immeasurable pain and incurable physical and psychological wounds as comfort women. (...) We shall face squarely the historical facts as described above instead of evading them, and take them to heart as lessons of history. We hereby reiterate our firm determination never to repeat the same mistake by forever engraving such issues in our memories through the study and teaching of history.

Although it is the first time the government explicitly uses the word “apology”, the sentence also says “once again”. This is contradictory as there had been apologies for the suffering of the war, but never before had there been a direct apology to the “comfort women”. Yohei Kono also refers to “severely injuring the honor and dignity of women” (名誉と尊厳) which in a sense doesn’t fully portray the hardship they went through. This system not only insulted women’s honor and dignity, it raped, enslaved, and even caused the death of many of them.

**On the Diet resolution of June 1995**

In June 9th 1995, during the Prime Minister’s address to the Diet on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the end of the war, Tomiichi Murayama expressed his “determination for peace while learning from the lessons of history” for Japan. To this followed the Resolution to Renew the Determination for Peace on the Basis of Lessons Learned from History by the House of Representatives from which the following passage was extracted:

“Solemnly reflecting upon many instances of colonial rule and acts of aggression in the modern history of the world, and recognizing that Japan carried out those acts in the past, inflicting pain and suffering upon the peoples of other countries, especially in Asia, the Members of this House express a sense of deep remorse”

While this doesn’t exclusively concern the comfort women issue, it is significant because it uses “sense of deep remorse” in the English translation although the Japanese original version uses the term 反省 (hansei) which refers more to reflection or meditation instead of remorse or regret. I feel it is important to know the original term has less depth and refers to regret of a past mistake adding the sense of not repeating it, and is often used by waiters in restaurants in situations like mistaking the dish of the customer.
On the Murayama Statement and the creation of the Asian Women’s Fund

In 1995, Japan provided an atonement through Murayama statement which expressed “deep remorse” and “heartfelt apology” and represented a massive step forward at the time. The statement mentioned “Japanese mistakes”, “colonial rule” and “facing the facts of history”. It is important to note that the atonement is strictly not regarded as a compensation by the Japanese government as this would mean admitting the great seriousness of their wrongs. This atonement led to the creation of the Asian Women’s fund, a joint project of the “people of Japan” and the government which assumed moral but not legal responsibility. It was created by the government and was funded and managed by volunteers. As soon as it was launched it received some striking critiques from both the victims and their supporters. According to Ms. Yang interview, there were controversies on the origin of the money: many of the critics were against atonement by donation of volunteers instead of money directly from the Japanese government. Others did not want economic compensation and felt like beggars for being offered it. Ms. Yang felt the creation of the AWF was a regretful and sad incident that complicated the situation and split up the supporter’s movement. Nevertheless, she feels accepting the money is a completely personal question, as respectable as refusing it. The Asian Women’s Fund was eventually dissolved without having been able to engage in any activities like trying to reach agreements although their website is still currently functional and grants access to many important resources on the issue.

On the statement by Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi

On August 15th, 2005, Prime minister Junichiro Koizumi made a statement on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the end of the war. This statement was similar to Murayama’s (remorse and heartfelt apology) only that it also celebrated and honored the war dead. Koizumi has caused many controversies in many Asian countries as every year he visited Yasukuni Shrine, a place where the war dead have been honored for centuries in apotheosis of their souls. This is very controversial as in this mainly military sanctuary, are also enshrined 14 World War II A Class Criminals. During his statement, he mentioned the fact Japan has been feeling remorse for 60 years and leads on to the idea that it should stop apologizing for the events of the war in every statement about Japan’s

26 Wada Haruki (2008)
history. This idea goes in the line of though of Japan as a victim of the war, which was rapidly spread after the end of the war with the exclusivity of being the only country in the world where atomic bombs were dropped. In his statement Murayama also said the following: “the peace and prosperity we enjoy today are founded on the ultimate sacrifices of those who lost their lives for the war against their will”.

**On the Kan Statements of 2010**

During Prime minister Kan made a statement for the 65th anniversary of the end of the war in August 10th, in which he expressed remorse and apology for the colonization of the Korean peninsula: “To the tremendous damage and sufferings that this colonial rule caused, I express here once again my feelings of deep remorse and my heartfelt apology”. His statement was well received in Korea as it represented a big step forward a sincere apology. However, the content of his speech changed significantly just 5 days later on the occasion of the Sixty-Fifth Memorial Ceremony for the War Dead. His audience were the families of war dead, and he spoke directly in front of them. Thus here, more emphasis was added to the suffering of Japanese soldiers and civilians during the war, and although反省 (hansei) and mourning were included in the speech, the apology was gone.

**On the 2015 Abe Statement and the Japan-South Korea bilateral agreement**

On the 70th anniversary of the end of the war, Prime minister Abe made a speech reflecting on Japan’s road to war. In it he says that “Japan has repeatedly expressed the feelings of deep remorse and heartfelt apology for its actions during the war” and with the same intentions as Junichiro Koizumi in 2005, leads on to victimizing Japan and insists on the fact it should stop having to apologize every year. During his statement it is important to note that the focus of Japan’s road to war is actually minimal as the comments on it represent only 8% of the whole speech.27

Also in 2015, Japan and South Korea signed a bilateral agreement which led to the creation of the “Reconciliation and Healing Foundation”. This foundation purpose was to the “support former sex slaves,” and to “dispense all funds necessary from Japan’s

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27 131 words out of 1664 that total his speech, which means 7.8%.
government budget to restore honor and dignity of the victims.”

In regard to this last agreement, the president of the International Center for Transitional Justice, David Tolbert wrote in a Huffington Post article:

“As part of the latest “apology,” Japan pledged 1 billion yen ($8.3M) for the creation of a South Korean foundation to support the surviving South Korean victims with medical, nursing, and other support services. South Korea, in turn, pledged to “irreversibly” drop its demand for reparation, end all criticism of Japan on the issue, and remove a memorial constructed by Korean “comfort women” survivors in 2011 in front of Japan’s embassy in Seoul.”

However, in 2018 Reconciliation and Healing foundation got dismantled. “South Korea’s decision is a clear refutation of the Korea-Japan agreement which, from a South Korean perspective, lacks sufficient sincerity.”

As we can see the applied measures have rarely been effective, with different organizations being created but ultimately failing in the end.

3.4. Main actors involved

There are two main categories of actors deeply involved in the comfort women issue: governmental actors and civil society groups. The first, concerns the government be it the prime minster or any member of the cabinet. As I have exposed previously, it is evident the Governmental position has slightly shifted over the years starting from the Kono statement, to the Murayama statement and the later Koizumi, Kan, and Abe statements. Also, depending on the audience, government representatives change the discourse to please the listeners: if the speech is addressed specifically and live to the families of those who lost their lives in the war, the speech will be different than a speech that might get international media attention and thus criticism from other countries. It is also important to note that Japanese politics have been dominated by the Liberal Democratic Party since the end of occupation, as they have until now ruled for 65 years.

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28 Michael Kang (2018) South Korea Decides to Dismantle 'Comfort Women' Reconciliation and Healing Foundation
30 Michael Kang (2018) South Korea Decides to Dismantle 'Comfort Women' Reconciliation and Healing Foundation
31 With some interruptions, from 1948 to 1993, from 1996 to 2009 and from 2012 until now.
Although this monopoly of power may hint to a consensus of ideas, this is far from true. The LDP has many different wings with very different political positions: its progressive wings often want the Japanese government to offer more apologies, while the conservative and also stronger wing pulls back from progressivism.

The organizations created by the government in order to solve the comfort women issue were in a sense a failure. Although both the Asian women Fund and the Reconciliation and Healing Foundation had supposedly good intentions in the first place, the level of commitment for both parties was clearly lacking. This is why activists decide to step up their actions to try to counter the non-effectiveness of both the government and the organizations it creates. It is thus very much thanks to spontaneous movements of the civil society that the community of former comfort women has known some achievements. The more progressive leaning individuals organize themselves to denounce injustice and fight for the victims’ rights. I will introduce 3 entities that can be categorized in this group of activists: the Support group for former comfort women living in Japan, the Women’s Active Museum on War and Peace and the Arirang Cultural Center.

3.4.1. The Support group for former comfort women living in Japan

Thanks to the documentary Our Hearts Are Not Broken Yet\(^{22}\) and through one of its co-producers, Ms. Yang Jingja’s interview I have become familiar with the Support group for former comfort women living in Japan. Ms. Yang had first worked in a network called 우리 여성 network (our women’s network) which got later merged with 3 other autonomous groups also supporting Korean women in Japan and former comfort women. Since its creation the group had 3 characteristics or rules: no leader, no office, and no fulltime staff, meaning that it was never a formal organization. When they merged in early 1992, they decided to create a telephone hotline for comfort women. This established the beginning of the support group which would support comfort women in their lawsuits. Some of the members of the support group kept on cooperating with each other after the lawsuits ended, and some even continued to take care of the former comfort women until their death.

This was the case of Song Sindo, a former Korean comfort woman that fought with lawsuits for more than 10 years against the Japanese government thanks to the

\(^{22}\text{オレの心は負けてない 2004}\)
support of Ms. Yang and other members from the support group. They decided to film in a documentary before and during the lawsuits of how they were affronting the issue called *My Heart Is Not Broken Yet*. After the lawsuit ended, the support group continued to work to defend these women memory and history. Yang Jingja continued to work to make Song Sindo’s voice heard, organizing talks in which Song Sindo would tell her story and discuss the issue with different audiences, from supporters, to high school students. Ms. Yang then continued to take care of Song Sindo until her death in 2017.

### 3.4.2. WAM and the Arirang Cultural Center

The Women’s Active Museum on War and Peace or WAM is the only museum in Japan focusing on violence against women in war and conflict situations, particularly Japan’s military sexual slavery. Since the Women’s International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan’s Military Sexual Slavery in 2000, its creation was envisioned to keep a record of the civil society Tribunal and most importantly of all the voices that were channeled through it. It thus preserves the tribunal documents and the testimonies of the victims and survivors in order to pass it onto the next generations. It is essential to mention here the immense role Yayori Matsui had in both the celebration of the Tribunal and the creation of WAM. She was a prominent journalist and feminist activist that proposed the Women’s International War Crimes Tribunal and envisioned WAM. After the Tribunal she was diagnosed with Cancer and decided to dedicate the rest of her life to defending the victims of the comfort women issue and building a place in which their memory can be preserved. She died in 2002, leaving all her inheritance for the creation of the museum. That is why thanks to Matsui Yayori’s enormous contribution and to other individual donations WAM was established in August 2005.

According to Nishino Rumiko, the director of the museum, there were 3 main reasons for opening WAM: to “preserve records of the Women’s International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan’s Military Sexual Slavery”, to “honor the women of Korea, China, Taiwan, the Philippines, Indonesia, the Netherlands, Malaysia, Burma, Papua New Guinea, Guam and Japan who dealt with trauma psychological suffering and physical torment not only during the war, but also in the postwar period”, and to “establish a base
for peace and human rights activism in order to wipe out wartime violence against women
and to promote a more trusting relationship between Japan and its neighbors in Asia”33.

Since its opening, the museum has held 16 Special exhibitions, and continues to
hold symposiums, seminars and film screenings inviting experts and supporters to deepen
the understanding of the exhibitions. They also conduct research on Japan’s military
sexual slavery system, including collecting testimonies and documents to establish the
“comfort women” archives for future generations and completing the “map of comfort
stations”34. It is also a place of exchange of information that offers a space of discussion
on these issues.

A similar organism is the Arirang Cultural Centre. It is a cultural center in which
people can learn about Korea and Japan history by reading books and other materials
available as well as participate in discussions, seminars and events on different topics
concerning this bilateral relation. Although these two organisms are not directly
connected and do not organize events together, they maintain a loose friendly relation and
exchange information. In fact, during the opening seminar for the inauguration of WAM,
a speech was given by the director of Arirang Cultural Center. According to Yamashita
Fumiko’s interview, there is a networks of non-governmental organizations and private
organizations called Zenkoku Kōdō (全国行動) through which these types of
organizations can exchange information and continue to fight for the memory of the
comfort women. As many other members from the Zenkoku Kōdō, WAM and the Arirang
cultural center are two organisms with a key function in enabling access to information
for the population.

3.5. Levels of success and failure

It is difficult to evaluate the levels of success and failure of the Japanese government,
as it sometimes changes its position. Although some statements might indicate that the
will of the government is to sincerely apologize to the victims and act accordingly by
teaching the issue in history like with the Kono Statement, other cabinet members can
lately shift this position by stating that Japan should stop apologizing for the acts of the
war, and pressuring a reform on history textbooks content. This happens because the

33 Rumiko, 2007: 2
34 Visible in Annex ********
books used in every public school are chosen by the committee of the city hall which is elected by the mayor of a city. This means that committees from the conservative wing will choose books they deem appropriate for children (and most probably do no speak of the comfort women issue). This in turn causes a self-censorship for historians and publishing houses, which causes even a stronger decrease in the already poor share of book published with the explanation of the comfort women issue. When including the terms “comfort women” in a history book, the publishing house knows it may have troubles during the evaluation for the certificate of approval of the government and in the case it is approved, it will not sell as much as the other books, as it is a taboo topic.

This is why external actors like South Korea or even the United States tried to intervene and protest on the issue. On July 2007, the Resolution 121 was passed by the United States House of Representatives asking the Japanese government to apologize to former comfort women and to include the issue in Japanese schools’ programs. It cited the 1921 International Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women and Children that Japan had previously ratified and a United Nations Security Council Resolution. This was the first time the United States had a say on the issue and tried to intervene, which was not well received in Japan as they considered the United States was entering in a debate in which it did not belong. In the case of South Korea, the demands to teach about comfort women in their history books were also rejected by Japan as we see in “Japan Rejects Calls to Teach About ‘Comfort Women’ in School Textbooks” (Hyunsu Yim, 2018).

As the intervention of other countries in the matter does not seem to be effective either, activists like the WAM step up their actions, although they also receive poignant criticism: I attended a special lecture at the Arirang cultural center in which I was told by one of the staff members about threats and demonstrations that conservative activists carried through weekly for many years in front of the center. During Ms. Yamashita’s interview, I was also informed of an incident almost taking place in the museum. In 2007, a group of right wing activists that had had a demonstration against the government apologies to comfort women tried to enter the museum to make a fuss. Before this could happen the

35 This can be appreciated in the Annexed graph on page
36 US House of Representatives Resolution 121 accessible at: https://www.congress.gov/bill/110th-congress/house-resolution/121/text
staff of the museum got a warning from the police, so that they denied their entry with the “real” excuse the museum was particularly crowded that day.

Although they sometimes had to face this type of threats and hardships, these two organisms have a key function in enabling access to information for the population, something the state should be doing – as it has on many occasions been recommended to do – but does not seem to organize by itself. This is why their independence from the government is crucial. If they were to be funded by the government, they would probably not be able to conduct the activities they do.

It is also thanks to activists that fight to elevate statues such as the Comfort Women Justice Coalition or (CWJC) that a monument in honor of comfort women was elevated in San Francisco, regardless of the mayor of Osaka’s threats. Furthermore, through the Zenkoku Kōdō and other Ngo networks in other countries, there are weekly demonstrations organized in strategic places like the front of the Japanese embassy in Seoul to demand apologies to the Japanese government and ask it to act according to its past commitments.

Moreover, regarding the result of Song Sindos’s lawsuit, she lost against the Japanese government but gained a lot of support and the opportunity to share her story in schools and different interviews. This might mean that although the government, particularly the Liberal Democratic party, might be rigid as to what they give as concessions on reparation and compensation, civil society movements might influence the situation. This is however true for both forms of activism (supporters of former comfort women and those against them), as both are however civil society expressing itself. Therefore, civil society groups may be the most successful actors in this issue. Although very contrary movements are taking place, getting interested in them or even taking part in them is still a way of positioning oneself and learning more about the issue which is what should be done in terms of moral responsibility.

3.6. Expectations for the coming 5-10 years

In many Japanese government statement, cabinet members use the words “expressing once again remorse and heartfelt apology”. It has repeatedly said words in this line of though, however, activists keep complaining and demanding a proper and sincere apology. Will the day in which the government will not be expected to apologize anymore ever arrive? How can sincerity be evaluated in apologies and government statements? These
are some difficult questions to answer. However, according to activists, it “falls well short of a complete and meaningful apology. It does not recognize Japan’s role in establishing and maintaining the system of sexual slavery. It does not accept legal responsibility for the violations. It fails to meet criteria set out in international human rights norms that a public apology must be an “acknowledgement of the facts and acceptance of responsibility” (Tolbert, 2017).

When I asked Ms. Yang and Ms. Yamashita on the expectations they had from the government, they were really clear in stating they could see no change possible, even in the hypothetical situation in which the government would change its dominant party. Japanese politics seem very rigid, and the general awareness on the issue is not helpful to make a change. This is why in their eyes the only expectation they have is from civil society groups. They are convinced the situation can only get better if the issue is talked about and it earns more awareness in Japan. Yamashita Fumiko talked about how awareness if much higher in other countries, and how the work yet to be done is Japan’s.

The problem is it takes time, and in a society mainly economically driven like Japan, it is difficult to expect a sudden change. This however may become more difficult with the time as age takes unfortunately away many of the survivors-witnesses. Their voices gave an impressive strength to the movement so that without them, the issue might get forgotten. Nevertheless, it is through the work of civil society groups like the Women Active Museum On War and Peace, the Arirang Cultural Center, or the Comfort women Justice Coalition or the recently created Seeds For Hope foundation (キボタネ)\(^{37}\) that the next generation might still learn about it while pressuring the government to include it.

It is however important to keep in mind this is a historical issue concerning women in a man driven society with rigid politics. Regardless of what path is taken, it will be hard to get recognition for it.

4. Evaluation and recommendations

When the Japanese government established comfort stations after the war in order to prevent the rape of Japanese women by the Allied forces, it clearly showed that the idea that rape could be prevented though the establishment of sexual comfort facilities had not

\(^{37}\) This is Ms. Yang current project. Across this foundation she organises exchange programs mainly between South Korea and Japan to teach young university students on the comfort women issue and other Japanese and Korean relations and history.
changed. A symmetrical rigidity of mind can also be felt in recent statements regarding recognition, apology towards the victims and education. In 1996, the special rapporteur Radhika Coomaraswamy recommended the Japanese Government to accept legal responsibility, to compensate the victims, to disclose governmental documents on the matter, to make a public apology to individual women, and to amend educational curricula to raise awareness of the issue, apart from identifying and punishing the perpetrators.\textsuperscript{38} The latter was never done, and will not be done because, like the majority of the surviving victims, the perpetrators most probably already died. The rest however can be interpreted in different ways.

It can be argued legal responsibility was assumed by the Japanese government when forcing to close the issues through the reparations and agreements it signed with the victim countries. However, as mentioned before, the agreements never mentioned specifically comfort women so that this can be deemed not accomplished. Also, punishing the culprits may now be an impossible part of carrying out legal responsibility. Nevertheless, legal responsibility also refers to Japan fully acknowledging its involvement with comfort stations. This means taking the Kono statement further and instead of saying: “The then Japanese military was, directly or indirectly, involved in the establishment and management of the comfort stations and the transfer of comfort women”, recognizing it also participated in the forceful recruitments, the rape, the violent harassment, and the killing of the women.

Regarding victims’ compensations, both the Asian Women’s Fund and the Reconciliation and Healing foundation have been relatively unsuccessful. Very few former comfort women received atonement from the AWF both because of victims refusing to receive it and because of the AWF requirements to certify having been a comfort woman.

Little documents were published by the government, there are many more sources of information about the comfort women system that have been found out by activists and private researchers. However, as discussed during the interview with Ms. Yang, the issue is that the government does not recognize the legitimacy of these documents. This is why

\textsuperscript{38} Coomaraswamy Radhika. 1996
NGOs have to collaborate among themselves and create networks of information on the issue.

The fact former comfort women lived in pain both physically and psychologically without having received a public apology addressed individually is regretful. Now that even fewer are still alive, it becomes an urgent matter. It is however sadly hard to imagine the current government doing so. Furthermore, with the exception of the Kono Statement, the majority of the statements made by the Japanese government do not explicitly mention what it is apologizing for. This should change in order for the Japanese government to fully acknowledge its past actions. Nevertheless, apology should perform the following:

“Apologies should not end truth seeking nor stifle truth telling by victims. Instead, an apology should encourage a collective reckoning by society of conflict-related crimes or human rights violations carried out in the name of the state. An apology should open up space for accountability rather than close it.”

Finally, I cannot stress how important the amendment of educational curricula is. Not learning about such an important and difficult issue is an insult to the lives of the former comfort women and also an insult to the Japanese population, as it denies them the right to learn and know about their country’s history.

As Tong Yu puts it, “International law places affirmative duties on states to investigate and prosecute grave violations of human rights,” and this has not been fully performed since more than 70 years. According to Goal 16.6 of the Sustainable Development Goals, it is important to “provide access to justice for all and build effective, transparent, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels” as well as “ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements”. This should be ensured in Japan for

5. Final Remarks

All in all thanks to the courageous coming out of former comfort women, this issue gained recognition. It was a movement very similar to the recent MeToo movement in which the coming out of victims showed the widespread of violence and cruelty the Japanese military had carried out. Thanks to the support of different activists, the

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39 David Tolbert (2016) Japan’s apology to South Korea shows what public apologies should (not) do.
movement gained an important momentum internationally and lead to a civil social movement that reached its peak with the celebration of the Women’s International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan’s Military Sexual Slavery in 2000. After this, we can say the issue earned a significant awareness in the international community, in which mostly everyone agrees on the same facts. This however is not the case in Japan. What needs to happen is for the Japanese society to acknowledge and digest its history. This would very probably help many aspects of gender relation in Japan. Indeed, Japan has very strong traditions in gender roles that often put women in sacrificial position, whether in the karayuki-san, the military comfort women during and after the war or the recent JK business. But this is not only the case in Japan. As Yamazaki Tomoko says when talking about the karayuki-san:

“Today such “recreation and amusement” continues around military bases worldwide, and is further manifested in the form of sex tourism. Suzuki Yoko, a specialist in women’s history, suggests that the modern sex industry, whether it involves the consumption of Asian women by Japanese men at home or abroad, is a contemporary version of the Japanese Imperial Army’s exploitation of Asian women as comfort women.”

This is why I believe post war treaties world-wide forget about aggressions to women. These are revoltingly taken for granted and considered normal in war periods or in situations of conflict. Women are expected to suffer. This is why a gender sensitive agenda is needed in conflict solving situations to limit the double aggression of male chauvinism and war violence.

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33

7. Annexes

7.1. News Articles on the Issue

**South Korea decides to disband 'comfort women' foundation**

Move is latest setback in efforts to settle lingering wartime tensions with Japan

SEUL/TOKYO — The government of South Korean President Moon Jae-in said on Wednesday that it has decided to disband a foundation it set up with Japan in 2016 to support wartime "comfort women," marking the latest setback to efforts to improve bilateral relations and triggering a protest from Tokyo.

The foundation, formally known as the Reconciliation and Healing
Osaka cuts San Francisco ties over 'comfort women' statue

Japan's Osaka city has ended its "sister city" ties with San Francisco over the display of a statue depicting women forced to work in sex shelters for Japanese soldiers during World War Two.

Osaka mayor Hirofumi Yoshimura said the "comfort woman" monument "destroyed the two cities' relationship of trust."

The work depicts three young women - from Korea, China and the Philippines - standing in a circle holding hands. It is estimated that some 200,000 women were kept in those military brothels.

Women's Statue as Japan Protests

In September 2015, San Francisco unveiled a memorial commemorating the tens of thousands of "comfort women" who were detained and raped by Japanese soldiers before and during World War II.

The monument has stood in San Francisco for a year. It depicts young women from Korea, China and the Philippines standing on a pedestal holding hands, while a statue of Khan Hoa-sun, a Korean activist, gazes up at them.

But the view from Osaka, Japan, of the memorial, which commemorates the tens of thousands of "comfort women" who were detained and raped by Japanese soldiers before and during World War II...
Documentary juxtaposes both sides of contentious debate on 'comfort women'

BY PHILIP BRAGOR
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

On May 30, three people held a news conference in Tokyo to speak out against a documentary titled "Shusenjo: The Main Battleground of the Comfort Women Issue," which focuses on the rhetorical battle over the women who sexually serviced Japanese soldiers before and during World War II. The participants included Nobukatsu Fujoka, vice chairman of the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform, which wants history textbooks to reflect the view that the government at the time did not force these women to work in authorized front-line brothels and that they were, in fact, professional prostitutes. This view is disputed by South Korea, where many comfort women were from, as well as by many Japanese scholars.

Fujoka and others claim Japanese-American Miki Dezaki deceived them when the director persuaded them to appear on camera to explain their position. At the time, Dezaki was a graduate student at Sophia University, and the participants believed the interviews were part of Dezaki's academic research. They had no idea they would end up in a commercially released documentary. They also claim the footage was edited "unfairly" so as to distort their views.

It's a "grotesque piece of propaganda," Fujoka said, demanding that distribution be halted. Fujoka and six others have decided to take legal action.

However, it's unlikely the screenings will stop. The movie is a hit — or, as much of a hit as can be expected of a low-budget art house documentary on this
7.2. Graphics and Documents

![Graph showing the evolution of the amount of Middle School History textbooks published including "comfort women".]

Source: WAM

Photographs: Comfort women statue in Seoul and Hong Kong:
The first image is a picture I took during my trip to Korea in February of the comfort women statue in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul. Next to the Statue were goods that one could take when giving a donation such as bracelets and pins. It was meant to contribute to the support group that keeps fighting nowadays for justice. The second one is a picture one of my friends and classmates took while studying abroad in Hong Kong. There were 3 statues and a lot of signs both in Korean and Traditional Chinese.
Statement by the Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono on the result of the study on the issue of "comfort women"

August 4, 1993

The Government of Japan has been conducting a study on the issue of wartime "comfort women" since December 1991. I wish to announce the findings as a result of that study.

As a result of the study which indicates that comfort stations were operated in extensive areas for long periods, it is apparent that there existed a great number of comfort women. Comfort stations were operated in response to the request of the military authorities of the day. The then Japanese military was, directly or indirectly, involved in the establishment and management of the comfort stations and the transfer of comfort women. The recruitment of the comfort women was conducted mainly by private recruiters who acted in response to the request of the military. The Government study has revealed that in many cases they were recruited against their own will, through coaxing, coercion, etc., and that, at times, administrative/military personnel directly took part in the recruitments. They lived in misery at comfort stations under a coercive atmosphere.

As to the origin of those comfort women who were transferred to the war areas, excluding those from Japan, those from the Korean Peninsula accounted for a large part. The Korean Peninsula was under Japanese rule in those days, and their recruitment, transfer, control, etc., were conducted generally against their will, through coaxing, coercion, etc.

Undeniably, this was an act, with the involvement of the military authorities of the day, that severely injured the honor and dignity of many women. The Government of Japan would like to take this opportunity once again to extend its sincere apologies and remorse to all those, irrespective of place of origin, who suffered immeasurable pain and incurable physical and psychological wounds as comfort women.

It is incumbent upon us, the Government of Japan, to continue to consider seriously, while listening to the views of learned circles, how best we can express this sentiment.

We shall face squarely the historical facts as described above instead of evading them, and take them to heart as lessons of history. We hereby reiterate our firm determination never to repeat the same mistake by forever engraving such issues in our memories through the study and teaching of history.
As actions have been brought to court in Japan and interests have been shown in this issue outside Japan, the Government of Japan shall continue to pay full attention to this matter, including private researched related thereto.

7.3. Interviews: Yang Jinja and Yamashita Fumiko

I had the chance and honor to meet and interview two activists working to preserve the memory of former comfort women: Yang Jingja and Yamashita Fumiko.

Yang Jingja is one of the members of the Support group for former comfort women living in Japan, and the co-producer of the documentary following Song Sindo’s lawsuit. I met her for the first time on February 5th thanks to Doctor Nobuo Haruna, my teacher at TUFS. I interviewed her through Dr. Haruna’s live translation on June 3rd. After her interview, Ms. Yang put me in contact with Yamashita Fumiko, one of the staff members at the Women’s active Museum on War and Peace. I had the pleasure to meet her and interview her on June 6th. Here are the questions I asked during the interviews:

Ms. Yang’s interview:

June 3rd, Nishi-Kokubunji, Tokyo, at Ms. Yang’s office:

To start, I would like to ask you a very basic question, about how this all started. How and why did you get interested in the life of former comfort women? And how did you get involved with them?

Could you briefly explain Song Sindo’s story and your relationship with her? Can you introduce the Support group for former comfort women living in Japan (who are the members, how many are you, how did you meet, when did you start to work together and why…)

What did you study in University? Did your study background help you to tackle this issue for instance during the lawsuit?

After getting interested in an issue and studying about it, when it comes to trying to actually take steps to change a situation like the one this interview is centered on, how does it work? Was it very hard in your case? Do you feel it was worth it in the end?
In your case with this issue, did you find a lack of data that prevented you from getting in depth? During Song Sindo’s lawsuit did this also happen to you? (her not remembering moments of her past or not finding documents related to her experience…)

I believe I remember you worked in collaboration with the Women Active Museum on War and Peace.

While I was writing my thesis, I asked myself the following questions, and as quite the expert on this issue I would like to discuss them with you. First of all, there are no clear figures regarding the number of women who were victim of and participated in the Japanese military comfort stations. Numbers go from 20,000 to 400,000 women according to different scholars. Why do you think there is such a wide range?

Even though it’s impossible to know, what do you think the actual number is closer to?

What are the main issues caused by the post war treaties of Japan regarding former comfort women? (Maybe the lack of mention of comfort women in those treaties?)

How do you feel about the 1965 Japan-Korea treaty that has been used by the Japanese government as an excuse to not reopen the debate on “the horrors of the war” and thus comfort women? What do you think should be done in this regard?

Do you know about the creation of the かにた婦人の村 (Kanita Women’s Village) in 1965? If so what do you think about its function and the extent of its action?

What do you think about the monetary compensation the government gave to the victims particularly through the Asian Women’s Fund?

Do you think the origin of the money destined to repay the victims is important? How do you feel about the AWF payment coming from volunteers and not the government?

How much is the comfort stations system explained in school History books nowadays?

How much do you think should be explained? What age should the students learn about such history?
When was it included? When and how did you learn about this issue?

In オレの心は負けてない, I remember you and Ms. Song went to different talks, some of them in schools. How was the experience of sharing the past of a former comfort women to female students? Did you do these talks to girls only or to gender mixed groups of students? If so, how did the boys react?

Could awareness of the comfort women potentially improve the situation of sexual harassment of women in Japan? Could this also affect and change how women are often seen as sexual objects destined for male pleasure? Do you think this situation has something to do with the fact that the comfort women issue was not dealt with in the past by the government?

How do you feel about the Osaka and San Francisco sister city relation breaking because of the reaction of the mayor of Osaka towards the elevation of a statue honoring comfort women in San Francisco?

How do you feel about a Japanese conservative activist kicking a comfort women statue in Taipei?

What are your expectations for the coming years regarding the position of the government?
What about the new emperor?

What about your expectations for civil society groups such as the WAM? Do you have any current or future projects prepared?

Ms. Yamashita’s interview:
June 6th, Waseda, Tokyo, open space in WAM:

Could you briefly explain how the Women’s Active Museum on War and Peace was created and what is its main goal?

What are the main activities you organize in the museum?
Do you sometimes work in partnership with other civil society groups whether locally (maybe the Arirang cultural center in Shin-Okubo) or internationally?

I previously visited the Arirang Cultural center and attended a talk in which a staff member explained that for many years there were violent demonstrations against the center every Wednesday. Have you also received criticism or even threats from opposing activists? If so, how do you deal with them?

When I first was introduced to WAM by one of my teachers at TUFS (Benjamin Middleton), he explained this museum was economically independent from the government (not publicly funded, but fully functioning thanks to the donations of visitors and volunteers). How important is this non dependency for your work? Has the government or any party members tried to silence your work?

What are your expectations for the coming years regarding the position of the government towards the comfort women issue? (What about the new emperor?)

What can we expect from WAM for the coming years? What directions does the museum want to take? Are you conducting any specific research?

Japanese imperialism of the 20th century caused many victims of sexual slavery across borders. Age has unfortunately taken away many of the victims who felt they did not get the proper apology and or compensation for the pain they suffered. The Tokyo tribunal 2000 was a movement that transcended borders and united women against the Japanese military. As it was a people’s trial, the verdict has no legal authority. Do you think it is possible for a transnational movement to grow again in the future that fights for the rights of these women? Maybe with the help of new technologies and globalization?

When I interviewed Ms. Yang, she explained how she organized and event in which a former “comfort woman” and a young victim of sexual harassment met and bonded so much they felt a connection and felt they had experienced very similar things and pains. Has the WAM worked with any type of support group for sexual harassment victims or does it plan to do so? What are your thoughts on the connections these two issues might have?
7.4. Special Thanks

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