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Rethinking "comfort women" in Historical Fiction: A Multidisciplinary Study on Korean and Korean American Novels

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Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD 2022

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way, and it is the examiners' responsibility to ensure that the academic standards are upheld.

A series of unprecedented incidents occurred since the Covid-19 outbreak. On the 17th of March 2020, the student hall where I had resided for two years advised all students to return home at short notice due to the pandemic. Within three days, we were instructed to vacate our rooms immediately, which was difficult in practical terms for international students due to the nationwide lockdown. The student hall provided no alternative arrangements or options, and after failed attempts to find new accommodation during the lockdown I managed to secure a storage unit for my belongings and find a flight to Korea under difficult circumstances.

After I returned to Korea, my parents and I were in a car accident (the 11th of July 2020) caused by a speeding vehicle that crashed into ours. We were all hospitalised, and my mother had a brain haemorrhage and underwent haemostatic infusion treatment. I also required and received physical therapy, but it took two years to recover fully from the damage caused by the accident. My mother required regular check-ups which required my attention, and still needs monitoring. In consultation with my supervisor, I applied for a period of medical leave (interruption of studies) which was granted. Though a longer term of leave would have helped me to recuperate fully, I was informed by the Doctoral School that I would have to reapply for my student visa if I were to interrupt my studies for more than 60 days under UKVI rules. Given the uncertainties with Covid-19 and changing policies, I took a shorter period of leave (just under 60 days) to avoid the additional stress of having to reapply for my student visa and prepared to return to London. Just two weeks prior to my departure, though, I developed another medical condition for which I had to receive emergency surgery and further treatment. Due to changing travel restrictions and impact of Covid-19 on healthcare services in the UK, given my health condition I did not return to London until August 2021 and continued to work on my dissertation remotely with regular contact with my supervisor. I consulted my supervisor, department research convenor, and the Doctoral School on a regular basis to seek advice and take care of logistical matters as and when they were required. When I returned to London, though I had arranged and paid for student accommodation in advance, my room was not ready when I arrived which further impacted my recovery.

Due to the disruptions I experienced since the outbreak of Covid-19, I have had to make some adjustments to the amount of primary and secondary sources I originally intended to analyse, though I don't think this has affected my conclusions significantly. The disruptions also affected my ability to work at a normal pace, which resulted in longer periods to produce drafts and reorganise the chapters as required. My supervisor also suffered from Covid-19 and long Covid earlier this year, which delayed feedback and editing. Given a two-year period of successive / relentless series of unforeseen events, including ongoing residual side effects from the car accident, I recently developed acute anxiety for which I have been seeing a specialist while completing my dissertation.

I have written this statement in consultation with my supervisor and can provide medical records and a letter from my therapist upon request, if so required.

(557 words)

Abstract

Rethinking "comfort women" in Historical Fiction: A Multidisciplinary Study on Korean and Korean American Novels

Seoung Yun Lee

This research examines how “comfort women” are represented in Korean and Korean American novels. An analysis of the works reveals different methods of representations of “comfort women” between Korean and Korean American historical fiction. I examine the Korean American works by Nora Okja Keller, Therese Park, Chang-rae Lee, Kalliope Lee and Mary Lynn Bracht, published between 1997 and 2018. My analysis of Korean novels focuses mainly on the works by Kim Sum with references to other Korean works on the issue. This study finds that Korean American novels generally contain more fictional elements that allow readers to reimagine the lives of the victims and re-contextualise the collective memory of “comfort women”, On the other hand, Korean novels provide contextualised narratives of the victim-survivors with incorporation of details collected from historical records and the victims’ testimonies. I also analyse how the Korean American works localise and Americanise the “comfort women” issue while the Korean novels appear more nationalistic with their characterisation of “comfort women”. This dissertation aims to study the similarities and differences in Korean and Korean American novels on “comfort women”, considering issues surrounding memory, history, diaspora, nationalism, and subaltern.

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First and foremost, I would like to express my most tremendous gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Grace Koh, for her patience and guidance throughout the course of my PhD. She has always been a great mentor and a source of intellectual inspiration, and I am genuinely thankful for her kindness and support.
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Moreover, I also wish to thank my two examiners, Prof. Janet Poole and Dr. Deokhyo Choi, who offered me insightful guidelines and constructive feedback to improve my dissertation. I am especially indebted to them for their comments and advice, which I will continue to remember for my future works.

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In addition, I wish to thank my fantastic friends Julia and Natalia for their friendship and for sharing the PhD experience. My life at SOAS would have been difficult without them, and they were always within my reach when I needed a friend.

I would also like to thank my friends in Korea and the United States, who would instantly sense my anxiety and call to offer me emotional support when I needed them.

Finally, I want to thank my family for their love and encouragement. I would not have finished this journey without the support of my family. I wish to express my gratitude to my brother and his family for sending me their love and support from Saudi Arabia.

To Mom and Dad, I am forever indebted to you for your unconditional love and endless support. You are the pillars of my life, and this work would not have been possible without you. Thank you.

Notes on Names

In this thesis, the authors' names or titles will be Romanised by following McCune-Reischauer Romanisation System, excluding the ones already transcribed and used in English publications.

With Japanese and Korean names, excluding Japanese/Korean American names, family names are written before hyphenated two-syllable given names, which is common practice with personal names in Japan and Korea.

Quotation marks are used around the term "comfort women" to indicate that this word implies Japanese military sexual slaves.

Notes on Translation

All English translations of Korean source texts are my own, unless indicated otherwise. As a published English translation (by Bruce and Ju-Chan Fulton) of Kim Sum's novel *Hanmyŏng* (*One Left*) exists, passages discussed in this study regarding *Hanmyŏng* were cited from the translated work.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Research Questions

The "comfort women" issue is an ongoing political and social concern in Japan and Korea. In addition to attacks accusing the victims of promiscuity, the survivors were condemned for the delay in coming forward almost after five decades since the traumatic incident occurred. There are various cultural and social reasons why the women would have been reluctant to publicly reveal their traumatic experiences. Until the 1990s, there was a tendency among victims of sexual violence in Korea to blame themselves and either remain silent or choose to commit suicide (Jung, 2014: 45). Jung Kyung-ja, in her *Practicing Feminism in South Korea*, blames the restrictive aspects (or appropriation) of Confucian ideals in Korean society as the reason for such phenomena (Jung, 2014: 44). Koreans have equated chastity as a virtue, and even until the end of the nineteenth-century women's sexual commitment to their spouses was a legal duty (Jung, 2014: 45). Not just "comfort women" victims but survivors of sex crimes in Korea generally feel inclined to blame themselves for the assault (Jung, 2014: 46). Hence, when interviewed, survivors such as Yi Sun-ok, although a victim, said she felt ashamed to testify and register herself as a "comfort woman" (Han'guk chŏngshindae yŏn'guso 1993: 180). Another survivor, Yi Young-sook, commented that she was unwilling to disclose her past as a former "comfort woman" because she felt ashamed (Schellstede Choi, 2000: 101). The victims felt responsible for the sexual violence inflicted on them, which prompted them to self-blame, choosing silence over public exposure. However, things took a great turn socially, politically, and culturally as the survivors began to publicise their experience as “comfort women”. Kim Hak-sun was the first to break the silence. Historical studies on “comfort women” existed before Kim Hak-sun’s testimony in 1991, but major redress movements in other various fields commenced after Kim’s press conference. Lisa Yoneyama, in *Cold war ruins: transpacific critique of American justice and*

Japanese war crimes, explicates that Kim Hak-sun's testimony "gained international publicity" (Yoneyama, 2016: 26). She further explained that the 1990s was the period of "consolidation of international protocols" which led to distinguishing gender and sexual violence committed during wartime as "war crimes" and "violation[s] against human rights" (Yoneyama, 2016: 26). Han'guk chŏngsindae munje daech'aek' hyŏbŭihoe (한국 정신대 문제 대책 협의회, The Korean Council for Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan; hereafter the Korean Council as it is often used in English)[1] was established just a year before Kim's public testimony, but it undeniably was able to conduct more fervent redress activism fuelled by the support and attention garnered by Kim.

The impact of Kim's testimony was immeasurable. The Japanese government conceded its involvement, to a certain extent, in operating the "comfort women" system (Kimura, 2016: 5). In 1993, then Chief Cabinet Secretary Kono Yohei released a statement that contained a partial acknowledgement of coercion used in recruiting "comfort women" (ibid., 2016: 5). A year after Kono's statement, Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi proposed to offer money to a non-governmental fund (the Asian Women's Fund) to support the victim-survivors (ibid.,2016: 5-6). His decision to implement this was criticised by the victim-survivors and activists since his plan was understood as a way to avoid legal responsibility as he expected the non-government organisation to conduct a compensation process (ibid, 2016: 6). In 2007, a Japanese Korean congressman, Mike Honda, introduced a House Resolution 121 (hereafter, H.R. 121) to the American House of Representatives, which states that the Japanese government should: announce an official apology; admit that force was involved when young women were collected for the sexual slavery; and educate future generations

[1] The Korean Council is the first and largest organization in Korea that is dedicated to "comfort women" research to advocate and represent "comfort women" (Ahn, 2020: 7). Han'guk Chŏngshindae Yŏn'guso (hereafter, Chŏngshindae Yŏn'guso) is non-governmental research institute dedicated to "comfort women" studies and is closely affiliated with the Korean Council. The organization also compiled and published the first collection of testimonies in series (Han'guk chŏngshindae yŏn'guso and Han'guk chŏngshindae munje daech'aek yŏbŭihoe, 1993: 315).

about the "comfort women" (Honda, 2007). His action ignited global awareness of the "comfort women" issue. Two Foreign Ministers of Japan and Korea, Kishida Fumio and Yun Byung-se, made an announcement at the Joint Press Occasion in 2015. This consultation was held between Kishida and Yun to discuss various diplomatic matters of mutual interest, including the "comfort women" issue (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Korea*, 2015). Foreign Minister Kishida, on behalf of the Japanese government: 1) admitted the involvement of the Japanese military authorities on the issue of “comfort women” and conveyed Prime Minister Abe's apologies to the women who suffered; 2) pledged to implement ways to treat former “comfort women” and their psychological pains by providing a one-time monetary contribution to a foundation that the Government of the Republic of Korea would establish to support all former “comfort women”; 3) confirmed that this issue be deemed finally and irreversibly resolved and the two governments abstain from accusations or criticisms of each other in the international community and the United Nations regarding this issue henceforth (*The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan*, 2015). Korean Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se stated that: 1) the Korean government would support the Japanese government's announcement and efforts and agreed that the issue would be finally and irreversibly resolved through this announcement; 2) the Korean government would take into account the Japanese government's concern over the “comfort women” statue placed in front of the Japanese Embassy in Korea and consider removing the statue by contacting relevant organisations; 3) the Korean government would also abstain from accusations or criticisms against the Japanese government in the international community and the United Nations regarding this issue (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan*, 2015). However, the survivors, historians, and organisations that support the victims were critical of this joint press announcement. According to *The Diplomat*, this occasion was not a diplomatic agreement as the Cabinet of

Japan did not approve it, unlike the Japanese government's previous diplomatic practice *(The Diplomat,* 2022).

To underscore the importance of this matter, non-governmental organisations, historians, and writers have conveyed their concerns publicly. Out of the many countries where these victims are from, Korea initiated the redress movement. Simultaneously, the issue has also drawn attention from overseas, especially in the United States, where Korean American writers and scholars initially carried out the most prominent protests in fighting for the justice of "comfort women". As mentioned earlier, Kim Hak-sun's public testimony in 1991 initiated international awareness. This publicity led to the increase in cultural products of "comfort women" in the late 1990s and onward, focusing more on the narratives and subjectivity of the victim-survivors, unlike in the past when they were more associated with graphic and sensual imageries.

In this study, novels centred around "comfort women" by Korean and Korean American writers will be discussed. Among many published Korean literature on "comfort women", not all focus on the victim-survivors. Excluding graphic novels, short stories, and books intended for children, six novels that concentrate on the lives of the victim-survivors will be examined: Yun Chŏng-mo's (윤정모) *Emi irŭmŭn Chosenppiyŏtta* (에미 이름은 조센삐였다, 'Your ma's name was Chosŏn whore', 1988 and 1997; hereafter *Emi irŭm*);[2] Pae Hong-chin's (배홍진) *Kŭrim sok ŭro tŭrŏgan sonyŏ* (그림속으로 들어간 소녀, 'The girl who walked into her painting', 2008*;* hereafter *Kŭrim sok*); Kim Sum's (김숨) *Hanmyŏng* (한명, 'One left', 2016), *Hŭrŭnŭn p'yŏnji* (흐르는 편지, 'Flowing letters', 2018),

[2] Yun Chŏng-mo's *Emi irŭm* is the first historical fiction on "comfort women" issue, which was published in 1988. Yim Chong-guk, a Korean historian who wrote *Chŏngsindae Sillok*, the first Korean record on "comfort women", contacted Yun and asked her to write a literary work on "comfort women". According to Yun, Yim shared his findings and encouraged her to write a novel about "comfort women" to raise public awareness (Yun, 2016). However, her work did not draw much attention at the time of its release. The novel was then republished after the "comfort women" issue gained more public attention. The 2nd Edition of *Emi irŭm* released in 1997 is referenced in this thesis.

Kunin i ch'ŏnsa ga toegirŭl paran chŏk innŭn'ga (군인이 천사가 되기를 바란적 있는가, 'Have you ever wished for a soldier to be an angel?', 2018; hereafter *Kunin i ch'ŏnsa*), and *Sunggoham ŭn narŭl tŭryŏda bonŭn gŏya* (숭고함은 나를 들여다 보는거야, 'Sublimity lies in self-reflection', 2018; hereafter *Sunggoham*). The main narrative of *Emi irŭm* is carried out by Sun-i, a former (fictional) "comfort woman". Pae Hong-chin's *Kŭrim sok* is based on records of a real-life figure Kang Tŏk-kyŏng, and Kim Sum's four historical novels[3] cite words from the testimonies of "comfort women". Her two works, *Kunin i ch'ŏnsa* and *Sunggoham* contain interviews with Kim Bok-dong[4] and Kil Wŏn-ok, the two Korean "comfort women" survivors the author personally interviewed. Along with these Korean novels, I will discuss Korean American novels including Nora Okja Keller's *Comfort Woman* (1997), Therese Park's *A Gift of the Emperor* (1997), Chang-rae Lee's *A Gesture Life* (1999), Kalliope Lee's *Sunday Girl* (2013), and Mary Lynn Bracht's *White Chrysanthemum* (2018).

My research aims to investigate how the "comfort women" issue is presented or recontextualised in the literary works by Korean and Korean American writers. Though some studies or reviews on Korean and Korean American novels on "comfort women" exist, they are rarely analysed together. These literary creations can be collectively perceived as outputs of a joint effort to bring justice to the victims. Still, the stylistic approaches in the Korean and Korean American novels vary, perhaps depending on the positionalities of the authors and their understanding of the history. On the one hand, Korean American works tend to have more fictional elements that allow readers to reimagine the lives of the victims and the collective memory of "comfort women". On the other hand, Korean novels provide recontextualised narratives of the victim-survivors by incorporating details collected from historical records and the victims' testimonies. I will analyse how the Korean American

[3] Kim wrote a total of five historical novels on "comfort women" but her latest work *Aiwa k'al* ('A child and a sword') published in 2021, is not discussed in this study as it is a graphic novel intended for children readers.
[4] Kim Bok-dong passed away in January 2019.

works localise and Americanise the "comfort women" issue while the Korean novels appear more nationalistic with their characterisation of "comfort women". Hence, this thesis will study the similarities and differences in Korean and Korean American novels on "comfort women", considering issues surrounding memory, history, diaspora, nationalism, and the subaltern.

Before delving into literary analyses, a comprehensive understanding of history, fiction, and memory is imperative. Moreover, a nuanced and multifaceted approach is necessary to comprehend the intricacies of historical novels. Broadly speaking, history is understood as an impartial record of past events, although at times its objectivity can be compromised by the perspectives of those compiling the data, reflecting the historians' subjective point of view. In the context of the "comfort women" issue, the victims' testimonies function as valuable historical resources. However, as the silence broke five decades after the end of World War II, the oral testimonies came under attack for their credibility and inconsistency, especially by historians, in relation to certain facts that they testified. Conversely, despite the challenges related to authenticity and reliability, the oral testimonies provided by victim-survivors still constitute historical data.

On the other hand, fiction represents a literary creation that can blend realistic and fictional elements. Historical fiction distinguishes itself by integrating historical facts and circumstances. Novels centred around the "comfort women" issue can thus be categorized as historical fiction. However, historical fiction must be recognized as a distinct literary genre and not as factual historical data. Memory, like history, reflects the past and has the potential for subjective intervention based on the positionality of the person or collective recollecting the past. Moreover, testimony stems from memory, and they are undoubtedly interrelated. All in all, history, fiction, and memory can contain varying degrees of subjective voice, depending on who presents the narrative. Fiction is a literary creation entirely based on the

power of the writer. Nevertheless, due to its unique characteristics, history and memory become crucial literary elements of historical fiction.

Notably, what remains crucial is that novels addressing the "comfort women" issue convey collective memory and offer a re-contextualization of historical narratives related to these women. These novels provide narratives of decentralized and marginalized women within official historical accounts. The significance of these literary works lies in their capacity to facilitate a form of "re-experiencing" history alongside those who endured the atrocious experience.

This thesis seeks to make a meaningful contribution to existing studies on Korean and Korean American “comfort women” literature. There is currently a lack of scholarship on Korean “comfort women” novels especially compared to Korean American works on the same topic. Moreover, despite countless authors' efforts, novels on “comfort women” are not acknowledged as a proper genre. Even if this is the case, cultural productions of “comfort women” are continuously created and produced by various artists and authors, necessitating studies on them by scholars of various academic disciplines. Through a comparative study of Korean and Korean American “comfort women” novels, this study may offer new ways to consider these works more comprehensively vis-à-vis the historical and socio-political issues surrounding “comfort women”. A comparative and comprehensive study of Korean novels would also be an important project in acknowledging the writers’ cultural reparation act, and it is hoped that more studies on Korean “comfort women” literature will be produced as the writers’ redress movement through literary or cultural productions is still an ongoing project.

1.2 "Comfort women": Terminologies and Historical Understanding

Before analysing the literary works, it is necessary to understand the background and histories surrounding the "comfort women" issue. How and when the word "comfort women"

became the term to indicate sexual slaves of the Japanese military during World War II needs to be clarified. Political and social contentions existed due to the misuse of the term "women's voluntary labour corps" (女子挺身隊, J. *joshi teishintai*, K. y*ŏja chŏngshindae*) as a synonym for "comfort women" (従軍慰安婦, J. *jugun ianfu*, K. *chonggun wianbu*). Hence, understanding the background and usages of these two terminologies is essential in analysing the concept and representations of the "comfort women", especially since confusion over the two appears even in historical fiction.

The term, "military comfort women" is originally *jugun ianfu* in Japanese (K. *chonggun wianbu*). The Japanese word *ju* (従, K. *chong*) translates into an act of "following" physically and psychologically, and *gun* (軍) means "the military" in both languages (Stetz and Oh, 2001: 76). As for the Japanese prefix *ian* (慰安, K. *wian*), the word means "comfort", and *fu* (婦, K. *bu*) translates into "woman" (Stetz and Oh, 2001: 76). However, this euphemism does not in itself connote sexual slavery. The definition of the term "comfort women" is provided by many scholars both in Japan and Korea. Around the late 1980s, from the historical archives at National Institute for Defence Studies (NIDS), Yoshimi Yoshiaki [5] discovered an official military document that consisted of details on the Japanese Imperial Army's direct involvement with the "comfort women" system and, based on his research, he defined "comfort women" as women who were banned from any rights and forced to service Japanese soldiers (Yoshimi, 2000: 39).[6] Still, Yoshimi expressed hesitancy in using the term "comfort women", for he found it inadequate to reflect the atrocious experiences that the women wen|t through, and he further claimed that the victims were in reality "military sex slaves (J. *gunyo seidorei*)". However, despite his reluctance, he used "military comfort

[5] He is the first Japanese scholar to discover and publicize Japanese official documents on "comfort women" that contained information of the Japanese military's direct involvement with "comfort women" system (Kimura, 2016: 11).
[6] Sarah Chung-hee Soh also provides a similar definition of "comfort women" as Yoshimi.

women" in his study, *Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery in the Japanese Military During World War II*, since his understanding was that, at the time of his first publication in 1995 and even in 2000, there was no other better alternative term to refer to these women (Yoshimi, 2000: 39). Radhika Coomaraswamy also conveyed a similar concern in her 1996 U.N. report, "Preliminary Report Submitted by the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Its Causes and Consequences". In this report, Coomaraswamy underscored how the "comfort women" system was essentially a sexual slavery that exposed women to systematic rape during wartime (Coomaraswamy, 1996). The Japanese government's immediate reaction to her report was discontentment because they claimed Coomaraswamy's understanding of slavery contrasted with the definition of slavery according to article 1 (1) of the 1926 Slavery Convention (Coomaraswamy, 1996). Despite the Japanese government's reproval, she asserted that "military sexual slaves" is a more accurate and appropriate terminology as the words "comfort women" do not adequately reflect the sexual abuse and rapes that the victims were forced to endure during wartime (U.N., 1995). Yet, regardless of her efforts or Yoshimi's public opinion, the term "military sexual slaves" was not widely accepted and used. Like Coomaraswamy and Yoshimi, Korean researchers have exchanged their concerns about using the term "comfort women" to refer to the victims. They have delineated why "sex slaves" as a term has not been widely used and explained that it is partly due to the Korean survivors' reluctance to be labelled as such. In *Chŭngŏn-jip 3: Kangje ro kkŭllyŏgan Chosŏnin kun wianbudŭl* ('Collection of Testimonies 3: Forcibly Taken Chosŏn Comfort Women'*;* hereafter *Chŭngŏn-jip 3*), ChoCh'oe[7] Hye-ran elucidates how Korean victims detested being associated with the word "*sŏng-noye*" (sex slaves) because of its sensual connotation. She assumes that this may be the reason why "*wianbu"* (comfort women) is still in use (Korea Chŏngshindae Institute, 1999: 339).

[7] The author uses both parents' surnames (Cho and Ch'oe).

Many Korean scholars have used the Japanese word *teishintai* or the Korean term *chŏngshindae* (挺身隊, 'voluntary labour corps') [8]to refer to "comfort women" (Stetz and Oh, 2001: 76). The purpose of *teishintai* or *chŏngshindae* was to utilise the labour of both Korean men and women in military factories, hospitals and other labour sectors. There were several ways to lure women to the "comfort women" system, and often, the recruiters told these women that they would work as *teishintai* or *chŏngshindae.* In *Chinese Comfort Women,* Peipei Qiu and her research team support such an argument. Qiu contends that the Japanese military dispatched its agents and hired civilian collaborators to procure young women by enticing them with false job offers, such as maid, nurse, and nanny. Once these women signed up to work, they were immediately taken to military "comfort stations" (Qiu et al., 2014: 46).

According to Qiu, after the Nanjing Massacre, Japanese soldiers' rapes of local Chinese women systematised into establishments of "comfort women" stations (Qiu et al., 2014: 31). While enslaving Chinese women, the Japanese military trafficked women from Korea, Japan and Taiwan into the Chinese mainland, the majority of whom were from Korea (Qiu et al., 2014: 31-2). Fraudulent offers of high-paying jobs (such as working as nurses' aides and labourers at munitions factories) or education opportunities lured young Korean women to the "comfort women" system (Stetz and Oh, 2001: 11). Indeed, "voluntary labour corps" existed for labour exploitation and "comfort women" system aimed for sex trafficking. However, as mentioned above, women were often drafted as members of the labour corps and then ended up in "comfort stations". As women were generally recruited either for labour or "comfort", "comfort women" and "voluntary labour corps" were deemed synonymous though they were different (Kim and Lee, 2020).

[8] It is referred as voluntary labour corps, voluntary service corps, or volunteer labour corps. The names may vary slightly but the purpose of its existence was to dispatch and utilize female workers due to shortage of male laborers during wartime.

Other historians also believed that Korean women whom Korean or Japanese recruiters approached at the time agreed to work in restaurants, factories or hospitals, hoping to provide financial support for their families, and could not decline when authoritarian figures (Japanese police and civilian military officers) offered job proposals. If they refused, civilians or military personnel abducted these women (Kimura, 2016: 108-109). Many taken into the system were virgins or had little to no knowledge about sex (Kimura, 2016: 113). According to Hirofumi Hayashi, at the beginning of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937, the involvement of brothel managers and human-trafficking agencies facilitated the recruitment of Korean women (Hayashi, 1998: 213). Hayashi presents six different methodologies the Japanese military implemented to force women to work at "comfort stations". The first way was utilising its colonies and human traffickers, explaining that the systematic recruitment process occurred since Taiwan was one of Japan's colonies. The second method was to hire prostitutes. The third way was to pressure local leaders of the Japanese colonies, including Malaya, Indonesia, and the Philippines, to give up their women. The fourth method was releasing recruitment advertisements in newspapers. The fifth technique is somewhat similar to the fourth as it was through deception, such as fraudulent job offers. Finally, forcible abduction was the sixth method. (Hayashi, 1998: 213)

1.3 Estimations and Ambiguities

As mentioned above, some historians believed that the Japanese military devised various methods to recruit "comfort women". Though there is no scholarly consensus on the exact number of victims, there have been several estimated figures by different groups of historians. Despite continuous investigation, there is only a limited number of official military documents on "comfort stations" and "comfort women" that exist. According to Yoshimi, the lack of military data is because the Japanese military incinerated all related

documents when the war was over, and even with those that remained, the Japanese government prevented them from being publicised (Yoshimi, 2000: 91). Tanaka Toshiyuki also contended that the documents verifying the Japanese military's involvement were either hidden or confiscated by the Japanese Imperial Army after the war. He believed the number of victims was never consistent and varied based on the estimation of each research team or scholar (Tanaka, 1996: 99). Based on his research about a 'Japanese military plan' in 1941, Tanaka's estimation of "comfort women" range between 80,000 and 100,000. This plan states that 20,000 comfort women were necessary to service 700,000 Japanese soldiers, or each woman was required to service 35 soldiers. Since about 3.5 million Japanese men were dispatched to China and Southeast Asia to serve in the military, Tanaka assumes that an estimated 100,000 women were mobilised to serve as "comfort women" for the Japanese army (Tanaka, 1996: 99).

Unlike Tanaka's study, *Kyodo News* released new wartime documents and letters from Japan's consulates in China that were sent to the Foreign Ministry back in Tokyo dated 1938 (*Kyodo News*, 2019). In this feature article, *Kyodo News* presents letters containing specific requests for women. The formula that the Japanese consulates suggested was that each "comfort woman" should service 70 Japanese soldiers (*Kyodo News*, 2019).[9] Due to different calculation measures that scholars have used with their research teams, only approximate numbers and estimations exist. However, a common consensus has been that the number of "comfort women" from World War II may have ranged from 100,000 to 200,000 and that eighty per cent of these victims were thought to be from Korea (Chuh, 2003: 1; Soh, 2000: 63; Oh, 2001: 9; Tanaka, 1999: 99). Park Jung-ae, unlike other Korean and Japanese scholars, came up with a broader range of figures of around 16,000 to 410,000 due to a lack of any official data (Park, 2015: 176). Peipei Qiu and her research team's estimation was similar to

[9] "Exclusive: Wartime documents shed light on Japan gov't role in recruiting 'comfort women,'"

Park's estimated range, precisely the maximum number of around 410,000. Qiu agreed with Su Zhiliang's formula ("3,000,000 Japanese soldiers/29 x 4.0 = 413,793 women") that there were more than 410,000 women who were brought into the system (Qiu et al., 2014: 39). She also asserted that Chinese women alone who were taken to "comfort stations" would have been around 200,000. Between 140,000 and 160,000 was the estimated number of women from other nationalities. However, Qiu and many other Chinese scholars have concurred that a much greater number of women than the estimated range were likely forced to become "comfort women" (Qiu et al., 2014: 39). Although there is no mutual agreement between the historians on the exact number of victims who were taken to “comfort stations”, the intentions behind these scholars providing estimations or mathematical formula can be assumed that it is due to an understanding that numbers add credibility to their findings and that they also help visualise the extremity of the “comfort women” system.

1.4 Politics of Memory: "comfort women" narratives

Due to limited data, researchers conducted extensive research to come up with their equations to estimate the number of "comfort women”. However, to contextualise the "comfort women" experience, historians sought victims' testimonies to further their studies on the "comfort women" system. In *Unfolding the 'Comfort Women' Debates,* Maki Kimura highlights how testimonies are proofs that exhibit the "truth" of history, exposing the subjugation of women (Kimura, 2016: 13). The testimonies of the "comfort women" survivors played a crucial role in shedding light on the atrocities committed during World War II and bringing attention to the issue on an international scale. However, it did take several decades after the war for the first victim to come forward and share her story. As the survivors started to speak out, advocacy groups, both in Korea and internationally, worked to amplify their voices and bring attention to their cause. They also played a pivotal role in

demanding acknowledgment, apologies, and reparations from the Japanese government. Over time, the persistence of survivors, combined with increased international awareness and support, led to a significant shift in public perception and societal attitudes towards the issue of "comfort women" in Korea and beyond. The survivors' narratives helped create empathy and understanding among the public, leading to increased pressure on the Japanese government to address the historical injustices.

Prior to the first “comfort woman” public testimony, the general sentiment of the Korean society towards sexual assault victims was unsympathetic, hence the society was not ready to embrace these victims. The survivors faced immense societal stigma and shame associated with being victims of sexual violence. Discussing sexual matters publicly was heavily frowned upon in the conservative Korean society, and many of the "comfort women" survivors feared retaliation from both their own communities and the Japanese government if they were to come forward with their stories. There were inadequate support systems and channels for the survivors to seek help and share their traumatic experiences. As Yang Hyun-ah also explains in her article, "Re-membering the Korean Military Comfort Women”, that the society's prioritisation of chastity essentially prevented the "comfort women" from publicising their traumatic experience (Yang, 1998: 131). Another evidence that the Korean society was unprepared to acknowledge the “comfort women” is due to Korea's socio-political circumstances. As David Andrew Schmidt explains in *Ianfu, the comfort women of the Japanese Imperial Army of the Pacific War*, while nationalism and a democratic political system actively developed in South Korea by the end of the 1980s, notions of feminism emerged only around the 1990s (Schmidt, 2000: 21). Similarly, George Lyndon Hicks in *The Comfort Women*, describes how military men had run South Korea until the late 1980s and that the government had not tolerated public demonstrations or political acts, and so the country was unprepared to provide a platform for "comfort women" victims to speak out

earlier on (Hicks, 1995: xxi). Yang Hyun-ah also illustrates further how the government lacked any interest in the "comfort women" issue and that no research, study, or discussion about it existed in South Korea before the 1990s, resulting in the prolonged silence of "comfort women" victims (Yang, 1998: 123). Hence, due to the dominant cultural, social, and political sentiments after World War II, even in their own country, "comfort women" victim-survivors felt they could not come forward.

The first official testimony by a Korean "comfort woman", Kim Hak-sun, took place in 1991. After the first Korean woman came forward and testified about her experience through a public press conference, other legal, political, and international actions were pursued. In 1991, the first lawsuit against the Japanese government for damages and compensation for "comfort women" was filed (Chinkin, 2001). In the following year, from 1992 to 1998, Pak Du-ri (former "comfort woman") and eight others who were victimised by the Japanese military sued the Japanese government, travelled to Shimonoseki to attend Kwan-Pu trial (關釜裁判)[10] (Choe, 2018). It can be surmised that Kim's press conference in 1991 stirred public awareness and ignited active redress movement.

Unfortunately, while the victim-survivors finally publicised their experiences, bringing great change to historical and cultural platforms, opposing parties also began to attack the "comfort women". Right-wing politicians, scholars, and revisionists, who denied the existence of "comfort women" questioned the authenticity of their claims as some of the victims stumbled on the dates or details of their experiences in some of the interviews. Historical revisionism downplayed or denied the scale and brutality of the system and condemned the survivors for circulating inaccurate information. They also attacked these

[10] Kwan-Pu chaep'an (關釜裁判) took place in Japan from 1992 to 1998. The "comfort women" victim-survivors had to travel from Pusan to attend the trials in Shimonoseki. Shimonoseki in Chinese character is read as Ha-kwan (下關) by Koreans and Kwan-Pu is an acronym of the two regions (Ha-kwan and Pusan).

women for using both *chŏngshindae* and *wianbu* to refer to "comfort women" (Song, 2016).[11] The revisionists and right-wing scholars are inclined to blame victims for fabrication and reproach them for 'unconvincing claims' (Kimura, 2015: 131). In a similar vein, Ju Ik-jong, in *Pan-Il Chongjok-chuŭi* ('Anti-Japan Tribalism'), claimed that the Korean government never demanded any reparation for "comfort women" from the Japanese government after Korea's liberation, arguing that this is a clear indication that "comfort women" system was not a concerning issue (Lee Y. et al., 2019: 343). Ju's simplified interpretation resonates with those of other revisionists from Japan. Japanese revisionists have also proclaimed that what seems unrealistic cannot be true (Kimura, 2015: 131). Kimura has retaliated such assertions by comparing the "comfort women" issue with the Holocaust. She asserts that the Holocaust comprises the most unimaginable series of events, just like the "comfort women" issue, yet very few questions its authenticity or existence (Kimura, 2015: 131).

Yoshimi Yoshiaki has stated that not many "comfort women" survivors received an education and assumed this may be one of the reasons their testimonies showed a lack of consistency due to contradictions or confusion about the timing of (historical) events in their statements (Yoshimi, 2000: 99). Moreover, Yoshimi believes in the historical value of each and every testimony and has extended his study on the reasons for inaccuracies found in some of the accounts (Kimura, 2008: 11). Uemura Tak'a-si[12] asserted that mistakes were made by everyone involved with the post-memory of "comfort women" at the initial stage, including right-wing Japanese newspapers such as *Sankei Shimbun* and *Yomiuri Shimbun* (Song 2016). Moreover, it should be noted that the oral testimonies of the survivors were recorded in written forms by supporting organisations, interviewers, and scholars, and some contents could have been altered or revised as the scripts were circulated and published as

[11] See Section 2 for more information on *chŏngshindae* and *wianbu.*
[12] The first Japanese journalist to write a special feature story on "comfort women" and was condemned by other reporters for addressing the issue.

their accounts were given at least fifty years after World War II. A complete denial of the "comfort system" can be deemed unreasonable since official documents confirm the involvement of the Japanese Imperial Army in managing "comfort stations". Regrettably, condemnations on oral testimony can hinder the victims from articulating their experiences. Still, as stated by Ueno Chizuko, for women's history, it is crucial for the women's silenced voices to speak out and be recorded and heard (Ueno, 2004: 123). She admits that oral testimony manifests four fundamental limitations which lead people to suspect and question, which are "lapses of memory and misremembering of events", "problem of inconsistency", "selective memory", and "memories of the past in the present" (Ueno, 2004: 123-24). Nevertheless, minor inconsistencies should not lead to questioning the existence of "comfort women".

Indeed, some victim-survivors may iterate information that is inconsistent with what they mentioned in their previous interviews. Revisionists use these cases to fortify their accusations against the victims for fabrication. For example, Kim Sun-dok from South Korea and Mardiyem from Indonesia "gave different accounts of their lives at different places and times, and these can occasionally contradict each other" (Kimura, 2015: 128). According to Kimura, Kim Hak-sun, the first "comfort woman" victim to come forward, also "presented different life stories" on different occasions (Kimura, 2015: 130). Some survivors, such as Yi Yong-su and Kim Kun-ja, whom Sarah Chung-hee Soh discusses in her study, *The Comfort Women*, altered their accounts to project "the theme of forcible recruitment" (Soh, 2008: 100). Their original testimonials revealed that they either left home voluntarily by following their friends or that their foster fathers made deals with the recruiters and sold them for money, but in their later interviews, they both claimed that the military forcibly abducted them (Soh, 2008: 100, 101).

Nevertheless, many believe these inconsistencies should not be used against the victims to remove the history of "comfort women". Since most of these women were in their late sixties to seventies at the time of their testimonies, their memories are not always accurate (Korea chŏngshindae Institute, 1999: 21-22). Their failure to provide exact dates and specific details should not necessarily override their testimonies of having been victimised and forced into a sexual slavery system. Even official historical records can contain selective accounts, and there are always possibilities or room for revision, as how data is used or interpreted can vary and result in different conclusions. Although "anecdotes, journal entries, recollections, oral testimonies are considered only secondary resources that support and strengthen the written history", oral history unquestionably holds equal weight and significance as written history (Ueno, 2014: 145). The first-hand accounts given by the victims unquestionably placed the "comfort women" experience in its proper context and facilitated widespread awareness of the issue among the general public. While oral testimonies serve as valuable assets for reinforcing and supplementing recorded history, they have consistently faced challenges regarding their credibility. Undoubtedly, first-hand narrations from survivors unequivocally situated the ordeal of "comfort women" within its rightful framework and effectively heightened public consciousness on the matter. In parallel, literary portrayals of "comfort women" promoted extended deliberation on the subject, ensuring the continuity of discourse. They managed to capture the attention of the public even those who possess limited interests in historical issues. They were undoubtedly the alternative to historical records which contextualised the experiences of "comfort women".

1.5 Politics and History

As most "comfort women" are known to be from Korea, Korea has mainly engaged with Japan in ongoing diplomatic discussions on atonement for the victims. This issue is not

only a historical topic but also concerns present-day diplomatic relations between Japan and Korea. There have been continuous diplomatic discussions on redressing the victims because claims have been made that the Japanese government has not formally apologised to the survivors and acknowledged their existence. However, as mentioned briefly earlier on, there were occasions when Japanese government officials did partake in offering apologies. In 1993, then Chief Cabinet Secretary, Kono Yohei released an official statement admitting the Japanese military's "direct or indirect" involvement in establishing and managing comfort stations and the transfer of "comfort women" (Kono, 1993). His apology contained an admittance of the coercion used in enslaving Korean women and a vow to study and remember the issue:

> 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. (Kono, 1993)

Two years after Kono's official statement, then Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi also made a public statement, which primarily reflected his remorse towards Japan's history of colonisation:

> During a certain period in the not too distant past, Japan, following a mistaken national policy, advanced along the road to war, only to ensnare the Japanese people in a fateful crisis, and, through its colonial rule and aggression, caused tremendous damage and suffering to the people of many countries, particularly to those of Asian nations. (Murayama, 1995).

His selection of words seems implicit as he does not mention "comfort women" or which Asian nations he is referring to. However, conciliatory efforts made by Kono and Murayama were overturned by the subsequent Japanese Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe. In 2007, when the U.S. congress asked Prime Minister Abe, to make an official apology to "comfort women", he declined. According to Hayashi Hirofumi, in the same year Abe officially denied any

involvement of Japanese military personnel or officials in forcing women into the "comfort system", and blamed private agents instead (Hayashi, 2008: 123-124).

Later in 2014, under Abe's supervision, a research team was organised to investigate the founding details of the Kono Statement to revoke Kono's apology (Tadaki et al., 2014: 2). The group consisted of law professors, lawyers, a journalist, and a historian. They believed that the Korean government had liaised with Kono to draft the statement. They also highlighted words from then-President Kim Young-sam's first public statement made in 1993 that he did not wish to request any monetary compensation from the Japanese government, asserting that the victims' demand for reparation should be handled domestically (Tadaki et al., 2014: 7). Meanwhile, since 1996, the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform worked to omit any information on "comfort women" system in Japanese school history textbooks with the help of Fusosha Publisher (Kwŏn, 2009). In her journal article, "The Japanese History Textbook Controversy in East Asian Perspective", Claudia Schneider explains how promoting patriotism in history education has been essential in Japan, Korea, and China (Schneider, 2008: 114). She believes patriotism is encouraged in all nations, especially when historical issues are involved (Schneider, 2008: 114). She also outlines why Japan is keen on revising its history books, disregarding opposition or criticism from China and Korea. The motivation for the Japanese government to pursue the revision of history is due to their belief that history education is the nation's internal affair and should avoid any negative images of the country (Schneider, 2008: 114). The limitation of history education using revised history is that it is based on selection and omission. It is irrefutable that history can be subjective as historical records and history education can differ depending on whose perspective history is written. In *Nationalism and Gender*, Ueno Chizuko acknowledges the problems of oral history such as "lapses of memory and mistakes"; however, she also asserts how written history legitimated by authorities also show the same imperfection as oral

history: “There are many official histories that treat things that happened as if they did not, as in claims that there was no Nanking Massacre. More things are forgotten than remembered in written history” (Ueno, 2004: 124). Hence, the dispute between Japan and Korea will continue without proper closure if only one form of historical record (written history) is deemed adequate for historical education and if the two countries fail to agree on the “comfort women” issue.

In 2013, supporting Abe's claim that no coercion was involved when drafting "comfort women”, Park Yu-ha incited a sensation with her varied remarks on "comfort women”. In her *Chegug-ŭi Wianbu* (‘Comfort Women of the Empire’*),* Park asserts that those who forcibly turned girls into "comfort women" were agents or traffickers, not the Japanese Imperial Army (Park, 2013: 111). Though there is some evidence that recruiters were affiliated with the Japanese military, shifting the blame on the agents and traffickers can be interpreted as misleading. In *Chegug-ŭi Wianbu,* "comfort women" are depicted as if they were given the choice to pick out which military base they wanted to go to and also to travel freely (Park, 2013: 64). The “comfort women” are also defined as “voluntary prostitutes” who were “close comrades of Japanese soldiers”, and due to these comments, nine survivors sued Park for defamation (Yi et al., 2014). Hundreds of clauses from the book were selected as evidence of the defamation offence. Park filed for an appeal, and this remains an ongoing case. According to the complaint, the plaintiffs claimed that Park's statement was "based on fiction”. They stated that Park had made her claims based on Japanese novels[13] which is an ‘erroneous act’ (Yi et al., 2014). Park’s claims included that the relationship between Korean "comfort women" and Japanese soldiers was "basically a comradeship" and that the women confined themselves to victimisation by concealing this fact. Her choice of the word

[13] In certain sections of her work, Park refers to Japanese novels on “comfort women” written by authors such as Taijiro Tamura and Komao Furuyama to support her argument that “comfort women” had freedom and sometimes close comradeship with Japanese soldiers, and were romantically involved with these soldiers (Park, 2013: 62, 63, 73, and 143). Borrowing fictional works to consolidate her arguments only made scholars question her claims about “comfort women”.

"comradeship", portrayal of a peaceful relationship between the two groups, and accusation of the victims' 'denial' of this 'fact' were deemed highly insulting to the survivors (Yi et al., 2014). Park's (mis)representation of "comfort women" was highly controversial, but she claimed she had intended to study "comfort women" from a different angle.

On the 28th of December 2015, the governments of Japan and Korea consented to a resolution despite the arguments on the issue in the aforementioned Joint Press Occasion. The general Korean public and the victims displayed their disappointment in their government since this 'resolution' agreement was decided without consulting the victims (Kim and Park, 2015). The Japanese government stated that this agreement was irreversible and that the "comfort women" issue should never be brought up again, which prompted more contentions between scholars and historians of both nations.

Four years after the 2015 Agreement, in 2019 right-wing historian Lee Young-hoon conducted collaborative research with Joung An-ki, Kim Nak-nyeon, Kim Yong-sam, Ju Ik-jong, and Lee Woo-yeon. They published *Pan-Il Chongjok-chuŭi* ('Anti-Japan Tribalism') with the subtitle, *Taehanminkuk wikwi ŭi kŭnwŏn* ('The Root of the Korean Crisis'). In their research, they claimed that "comfort stations" were military-managed brothels, and "comfort women" were sex workers (Lee et al., 2019: 303). In a book review of *Pan-Il Chongjok-chuŭi,* Kunitoshi Matsuki calls Lee and his team 'true patriots' for providing 'historically accurate facts' and supports their claim that the Japanese were no aggressors and never abducted Koreans (Kunitoshi, 2019). There is a great divide between right and left-wing scholars in Japan and Korea. The right-wing historians, including Lee Young-hoon and his research team, have asserted that there were no sex slaves other than sex workers (licensed prostitutes) and that no forms of force and abduction had been involved when drafting the women (Park, 2005: 67-68). Chizuko T. Allen, who conveys similar views as Kunitoshi, posted her book review of *Pan-Il Chongjok-chuŭi* on an English news website by *Sankei Shimbun*. In her

review, Allen accused Korea of fabrication and stated that "comfort women" were wartime prostitutes who provided sex services to the Japanese military. (Allen, 2020).

Almost mirroring the claims made by right-wing Japanese historians and scholars, a specialist on Japanese legal studies, J. Mark Ramseyer, published a journal article titled "Contracting for sex in the Pacific War" in the *International Review of Law and Economics*. He begins his article by stating the necessity for brothels catered to the Japanese army during the 1930s and 40s, and claims that the term “comfort women (ianfu)” was just a term that the Japanese military used to refer to sex workers (Ramseyer, 2021: 1). The article argues that the Korean women were all voluntary sex workers. To support his case Ramseyer provides an anecdote of a girl, Osaki, claiming that she was aware of what the job of a prostitute entailed, that she chose to become a prostitute to escape poverty, and accepted the recruiter’s offer of her own free will: "The recruiter did not try to trick her; even at age 10, she knew what the job entailed" (Ramseyer, 2021: 4). This anecdote, however, was later proven to be false. Amy Stanley and other scholars of Japanese history sought out the book Ramseyer referenced in his article to discover that Osaki and other girls had called out the brother keeper for tricking them into working for him (Gersen, 2021). When Jeannie Suk Gersen questioned Ramseyer about the credibility of his sources, especially on Osaki, he admitted via email that he "did make a mistake here [about Osaki being a voluntary prostitute]" (Gersen, 2021). Park Yu-ha, while agreeing with Ramseyer that "comfort women" were voluntary labourers, also added that "it is not entirely true that 'comfort women' are all prostitutes" (Yi, 2021). In Park’s case, she believed that the women volunteered to be "comfort women”, but they were not all prostitutes or aware of their duties as "comfort women”. Therefore, even if Ramseyer admitted his mistake, using Osaki’s anecdote only exposed his study's limitations and extremities. His understanding of sexual exploitation is biased to an extent to interpret a case

of child sexual exploitation as a voluntary sexual service and that a child can make such a choice.

To refute Ramseyer's claims, Hosaka Yuji, a Japanese political science professor in Korea, rebuked that "the documents that Ramseyer used in his article do not tell the full story, including the 1938 regulation by Home Ministry on recruiting women for the overseas comfort stations" (Ahn, 2021). Hosaka argued against Ramseyer's claim that only licensed prostitutes worked at "comfort stations" and contended that there is much evidence in documents from 1940 and 1942 that verify how the Japanese military was involved in forcing women to become "comfort women" (Ahn, 2021). Hosaka is a Japanese scholar whom Japanese revisionists and right-wing scholars have often condemned. His work *Sin-Ch'inil-p'a* ('New Pro-Japanese Group') was written to refute Lee Young-hoon's work.

Similarly, Yonson Ahn has also provided historical evidence that the Japanese military was closely involved with managing the "comfort system". In her study that was published before Ramseyer's article, she argued that "military equipment and accommodation" such as "train, naval ship, or military truck" were in use for the mobilisation of the girls (Ahn, 2020: 14). She further asserted, "the utilisation of military transportation required official sanctioning, as civilians were not allowed to board naval ships without a military permit", and thus it seems indisputable that "The military authorities and the state of Japan were therefore involved in the process of recruitment and transportation of the 'comfort women' during the war" (Ahn, 2020: 14). Ahn acknowledges the "assistance of local Korean collaborators or agents" but she also provides valid evidence on the "operation of recruitment by the colonial authorities" (Ahn, 2020: 14). Chong Yong-Hwan has also retaliated against revisionists such as Park Yu-ha, stating that the attempts made by revisionists are ways to "rewrite" history from "the coloniser's perspective" (Chong, 2016: 155). Some revisionists have compared Korean victims with the Japanese "comfort women", praising the latter's

silence and reproaching the Korean victims as being vulgar and shameless in exposing their trauma. They have made claims that "women of any virtue would not dare to testify to their experience of having sex with a number of soldiers", insinuating that Japanese women are more dignified for keeping their silence (Kimura, 2015: 131). In a similar vein, conservative historian Hata Ikuhiko also highlighted the absence of testimonies made by Japanese "comfort women" to deny the extremity of the "comfort system", to which Ueno has rebuked Ikuhiko's denial of violence inflicted on "comfort women" as signifying the weakness of Japanese feminism (Ueno, 2004: 91).

The contentions between historians and politicians have not ceased even after the 2015 Japan and Korea Agreement on the "comfort women" issue. Despite the two governments' consensus that the issue should no longer be discussed in public, active debates as well as attempts at censorship and revision have continued (Kim and Park, 2015). Amid repeated debates between Japan, Korea, as well as the United States, the Korean Council more recently released a public statement questioning the Korean government's stance on the 2015 Agreement (*Women and War*, 2022). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea responded to this public inquiry by reiterating that the 2015 Agreement between Japan and Korea on "comfort women" was an official agreement between both nations and remains valid, as was confirmed by the previous government (*Women and War*, 2022).

Amid ongoing political and historical debates, my research aims to examine how the "comfort women" issue is conveyed or presented in the cultural realm, namely literary works by Korean and Korean American authors. In the following chapter, I will introduce some of the cultural (visual and literary) representations of "comfort women", existing studies on "comfort women" literature and research methodologies to analyse Korean and Korean American novels on "comfort women" in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2. Representations of “comfort women” and Theoretical Framework

Ever since the first “comfort woman” victim Kim Hak-sun publicised her experience as a “comfort woman” in 1991 to testify, historians, artists, and authors have advocated and argued for the victims, just as the number of opposing scholars who questioned the testimonies’ authenticity thrived.[14] Many publications, including books and articles by historians as well as literary works were produced, as well as different visual (including cinematic) representations of “comfort women”. The only novel published before Kim’s public testimony is Yun Chŏng-mo’s *Emi irŭm*, but public awareness about the “comfort women” issue increased only after Kim’s public testimony, which fuelled the cultural productions about this historical matter. This is one of the reasons why Yun’s novel was republished in 1997. When *Emi irŭm* was released, although there were historical records about the “comfort women”, apart from documentaries, cultural representations prior to the release of testimonies were biased and perverted.

In this chapter, I will consider how the “comfort women” issue has been considered and presented in the cultural realm, in visual and literary representations. I will then discuss some theoretical issues related to historical fiction, memory and trauma, diaspora, and the subaltern, with a view to analyse Korean and Korean American novels on "comfort women” in subsequent chapters, drawing from the points raised in this chapter.

2.1 Cultural Representations of “comfort women”

Cultural representations of “comfort women” victims can be found in various forms such as films, graphic novels, statues and literature. Many artistic works only marginally

[14] See Chapter 1.

feature the “comfort women” issue. However, in exploring cinematic representations of “comfort women”, only those that deal with the “comfort women” issue as their central theme will be discussed. It is not within the scope of this study to outline all forms of cultural representation of “comfort women”. Studies on these artistic creations will help produce insights into how Korean and Korean American novels deal with the “comfort women” issue.

2.1.1 Films

The first cinematic representation of “comfort women” was released in Japan in 1950, and this was based on a novel by Tamura Taijiro under the title, *Shunpuden* (*Story of a Prostitute*). The author praises that Korean women willingly volunteered to become “comfort women” at the time, unlike Japanese women (Choi, 2014: 4). The novel has a Korean “comfort woman” figure who forms an intimate attachment to a Japanese soldier and dies with him. Two film adaptations were made of Taijiro’s novel. *Akatsuki no Dassō* (*Escape at Dawn*) was released in 1950, and the other adaptation came out in 1965 with the same title as the novel, but they were screened before their official release dates. Until 1952, Japan was under U.S. rule after World War II, which led to inspections of these movies conducted by the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP) or General Headquarters (GHP). Due to strict censorship, elements that hinted at Korean “comfort women” were removed; hence the Korean protagonist’s nationality was changed to Japanese. However, a side character who is a Korean “comfort woman” appears in Seijun Suzuki’s film with a Japanese name Tsuyuko. Choi Eun-ju argues that Suzuki’s creation of Tsuyuko offers a new perspective as the character represents the gaze of an ostracised “comfort woman” figure (Choi, 2015: 268). In the same year as Suzuki’s film, another war movie that contains a “comfort woman” character was released with the title *Chi to suna* (*Fort Graveyard*), which is also a film adaptation of a short story by Ito Keiichi. Oharu is a Korean “comfort woman”

who is depicted as someone who also willingly offers her body to serve and educate a troop of sexually naive young soldiers (Choi, 2015: 256).

In 1979, a Japanese film director, Yamatani Tetsuo, interviewed and filmed a "comfort woman" in Okinawa named Bae Bong-gi. This documentary film, *Okinawa no Harumoni*, may be seen as a testimonial record of a "comfort woman" even before Kim Hak-sun's press conference in 1991, which is officially acknowledged as the first public testimony given by a "comfort woman". However, as Maki Kimura states in her *Unfolding the 'Comfort Women' Debates* (2016), the film did not effectively portray the victim as Tetsuo had envisioned. Bae's recollection of her experience as a "comfort woman" was not pessimistic. She even expressed remorse about the defeat of the Japanese military in World War II, withholding any criticism against those who exploited her (Kimura, 2016: 202). The director's mission to expose the criminal side of the Japanese military failed. Nevertheless, Tetsuo's film, though not a grand success in a commercial or conventional sense, was screened all over Japan and was shown in 2016 DMZ International Documentary Film Festival in Korea (Kim, 2021: 219; Yun, 2016).

Sensual and erotic representations of "comfort women" were also shown in Korean drama films like Japanese works. In 1965, the same year Suzuki released his film *Shunpuden*, Chŏng Ch'ang-hwa released *Sarŭbin kang e noŭri chinda* (*Sunset on the River Sarbin;* hereafter *Sarŭbin kang*). In Chŏng's work, "comfort women" characters are not portrayed as individuals and are only shown as members of a group of women who serviced soldiers. Moreover, when a "comfort woman" figure is zoomed in, she is shown in a tight mini dress with a cigarette in her hand and sits in a position that exposes her body. After several decades since the release of *Sarŭbin kang* Kim Jin-hyuk's film adaptation of Yun Chŏng-mo's *Emi irŭm* released in 1991 differs from the original text as the film features only sexual and graphic scenes. Yun commented in an interview that she never finished watching the film

adaptation of her work as she found it to be a disgrace and was ashamed of it (Yun, 2019). Unlike her work which was written to expose the mistreatment and violation of the victims' basic human rights during military sexual slavery, the film focused only on graphic and sensual imageries of "comfort women" (Yun, 2019). As mentioned earlier, only after Kim Hak-sun came forward, the number of cultural productions of "comfort women" increased and began to convey the survivors' perspectives and narratives. According to Kim Ch'ŏng-kang, Korean films about "comfort women" were catered to sexual and sadistic pleasure seekers, so they were made primarily by pornographic filmmakers and distributors (Kim, 2017:157). Kim also highlighted that these films resulted from a patriarchal and nationalistic understanding of the issue, which could be interpreted as attempts to forget the "comfort women" (Kim 2017: 154, 156).

In Korean cinema, active participation in reimagining the lives of the "comfort women" victims was initiated by the director Byun Young-joo, starting in 1995. Byun created a documentary film trilogy (1995, 1997, and 1999) in which the victims actively partook in making the series by openly expressing their sentiments and emotions. The first film was released in 1995 under the title *Najŭn moksori* (*The Murmuring*); the second movie *Najŭn moksori* 2, came out in 1997 with an English title, *Habitual Sadness*; and the third and last film, *Najŭn moksori* 3 (*My Own Breathing*), was produced in 1999. In her analysis of Byun's trilogy, Lee So-hee explains that Byun initiated her filming to record the history of "comfort women" from the viewpoints of the survivors and present their testimonies differently from the nationalists' approach (Lee, 2010: 351). In the third film, the survivors participated in directing. They appear more than as characters in the movie, as they conduct interviews with one another, becoming participants and observers of the historical past.

Furthermore, the director appears in the film and provides commentaries on the origin of her motivation. Kang Tŏk-kyŏng, a former "comfort woman" who became a famous

activist in fighting for “comfort women” rights, sought Byun out after her lung cancer diagnosis, conveying her wish to be remembered by the public even after her death (Lee, 2010: 361). Lee So-hee further adds in her article that though Byun’s trilogy, former “comfort women” underwent a transformative phase of claiming or owning their agency (Lee, 2010: 372). Similarly, Oh Young-suk also believed that Byun’s filmmaking strategy encouraged the survivors’ participation in presenting their narratives and claiming their subjectivity (Oh, 2017: 158). Oh also adds that women were more empowered through their involvement in the movie making, speaking in their voices to recall the past violence inflicted on them (Oh, 2017: 158). However, Oh believed the last film, *Najŭn moksori* 3 was more restrictive and controlling. In the previous movie from the series, Byun had asked the survivors to become directors. Oh interpreted this transition as somehow turning the victims into a female collective rather than seeing them as individuals (Oh, 2017: 159). She also explicates that the director includes herself as a member and comrade of the collective and the “comfort women” rather than depicting them as individuals (Oh, 2017: 159). However, Oh asserts that it is necessary to historicise the “comfort women” issue in this manner as the nation fails to provide the support that these survivors need (Oh, 2017: 162). In other words, underscoring the collectiveness of the “comfort women” strengthen the voice of “comfort women as they sympathise with each other and become speakers and listeners.

Like Byun, Daisil Kim Gibson, a Korean American film director, also released a documentary about Korean “comfort women” called *Silence Broken* in 1998. Gibson states that she yearned to address forgotten history by rewriting it because she believes history is often written by those in power (Ratner, 2011: 35). Repulsed by authoritative representations of the past by other filmmakers, she lets her subjects have voices and guide her direction. Through the documentary, the director comments that she wants to inspire her audience (Ratner, 2011: 35). With *Silence Broken*, Gibson asserts that she did not wish to focus on the

pain and suffering of the victims because if the work only commits to doing that, the "comfort women" become objectified as nothing more than a subject or issue (Ranter, 2011: 38). At the same time, she does not wish to impose her views on to her viewers and expects them to empathise the agony and pain of her subjects in her film (Ratner, 2011: 36).

Unlike drama films that were released in the past, drama films underwent a transition. Similar to documentaries, drama movies started to focus more on contextualising the lives of "comfort women". *Nun'gil* (*Snowy Road*) was successful and was well-received by the audience. It was first aired as a special television drama series of two episodes in 2015. Two years later, in 2017, it was made into a film format due to its popularity and screened in commercial theatres. *Kwihyang (Spirit's Homecoming*) was a film made possible through crowdfunding after investors declined to support the director, Cho Jung-rae and his film project. The time of its release was after the Japan and Korea Agreement on "comfort women" in 2015. Although the audience' reactions toward this film are nationalistic, sympathetic, and supportive, Sin Won-seon discussed the limitations of Cho's film. According to Sin, the director's offer of resolution for the "comfort women" victims through a shamanic ritual seemed outdated and surreal (Sin, 2017: 185). A high-angle gaze of the camera exposes the victim characters from the perpetrator's point of view, inciting voyeurism from the audience. Sin further argued that even if using scenes of sexual violence may be unavoidable when dealing with the "comfort women" issue, the rape scenes and camera angles objectified the women (Sin, 2017: 187). Lastly, the film manifested its limitation by contextualising the "comfort women" story with inconsistency. Not only Sin but Yu Chin-wŏl and Yi Hwa-yŏng also presented similar criticisms of the film. Yu and Yi also recognised the film's success but found factors that seemed to limit the film from being a successful media representation of the victims: firstly, the victims are rendered as "scapegoats" of the nation or seen as the vandalised nation itself; secondly, they are shown only as "girls",

eradicating the presence of survivors of the present; lastly, the film focuses only on appeasing the deceased via shamanic ritual, committing the folly of devaluing the existence of the survivors who are still alive (Yu and Yi, 2018: 361-362). Despite the negative reviews, these films showed great differences from films that were released in the past. The most recent Korean film on the "comfort women" issue is *i can speak* (2017), and it has been thus far considered the most successful representation of "comfort women" by critics. The film is based on the testimonies of Lee Yong-su and Kim Kun-ja, who attended the 2007 U.S. House of Representatives hearing as witnesses. Kim Hye-jin has stated that the re-enacted scene of the protagonist giving their public testimony can be interpreted as (the victims) regaining their subjectivity or agency and voice, which attributes to its critical acclaim and success. (Kim, 2019: 180).[15]

Animation movies on the "comfort women" issue have also been produced over the past decade, which contain realistic features like recent drama movies. Though shorter than other types of films,[16] Kim Jun-ki's *Sonyŏ iyagi* (*Herstory*) (2011) and *Sonyŏ-ege* (*For Her*) (2017) gained much support and attention from the Korean Council and the public. The director wrote and created *Sonyŏ iyagi* from the recorded voice of a former "comfort woman", Ch'ong Seo-un (*News and Joy*, 2017). The sequel also consists of recorded voices of men who served in the Japanese military during World War II and visited "comfort stations". Though the animation film industry is significant in Korea, animation movies about "comfort women" did not appear until Kim's active initiative. To gain support from the Korean Council, Kim spent more than six months on the research and a total of 9 years with his team to complete the films (*News and Joy*, 2017). In an interview, he explained that he attempted to focus more on the atrocious aspects of war than villainising the Japanese military and that

[15] "Ch'immuk kkaet'ŭrigi-lŭl t'onghan t'ŭrauma-ŭi hoebok" (The recovery from the traumas through breaking silence)
[16] (*Herstory* is eleven minutes long and the duration of *For Her* is thirteen minutes)

presenting both Japanese soldiers' and "comfort women" viewpoints in his films was his effort to be objective (*News and Joy*, 2017).

2.1.2 Other Cultural Productions

In addition to film, another visual cultural product is a monument known as *P'yŏnghwa ŭi Sonyŏsang* ('Statue of Peace'; hereafter *Sonyŏsang*). *Sonyŏsang* was designed by a Korean artist couple, Kim Sŏkyŏng and Kim Unsŏng, who felt it was their duty to contribute their talents in commemorating, redressing and supporting the victims of the "comfort system". The couple were inspired to design and install the statue when they heard Kim Hak-sun's public testimony about the issue. They contacted the Korean Council and offered to contribute to the campaign for the victims. They have created seven different versions of the memorial statues that stand in different locations. Twenty-five of their statues are located in Korea, and two are in the United States (Lee, 2016).[17]

They chose to sculpt a girl figure because they found it to be the most fitting image to represent and recover the lost youth forcibly taken away from the victims (Lee, 2016). They also constructed the statue in particular embodiments, symbolising the specific experience of "comfort women".[18] Elizabeth Son, in her *Embodied Reckonings: "Comfort Women", Performance, and Transpacific Redress* (2018), analyses how the girl image of the statue

[17] "Statue planned for another type of victim" by Lee Sun-min

[18] The monument contains seven key features that highlight the painful experience that "comfort women" victims endured during their entrapment under the system. Some scholars discredit the statue and claim that the monument excessively exhausts only the girl image, omitting these symbolic elements. Roughly cut hair symbolises how women's hair was cut against their will, and it also symbolises broken ties from their parents as hair signifies inheritance from their parents. The clenched fists placed on the statue's lap stand for rage against Japan. Thirdly, her bare feet and uplifted heels indicate her insecurity. Bare feet show how shoes of some "comfort women" were taken away when they were abducted, so they could not attempt to escape. Continued social stigmas also disable her from standing properly with her both heels firmly touching the ground, which is why her heels do not touch the ground. The little bird on her shoulder signifies the medium that connects the living and the souls of the victims. Mosaic tiles in the form of a shadow of an old woman mean torn wounds and painful lives of "comfort women" in the present. Within this shattered shadow, white butterfly exists in the centre, which signifies the artist's yearning that the suffered women resurrect as white butterflies. The empty chair next to the memorial can be interpreted as a place to sympathise with "comfort women", and its emptiness can also be viewed as deceased victims, who passed away before justice was served (*KBS News*, 2019).

highlights the vicious and vile nature of sexual slavery and also emphasises the weakness and vulnerability of young girls who were forcibly conscripted to the system (Son, 2018: 154). Due to its symbolic elements, the statue instigated political tensions between Japan and Korea. The Abe administration expressed resentment toward the memorial, demanding them to be removed from locations in Korea and other countries (Ahn, 2020: 167). Even diplomatic relations between Osaka and San Francisco were terminated in 2018 due to the placement of the "comfort women" statue in San Francisco (Ahn, 2020: 167).[19] According to the data provided by the Korean Council, there were initially thirty-six peace monuments (either in a form of a memorial or female form) in different countries such as Japan (4), China (2), Hong Kong (1), Taiwan (1), the Philippines (4), the U.S. (17), Canada (1), Australia (2), and Germany (4) (Status of Overseas Installations, 2023). Within Korea, there exist 146 peace monuments (Status of Domestic Installation, 2023). However, four monuments erected overseas, specifically two in the Philippines, one in the U.S., and one in Germany, were later removed. As a result, the current total stands at thirty-two statues that can be found across the globe (Status of Overseas Installations, 2023). Petitions are being conducted with the aim of returning the statue to the University of Kassel. According to the report presented by the Korean Council, the statue was unexpectedly removed as a result of pressure from the Japanese government (Status of Overseas Installations, 2023).

Yonson Ahn highlighted that these monuments and museums dedicated to "comfort women" function as mnemonic objects to remind the experience of the survivors (Ahn, 2020: 168). While these monuments have occasionally led to political and diplomatic tensions, the growing presence of these peace monuments indicates that these artistic creations serve an epistemological purpose in fostering historical awareness.

[19] "The 'comfort women' monument erected in San Francisco in 2018 depicts three women—from China, Korea, and the Philippines—who symbolize women and teenage girls forced to work at comfort stations from the early 1930s until Japan's defeat in 1945" (Ahn, 2020: 167).

2.1.3 Literary Representations of "comfort women"

2.1.3.1 Poetry

There are fewer poems than novels on "comfort women". Among the most recognised collection of poems on "comfort women" include those by Emily Jungmin Yoon, who debuted in the American literary market with *Ordinary Misfortunes* in 2017, for which she received the Sunken Garden Chapbook Prize. In 2019, Yoon published another collection of poems, *A Cruelty Special to Our Species*, which also deals with "comfort women". Each poem in "The Testimonies" contains subtitles which are the victims' names. Another poet who published a collection of poems on "comfort women" is Kwŏn Suncha, who published her Korean poems in 2015 and an English translation of them in 2018. Kwon's work is entirely dedicated to commemorating "comfort women", containing six sections of photos and paintings that help the readers understand the historical background of "comfort women" (Kwon et al., 2015). Both Yoon and Kwon composed their poetry to address women who suffered from injustice and war conflicts.

2.1.3.2 Fiction

Compared to poetry, more fiction or novels have been written on the topic. Though the victims are from many different countries, mostly former Japanese colonies such as Korea, Malaya, Indonesia, and the Philippines, literary works on "comfort women" have been produced mostly in Korea and the United States. Novels on "comfort women" written in English are by Korean American authors. Korean novels have centralised the discussion of the topic more in Korea and on Korean victims. In contrast, Korean American novels have Korean American characters with the United States as the novel's primary setting. As historical fiction, all the works contain fictional elements to varying degrees, and they reflect different levels of historical awareness of the authors.

Since 1997, five Korean American historical fiction on the "comfort women" issue have been published. Nora Okja Keller's *Comfort Woman* and Therese Park's A *Gift of Emperor* were published in 1997, followed by Chang-rae Lee's *A Gesture Life* in 1999. In 2013, Kalliope Lee debuted as a novelist with *Sunday Girl.* A more recent work on "comfort women" was written by Mary Lynn Bracht in 2018, titled *White Chrysanthemum*. Though these works were written in different years and in different styles, they all seemingly aim to convey a similar message, to serve justice for "comfort women" victims.

In Nora Okja Keller's *Comfort Woman,* Soon-Hyo/Akiko is a former "comfort woman", and her first-person narrative alternates with her Korean American daughter Beccah's voice. The novel covers Soon-Hyo's life in the "comfort station", her marriage and immigration to the United States. After the death of her American missionary husband, she lives as a shaman with her daughter. In Chang-rae Lee's *A Gesture Life,* the novel also has a first-person narrative but is the 'perpetrator' of the "comfort women" system. Franklin Jiro Kurohata is a Korean Japanese medical officer who falls in love with a "comfort woman" character named K/Kkutaeh. Like Soon-Hyo in *Comfort Woman*, Kurohata also immigrated to the United States after World War II. As a gesture of repentance for failing K, since she dies due to his arrogance, he adopts a Korean African American girl. The protagonist of Therese Park's *A Gift of the Emperor* also immigrates to the U.S., but she returns to Korea at the end of the story. Like the other two novels, *A Gift of the Emperor* is told through a first-person narrative by the protagonist, Soon-ah.

Kalliope Lee's *Sunday Girl* also is narrated from a first-person perspective of Sibyl, a Korean American protagonist who comes to Korea in search of her Korean identity with her close friend Jang-mee, a Korean American adoptee, who also has the same objective as Sibyl. Jang-mee connects with a "comfort woman" ghost through her experience of violent rape and falls into a coma. Sibyl uses the ritual of exposing herself to sexual violence to communicate

with the same spirit (Ko, 2016: 108). Lastly, Mary Lynn Bracht's work is the most recent Korean American novel on "comfort women". The story follows a similar format to Nora Okja Keller's work. The novel contains two main narratives by two sisters, Hana and Emi. Although the work consists of a third-person omniscient narrative style, similar to *Comfort Woman,* chapters on Hana and Emi alternate throughout the novel. However, this novel is different from the others as Hana, a former "comfort woman", fails to return home, and her chapters only provide details of her life as a "comfort woman". Her sister, Emi, has no information about her whereabouts or whether she is even alive, and the novel only hints that Emi assumes that her sister was taken to a "comfort station".

There exists almost double the number of literary works on the "comfort women" issue in Korean than in English. Kim Sum wrote five works on "comfort women", including Hanmyŏng (2016)*, Hŭrŭnŭn P'yŏnji* (2018a), *Kunini ch'ŏnsa* (2018b), and *Sunggoham* (2018c),[20] which I will examine along with Yun Chŏng-mo's *Emi irŭm* (1988)[21] and Pae Hong-chin's novel *Kŭrim sok* (2008). Among all the Korean authors who wrote books on "comfort women", Kim Sum is the only author the Korean Council commissioned, and she received more recognition than any other author for her different stylistic methods.

In Kim Sum's *Hanmyŏng*, the narrative takes place at a specific time when only two surviving victims are left in Korea, and one is about to pass away. The novel has 316 footnotes which reference real accounts given by the victims when they gave their testimonies. All the details about the "comfort woman" experiences mentioned in the novel derive from the victims' testimonies and interviews. The protagonist is referred to as "kŭ-nyŏ" (she) to indicate that she is a symbolic figure that represents all "comfort women". Her name is revealed only in the last few pages of the narrative when she decides to meet with the last surviving "comfort woman" victim. Kim's later works *Hŭrŭnŭn P'yŏnji, Kunini ch'ŏnsa,*

[20] Kim also recently published *Aiwa K'al* ('A child and a sword', 2021). As this is a graphic novel intended for children, I will not be analysing this work in this dissertation.
[21] Quotations from this novel that are used in this thesis are from Yun's second edition of *Emi irŭm* (1997).

and Sunggoham were all published in the same year, 2018. Unlike *Hanmyŏng,* which has a third-person omniscient narrator that focuses on the life of P'ung-kil, *Hŭrŭnŭn P'yŏnji* is narrated by a first-person narrator and protagonist Kŭm-cha. The novel could be considered as a prequel to *Hanmyŏng* as *Hŭrŭnŭn P'yŏnji* focuses on Kŭm-cha's life at the "comfort station". At the same time, *Hanmyŏng* is set in the present with the possibility that P'ung-kil may end up as the last "comfort woman" victim-survivor. *Kunini ch'ŏnsa* and *Sunggoham* are novels the Korean Council asked Kim to write. *Kunini ch'ŏnsa* is based on the actual "comfort woman" survivor Kil Wŏn-ok and *Sunggoham* is based on the life of Kim Pok-tong.

Pae Hong-chin's novel *Kŭrim sok* (2008) is similar to the novels of Kim as the work focuses on another real-life "comfort woman" survivor named Kang Tŏk-kyŏng. *Emi irŭm* is the first Korean "comfort woman" novel by Yun Chŏng-mo and consists of a first-person narrative by Pae Mun-ha, the protagonist and son of the "comfort woman" victim. Through his visit to his father's funeral, he discovers that his mother, Sun-i, is the victim of sexual slavery during World War II. Sun-i narrates her experience as a "comfort woman" to her son Mun-ha. Although Sun-i's narrative takes up less than her son's, her life as a "comfort woman" is nevertheless told through her own voice. The Korean literary creations of "comfort women" centralise on the victims and their viewpoints, unlike "comfort women" figures that appear in Korean American "comfort women" novels.

The majority of "comfort women" is from Korea, and a substantial portion of the diplomatic negotiations with the Japanese government has been orchestrated and executed by the Korean authorities. Over time, Korea emerged as a leading country in advocating for the reparation of the "comfort women" victim-survivors. Considering the historical and sensitive nature of this issue, any attempts at historical revisionism or dissemination of inaccurate information were critiqued and condemned by both scholars and the general public. This sentiment of upholding historical accuracy appears to have transcended into literary realms,

especially among Korean literature as Korean writers show strong impulse toward historical facts in their novels. Consequently, within the genre of historical fiction, Korean writers exercise certain level of restraint in their representation of the "comfort women" issue, displaying a commitment to reflecting historical facts within their works.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 Historical Fiction

The history of “comfort women” consists of archival records by historians and survivors’ accounts and recollections. Their testimonies consolidate memories, which are preserved as recorded in the archives. The historical record is often categorised as a different type of data from testimonies, but “comfort women” history is a conglomeration of oral testimonies and archival data. Chris Weedon and Glenn Jordan affirm this notion by presenting their understanding of history and memory. They claim that they are aware that some scholars may disparage memory-based sources as untrustworthy. Still, they do not wish to place history as an opposite notion of collective memory (Weedon and Jordan, 2012: 145). They define history as a process which places “memory-based work within more general narratives of the past, a process that inevitably implies a large measure of selection and forgetting that represents interests in the present” (Weedon and Jordan, 2012: 145). After they state the nexus between history and memory, they further articulate the importance of memory. Collective memory is valid as it helps to remember traumatic incidents such as wars and genocide. Moreover, as the number of survivors to tell their first-hand experiences diminish, it is essential to record these individual testimonies (Weedon and Jordan, 2012: 145). Just as the claim made by Weedon and Jordan, acknowledging the importance of collective memory necessitates recognising individuals who went through such traumatic events, which can include the victims of the “comfort women” system. The number of

"comfort women" victim survivors is swiftly diminishing as well. Some historians deem the unfiltered accounts offered by the survivors as disorderly or too subjective. Perhaps this may be why other forms, such as literary creations, are emerging to render the experience of the victims.

It is essential to discuss how history functions as a literary tool. Lydia Kokkola provides her understanding of history and how it can be subjective even though historical facts are believed to be objective presentations of events that almost resemble scientific data (Kokkola, 2003: 98). She further adds that historical facts cannot be like scientific facts that can be reproduced without changes since there is a possibility of amendment with historical facts if there are new conflicting views (Kokkola, 2003: 98). In other words, she believes historical facts are bound to change by who decides to deliver them. However, though she claims that history can be subjective, she highlights the importance of historical facts if they were used in historical fiction. She asserts that writers should never forget historical facts when writing historical fiction (Kokkola, 2003: 107).

Another role that historical novels should serve is that they should not neglect ethical considerations. Emily Miller Budick asserts how historical fiction is founded on moral thinking that enables ethical judgement. Hence, historical novels allow readers to form ethical thinking through reading about an atrocious event such as the Holocaust (Budick, 2015: 3). Similar to "Holocaust fiction", historical fiction like "comfort women" literature evokes ethical judgements. Tessa Morris-Suzuki, also highlights how historical novels are not created only for the readers' empathy but also provide interpretations and understandings of the causes and consequences of past events (Morris-Suzuki, 2005: 41). Moreover, other crucial features of historical fiction are elaborated in Georg Lukacs' *The Historical Novel*. Lukacs claims that historical fiction retells historical events, and readers can re-live the historical reality through reading such fiction (Lukacs, 1962: 42). Readers can emotionally

and mentally engage themselves in the lives and experiences of the "comfort women" by reading historical fiction that vividly portrays their struggles and challenges. It implies that the readers can gain a deep understanding of what these women went through, almost as if they are reliving those experiences themselves, even though they are only engaging with a work of fiction. As with “comfort women” literature, the primary motivation of the writers to compose their works may not be solely for didactic purposes, but also to evoke an awareness or response from the readers. Historical elements in these novels are utilised to arouse readers’ interest or awareness of the past that was ignored. Lukacs explains further that these novels exist to present history and characters in such a way as they were in historical reality (Lukacs, 1962: 43). Hence, historical novels on “comfort women” that present extreme cases of violence inflicted on “comfort women” may show the historical reality to which many Koreans and Japanese have turned a blind eye.

2.2.2 Collective Memory of “comfort women”

Literary works on the “comfort women” issue are historical fictions that provide certain details, which enable ethical judgement of the historical facts presented in the novels and allow the readers to re-experience the history of “comfort women” by reading these novels. Moreover, the readers can acquire knowledge of atrocities of the “comfort system” that was not widely known. Morris-Suzuki asserts that historical novels can give readers a unique understanding of history. Historical novels present the inner thoughts of “comfort women” and describe communities and events, which are different from how historical records discuss the past. Authors of historical novels can present alternative viewpoints, reimagined narratives, and even revised interpretations of historical incidents. As stated earlier, these literary creations of “comfort women” are still works of fiction. Nevertheless, they present the collective memory of these victim-survivors, which can allow a more

empathetic understanding of the past, enabling readers to connect with the "comfort women" characters and their circumstances.

Another theoretical understanding of memory put forward by Pierre Nora provides a fresh impetus to the debate on the importance of memory versus history. Nora, who effectively came up with the notion, "lieux de mémoire (sites of memory)", defends the necessity of crystallising the memory since "milieux de memoire (real environments of memory)" no longer exist once the event becomes part of the history. Nora articulates how memory is fundamentally different from history. According to him, memory undergoes a permanent progression of remembering and forgetting. He defines memory as something bound to stay unchanged or be susceptible to be appropriated or revived; on the other hand, he explains that history is problematic, unfinished, and a reconstruction of what is gone (Nora, 1989: 8). His definitions of history and memory show that he has pessimistic views on history. Nora also claims that history constantly questions memory and is adversative as its objective is to suppress and eradicate memory (Nora, 1989: 9). According to Nora, "Lieux de mémoire (sites of memory)" requires planning since there is no spontaneity of memory. Hence, he suggests that there should be efforts to create and commemorate deliberately (Nora, 1989: 12).

It can be said that such deliberate efforts may have been projected by Korean and Korean American writers, as they exerted themselves to preserve the memories of "comfort women" in different ways in their stories. These endeavours could reflect Nora's comments on the essence of the memory preservation act which minority groups often commit themselves to. Marginalised or minority groups endeavour to protect their memory or otherwise, history would eradicate lieux de mémoire (Nora, 1989: 12). At the same time, though if history does not transform and distort memory, "lieux de mémoire" cannot exist, so history and memory must coexist (Nora, 1989: 12). Though they are seemingly antithetical, either would perish if only one exists while the other does not.

History and memory of "comfort women" also necessitate coexistence. For "comfort women" victims, their accounts and memoirs are perceived as a materialisation of collective memory. As mentioned earlier, the history of the "comfort women" issue depends not only on archival records and data but also on the voices and recollections of these victims. These testimonies allow the preservation of memory and the existence of history. Some historians constantly distinguish history from memory, arguing that memory is incomparable to historical records and cannot coexist. They also claim that memory is deemed controversial because it lacks reason and rationality, involving subjective perceptions and views. Indeed, in *On Collective Memory*, Maurice Halbwachs expounds that there may be alterations in recording collective memory. He agrees that the past may get distorted during the reconstruction process (Halbwachs, 1992: 182). Nevertheless, he also argues that individuals who belong to specific group contexts can remember and recreate the past (Halbwachs, 1992: 22). The past can be revived through collective memory.[22]

Chris Weedon and Glenn Jordan also retaliated against the claim that memory is subjective compared to history. They highlighted how history involves the process of selection and omission by the authors, sometimes forgetting through the authority of historians, which reflects the interests and demands of the present (Weedon and Jordan, 2012: 145). Nevertheless, neither history nor memory is objective, and there are constant suspicions about the unreliability of collective memory. Still, they assert the necessity for collective memory to be preserved due to the diminishing number of survivor victims (of the Holocaust, for instance). Similarly, the "comfort system" survivors are also diminishing, as the number of survivors in Korea now stands at eleven (*The JoongAng*, 2022). Hence, ideas delineated by Tessa Morris-Suzuki, Pierre Nora, Chris Weedon and Glenn Jordan regarding the role of

[22] Marianne Hirsch, like Halbwachs, also claims that recording memory helps one to reflect and mourn and return to post-memory, rebuilding and reconnecting to the losses (Hirsch, 2012: 243).

"collective memory" and the importance of memory preservation can be helpful when considering them in relation to "comfort women" novels.

2.2.3 Trauma

The collective memory of "comfort women" is an amalgamation of traumatic experiences that resonate with what other war crime victims experienced. Cathy Caruth, in *Unclaimed experience,* explains how Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) reflects the physical and neurobiological impact on the mind due to an uncontrollable and atrocious event (Caruth, 1996: 58). "Comfort women" underwent a traumatic experience that they continue to suffer from and carry the psychological burden against their will. To understand "comfort women" better, I found it helpful to consider the behavioural patterns of other trauma victims, such as those of the Holocaust. In *Narrating the Holocaust,* Andrea Reiter examines how victim-survivors of the Holocaust reacted after their survival. According to Reiter, the survivors often feel responsible to speak for those who lost their lives and retell the past to be remembered. (Reiter, 2000: 137). Reiter also mentions that due to the active participation of the Holocaust survivors, their testimonies gave an illusion that the presentation of the experience seemed to overlap with one another (Reiter, 2000: 141). However, this is due to the presentation style of testimonies, as they all contain first-person subjects (Reiter, 2000: 140).

Unlike survivors of the Holocaust, "comfort women" victims were incapable of writing down their records as many were illiterate (The Korean Council, 1993: 17). The majority of the "comfort women" victims were taken into the "comfort stations" when they were young, and this deprived them the chance of proper education. This difference distinguishes the Holocaust survivors from the "comfort women" victims, as the "comfort system" victims needed aid to deliver their stories. Even though Korean former "comfort

women" also voluntarily reported that they were once "comfort women", they were confined to their past and continued to suffer by being old, sick, lonely, and poor (Korean Council, 1993: 17). Also, though they finally testified, the five decades of their silence was evidence of their trauma (Yang, 2006: 153).

2.2.4 Diaspora, multidirectional memory, and transnational redress activism

Many historical novels on "comfort women" make use of archival records and testimonies, and present themes of trauma and collective memory, but due to the different positionalities of the authors, Korean American (diaspora) authors may present the "comfort women" issue differently from Korean cohorts. According to David Palumbo-Liu, even if Asian Americans contribute a great deal to their society, they are likely to be re-marginalised as Asians (Chuh and Shimakawa, 2001: 215), and constant discrimination as such can potentially motivate diaspora communities to learn about their native heritage and history. There seem to be several reasons why Korean American authors seem to have a sense of obligation to address the "comfort women" issue in their novels. These writers have a special affinity towards Korean history and culture due to their ethnicity. They write these novels to redress and produce knowledge about "comfort women" victim-survivors. However, they also attempt to redefine Asian Americans who are still racialised and marginalised in the United States while dealing with Korean historical issues in their cultural productions. Through such writing practice, the authors also seem to seek opportunities to form their selfhood. Along these lines, while these works may cover issues on diaspora and self-formation, they may deliver historical knowledge unfamiliar to their American readers and achieve multidirectional memory between the past and the present.

In the compilation work, *Korean diaspora, Diasporic Returns to the Ethnic Homeland,* Christian J. Park states how second, or later-generation Korean Americans returned to Korea

with longings to discover their roots (Park, 2019: 129).[23] In a similar vein, Laura Hyun Yi Kang analyses how Korean American authors seem obliged to give voice to Korean "comfort women" because they are of Korean descent. This ethnic affinity that Korean Americans felt motivated them to represent the victims of military sexual slavery (Kang, 2003: 26). Soh verifies this affinity by referring to Keller's claims that although she cannot even speak the Korean language, she feels a strong attraction to Korean culture. According to Soh, Keller also confessed that she struggles with defining what her identity is as a Korean American in the U.S. and stressed that she tackles this conflict by "try[ing] to resolve it with writing" (Soh, 2008: 53). Hence, Korean American authors seem to be drawn to "comfort women" issue because it is Korean history. They may also be inclined to address this historically sensitive issue because of their awareness of their ethnic identity.

While the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 provided more opportunities for Asian Americans to immigrate and become citizens, it did not completely free them from social struggles such as desires for acceptance and recognition. Their status as the social minority still remained, even if they were born in the United States or naturalised citizens. Lisa Lowe conducted extensive research into the history of Asian Americans and provided her insight in *Immigrant Acts* (1996). According to Lowe, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Asian Indian, and Filipino immigrants were fundamental to building the American nation with an idealised notion of inclusiveness (Lowe, 1996: 5). Although Asian Americans' desires for acceptance, they still faced marginalisation. However, despite their efforts, whether they were descendants of generations born and raised in the United States or not, they were generally perceived and treated as foreigners (Lowe, 1996: 5-6).

In *Reading Asian American Literature,* Cynthia Sau-Ling Wong also makes a similar claim that even when Asian Americans were soon widely accepted as Americans, in reality,

[23] "Ethnic Return Migration of Miguk Hanin (Korean Americans)"

they were still identified as the subgroups of the periphery and would be distinguished explicitly by whether they were Asians born in America or Asians mixed with Caucasian heritage (Wong, 1993: 7). Asian Americans, therefore, were constantly tested and ostracised that they seem to face difficulties in assimilating. This is one of many reasons that Asian American writers addressed the issue of social minority in their literary creations. For instance, even novels on "comfort women" written by Korean American authors address how Korean Americans are marginalised and racialised. They convey the obstacles faced by Korean American characters in the novels, trying to earn acceptance within American society.

Kandice Chuh asserts that many Asian American writers attempt to recreate and reimagine the negative stereotypes of Asian figures that were often depicted as villains in the U.S. political and cultural representations (Chuh, 2003: 11). This is because the media presentations of Asian Americans had limited and somewhat biased portrayals until Asian Americans involved themselves with literary creations. Some novels contain even "comfort women" characters as immigrants of the U.S. such as Soon-Hyo in Nora Okja Keller's *Comfort Woman*. Also, as Korean Americans experienced racialisation and in some cases sexual objectification, they were drawn to the subject. Therese Park also apparently commented that she developed Soon-ah in her novel *A Gift of the Emperor*, to reflect her own struggle for survival as a Korean American in the United States (Kang, 2003: 31-32).

In Laura Hyun Yi Kang's article, "Conjuring 'Comfort Women': Mediated Affiliations and Disciplined Subjects in Korean/American Transnationality", she claims that Korean American novels on "comfort women" would represent the survivors; however, these works still focus on diasporic Korean Americans' cultural and national circumstances within the United States (Kang, 2003: 33). Indeed, though these writers may be inclined and even feel compelled to address the Korean history in their novels, they cannot avoid conveying their interest in Korean American selfhood. Kang further advocated that this "selfhood" that

Korean American writers attempt to achieve through writing historical novels on “comfort women” is distinctively an American one: “The selfhood that is achieved through this remembrance must be distinguished as a particularly American one, one that is allowed and enabled to remember these pasts not in spite of but as a consequence of their national location in the United States" (Kang, 2003: 33). Hence, the affinity that Korean American writers feel is a significant feature of these novels but what they depict and create may reflect their desires to discuss Korean Americans and their positionalities as diaspora in the U.S. mostly due to their cultural and national conditions.

As mentioned earlier, various efforts to achieve historical justice for “comfort women” took place in the U.S. by conducting litigations to punish war criminals. Korean American authors may be conscious of their mission to redress “comfort women” in their novels; however, they also present power dynamics between the American justice system and the vulnerable victims of war crimes. Nora Okja Keller seems to show negative aspect of this American intervention by having the “comfort woman” character, Soon-Hyo, marry an American missionary, who believes that he is saving her. Soon-Hyo’s American husband appears in the novel to be criticised for his symbolic existence of an American intervention in Korea. According to Kandice Chuh, she believes this juxtaposition of Soon-Hyo and her American husband is the writer’s critique of American intervention: “He [Soon-Hyo’s husband] figures the justificatory rationale underwriting U.S. intervention in Korea, and very plainly, serves as a means for this novel to criticize U.S. imperialism” (Chuh, 2003: 18). However, at the same time, Chuh questions the supportive stance toward American justice through Chang-rae Lee’s protagonist, Kurohata or Hata:

> The operating field of Lee’s novel might be seen as U.S. culture and politics, and as we read his elegant prose, and especially, as we watch as “K” and Lieutenant Kurohata converse in English, we cannot help but recognize the paradoxical ability of character/ narrator and author, as well, perhaps, as ourselves, to speak on behalf of powerlessness from relative positions of power and authority. (Chuh, 2003: 16)

Although Korean American writers attempt to present the voices of the victims, Chuh contends that these authors present Korean American or American characters in a relatively powerful position to speak on behalf of the victims. Among many critics and scholars, Kandice Chuh, Laura Hyun Yi Kang, and Lisa Yoneyama share similar views on how "comfort women" issues sometimes get 'appropriated' in literary works. Although these writers are keen on giving voice to the powerless, the works often represent the vulnerable through an authorial view (Chuh, 2003: 16).

Korean American writers become advocates for "comfort women" survivors by delivering their narratives. This is undeniably evident as the writers admitted themselves to this fact. Historically, Korean Americans have been actively involved with redress activism, seeking ways for legal resolutions for the victims. Even in Keller's novel, the U.S. is presented as a place where "individual emancipation and political realisation are at least promised", while "Asia" symbolises inertness and "undifferentiated realm of victimisation" (Yoneyama, 2003: 70). Hence, America is depicted as supposedly an alternative choice for the redress activism to take place. While doing so, there lies potential complexities of their positionality, which may affect the way they represent these women. Korean Americans seemingly position themselves as proponents of American justice. By shifting the place of discourse to a different geographic location, conducting litigations in state and federal courts, and writing historical novels on "comfort women" issue in English, transnational activism is established.

Simultaneously, Korean American activists may unintentionally project American intervention. According to Yoneyama, she also asserts on Korean Americans' heavy involvement with "comfort women" redress movement: "Korean/American and Asian/American transnational feminists have deployed American juridical venues, legislatures, communities, social media, and spaces of cultural production to disseminate

memories of the Japanese military's sex trafficking and forced prostitution throughout the empire" (Yoneyama, 2016: 150). She further elucidates on how Korean Americans are inevitably influenced by U.S. nationalism as they contribute to the American discourse about "comfort women" issue: "American discourse on Japanese war crimes is profoundly shaped by U.S. nationalism and assumptions about modernity, liberalism, colonialism, and post coloniality that are embedded in Cold War epistemologies" (Yoneyama, 2016: 152). The inherent drawback of this whole practice is that while the intention or motivation that led these Korean American writers is explicitly aimed to redress the "comfort women", due to their positionality and circumstances they may become "the agent-subjects of U.S. state apparatuses" and may even use this opportunity to "secure their nationalised status by underwriting America's Cold War myth of liberation and rehabilitation vis-à-vis Asia" (Yoneyama, 2016: 152). Kang also highlighted that the limitation and danger of transporting Korean "comfort women" issue to the United States by Korean Americans may be that they may end up Americanising the issue through their mediation and intervention (Kang, 2003: 29).

While historical novels written by Korean Americans may seem supportive of American justice, they also serve to deliver historical knowledge to American readers unfamiliar with "comfort women" history. These novels focus on recovering the history of "comfort women" not solely for the benefit of those who experienced that history but instead fulfilling a desire for knowledge for the U.S. readers to satiate their curiosity and need for knowledge (Chuh, 2003: 19). It can then be assumed that the recontextualisation of "comfort women" history is complex as it is not only an act of giving voice to those directly affected by "comfort system" but also as a means for contemporary readers to understand and engage with history: "By extension, according to this novel, the importance of recovering the history

of ‘comfort woman’ locates not to those who were so conscripted, but to us, to satisfy our will to knowledge” (Chuh, 2003: 19).

Nevertheless, transmitting historical knowledge about “comfort women” via historical novels has a pedagogical effect of educating American readers, which can be interpreted as an attempt to raise historical awareness. Additionally, these literary creations can possibly incite multidirectional memory as memories of “comfort women” are depicted as relatable or understandable for Korean American characters within the narratives. In the context of *Comfort Woman*, Chuh contends that Beccah’s connection with not only her deceased mother but also her grandmother and another “comfort woman” character Induk is a way of “creating a common genealogy” and tie between women that transcends biological relations (Chuh, 2003: 19). Chuh further explicates how the past is represented and reshaped through historical novels by Chang-rae Lee and Nora Okja Keller: “At issue thus in both of these novels is the question of the ends to which past events are revisited, or put otherwise, the question of how they are made into objects of knowledge vis-à-vis narration and representation, for and in the present” (Chuh, 2003: 20). Indeed, there exists power dynamics when these Korean American writers reimagine memories of “comfort women”; nevertheless, this representation process evokes multidirectional memory, where memories can be interpreted in various ways. Furthermore, the authors seem to be also aware of the fact that “comfort women” issue in their novels is not just remembering one particular person’s memory but rather it serves as a pivotal point where various historical narratives can intersect and converge: “Such an approach to Lee’s and Keller’s novels helps us to see them as recognizing that “comfort woman” does not signal the beginning of a personal narrative but rather marks a nodal point in converging historical narratives” (Chuh, 2003: 20-21). This is a proof that the novels written by Korean American novels are not centred around just one

individual story, but they contribute to multidirectional historical memory through which broader historical contexts and perspectives are merged into the narratives.

All in all, unique positionality, motivations, and challenges, while also acknowledging the multidirectional memory and transnational activism of Korean American writers all affected their ways of representation of "comfort women" which all factored into why and how these authors may felt obliged to address this issue in their works. They may initially feel the need to approach this issue due to their affinity towards ethnicity. However, it does not stop there as these writers may be writing these novels also to address issues of Korean American diasporic positionally within the U.S. and their writings are enactments of accomplishing their selfhood. Also, another detrimental challenge that these writers may feel is that they may uphold U.S. nationalism as they try to rectify the historical justice for Korea in the U.S., offering to assist the victim-survivors yet presenting their empowered stance as an Asian American. Indeed, these complexities that they are entangled with do not derive from intentional attempts and they are unavoidable due to their circumstances within the U.S. society as constantly racialised Korean diasporas. Lastly, these various attempts to address history is an intentional effort to redress the victims and their redress activism evoke multidirectional memory as the voices of the "comfort women" characters in the novels are interrelated with memories of the present.

2.2.5 Feminist approach: 'Subaltern' and Objectification of the "comfort women"

As mentioned earlier, "comfort women" representations existed even before Kim Hak-sun's public statement, but they focused on sensual and sadistic aspect of the military slavery. Korea was unprepared, politically, socially, or culturally, to provide a proper understanding of "comfort women" to the public. Even when Japan and Korea signed the Basic Treaty (HanIl kibon choyak) in 1965, monetary compensation for Korea's suffering

due to forced conscription and labour during Japan's colonisation was not addressed. The Korean government also failed to demand from the Japanese government monetary compensation and an official apology for "comfort women" (Hicks, 1995: 132). As George Hicks further explains in his *Sex Slaves of Japan's Imperial Forces: The Comfort Women,* women's status was low both in Japan and Korea and the rape and abuse of women were often slighted as mishaps of war (Hicks, 1995: 132). Hence, social sentiments toward the victims were generally hostile, often depicting them as fallen, ruined or vulgar.

Similarly, Heo Yoon also pointed out the danger of exploitation by the Korean government or society, pressuring the victim-survivors. She criticised how androcentric Korean society turned down knowledge production on the "comfort women" subject (Heo, 2016: 108). Yang Hyun-ah also disparages how the Korean government, as noted above, never demanded compensation for "comfort women" at the time of signing the 1965 Basic Treaty, and the victims were never a concern for the government at the time (Yang, 2006: 135). She further adds that the government made them "sinners" and treated them as "subalterns" (Yang, 2006: 135).

The Korean government and society in the 1950s prioritised rebuilding the nation and instilling values of national identity among the general public. According to Heo, Korea was experiencing the turmoil of the Korean Armistice Agreement (Heo, 2016: 82). The nation then underwent Americanization, fostering anti-communism due to its new relationship with North Korea. Following the Korean War, the division of Korea into North and South led democratic South Korea to concentrate on establishing a new order, leaving no opportunity for the "comfort women" to share their experiences with the public. Korean society was also rife with misogyny, silencing women's voices and "comfort women" victims. They were speechless since the nation had already paired them with demeaning images, and there were no platforms for them to speak about their past trauma, rendering them voiceless.

Korean victims' recollections of their traumatic experiences evolve around the "*han* complex", as Chung-hee Sarah Soh extensively illustrates in her book, *The Comfort Women*. Soh articulates that *han* is a cultural convention that Korean survivors associate with to describe their horrific past and explains how it comes into existence. She explains that *han* is created as a result of social injustice, failure, and/or tragic incidents (Soh, 2008: 81). She also adds that the three factors that instigate *han* are gender, class, and sexuality (Soh, 2008: 81). To support her argument, she provides testimonies given by Mun P'il-gi, Yi Tŭk-nam, Yi Sang-ok, Kim Ok-sil, Kim Hak-sun, Song Sin-do and Pae Chok-kan on how they had all cultivated *han* due to the injustices against women (such as favouritism of sons over daughters) either by their mothers or fathers or both. They were restrained from education and suffered from physical and psychological abuse just because they were born as daughters. Here, Soh provides accounts that centralise on socio-cultural *han* within Korean households/society and not much on resentments toward the "comfort system".

The novels are written to achieve a connection with the survivors on a different platform than historical documents that provide information on their past as "comfort women". As with other cultural products on "comfort women", these novels attempt to present features and aspects of "comfort women" from a different angle than narrating only historical facts. Testimonies were initially considered to provide details of the "comfort system" that military documents failed to produce. "Comfort women" literature can be studied for its stylistic aspect and other themes. Still, it is also imperative to acknowledge that the essence of these "comfort women" novels' existence is to address the subordinate subjects of society (the marginalised women), who were physically and psychologically violated. It took five decades for the first Korean woman to come forward and expose the atrocities of the "comfort" system. Following her footsteps, images of "comfort women" were used in diverse platforms to the extent of exhaustion; however, fictional representations

of “comfort women” presented in the novels written by both Korean and Korean American authors show how subaltern subjects can reappear differently from history, which sometimes negated or attempted to silence their voices.

As mentioned earlier, unlike other survivors of historical atrocities such as the Holocaust, most “comfort women” were undereducated since they were taken into the system at a young age, which is why other people recorded their testimonies or wrote their (auto)biographies on their behalf.[24] The oral testimonies exist, but the written texts can only survive through the help of historians or members of organisations that wish to re-present them. Moreover, the victims were afraid to speak about their traumatic experiences as “comfort women”. Through a consolidated support system between the subalterns and intellectual women, their voices took the form of testimonies, which led to an “interdependent relationship in creating the emerging space of speech and new histories” (Park, 2005: 169). Park So-yang claims that the silenced subaltern speech from “comfort women” was enabled through the help and guidance of Korean female intellectuals such as Yun Jeong-ok and other fellow members of the system (Park, 2005: 169).

Among many discussions on the subaltern that exist, Gayatri Spivak’s theory on subaltern subjects seems appropriate when examining “comfort women” characters in historical fiction. Subaltern theory was initiated by Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, who coined the term to refer to socially marginalised cohorts, which helped to understand the power dynamics between the nonelites and the sovereign subjects (Landry and Maclean:1996, 203). The notions that Spivak uses derive from Ranajit Guha and his cohort of Subaltern Studies, which focuses on Indian elitism and “subalterns” within the society. Pioneered by Guha, Indian Marxists and historians formulated Indian “subalternity” to repudiate elitism conducted by colonialists and bourgeois-nationalists (Ludden, 2001: 15). Yet, Spivak’s study

[24] See Section 2.2.3.

on subaltern advances further into marginalised Indian women, who are doubly effaced subordinate subjects. She discusses the Indian tradition of Sati which the British colonialists abolished under the context of "saving brown women from brown men" (Spivak, 2010: 50). Her argument about Sati is that its abolition highlights the colonialist perspective of superiority over the indigenous population. Spivak acknowledges that subaltern is not distinctively gender specific. However, she criticises the masculinist discourses on marginalised Indian females, who are often doubly effaced. She argues that the issue is not about whether women participate in resistance movements. Instead, the main concern is that regardless of whether the subaltern is seen as a victim of colonialism or a participant in the resistance, the way society constructs gender keeps men in a dominant position (Spivak, 2010: 41). Regardless of whether women are objects of colonialism or as subjects of insurgency, the subalterns are denied a voice and representation. In other words, the subalterns could not speak and had to stay silent. Hence, due to the hierarchy of gender, the very existence of women was hidden and effaced.

The "comfort women" system was implemented as a war tactic designed by the Japanese military, which violated women's autonomy over their mentality and body. Yet, the subjectivity of "comfort women" is often associated with nationalism. Just like studies on subalterns of India, intellectuals and social elites conducted representations of "comfort women", and the voice of ostracised women was initially hidden. Spivak empathised with the "Rani of Sirmir" in her essay[25] and her decision to be Sati, which is condemned and intervened either by the colonial British or the noble Hindu: "In the event, when the law abolishing Sati was written, the discourse was once again race or class divisive between the bestial Hindu and the noble Hindu, the latter being represented as equally outraged by the practice as the British" (Spivak, 1985: 269). As Spivak further elaborates on Sati in her later

[25] "The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives"

essay, “Can the subaltern speak?” Sati is a practice of permitted self-destruction, enabling the widow to own the agency to carry it out. While suicide is considered to be taboo, Sati was a sanctioned self-immolation, which can even be interpreted as a signifier of a woman’s choice and desire (Spivak, 2010: 54). Spivak’s vexation with how the positionality of a subordinate subject gets decided by the interpreter or the third party was also a common phenomenon in Korea, Japan, and the United States since intellectuals or scholars initially approached the “comfort women” issue without consulting the survivors.

In this study, I draw upon Spivak's notions of the subaltern to explore how "comfort women" find their voices in literary works. While not all "comfort women" novels provide direct platforms for these survivors to speak, the authors don't entirely suppress their voices either. Testimonies preceding these novels have influenced the evolution of the survivors' positions. Although Spivak argues that "the subaltern cannot speak" in her essay, this doesn't obscure the women's experiences and agency (Spivak, 1993: 104). The subalterns discussed by Spivak lack political and social power, and the dilemma arises when intellectuals impose their ideological frameworks on them.

In the case of "comfort women”, they have endured immense suffering at the hands of a patriarchal society and men, yet they have bravely voiced their pain and trauma. Initially, societal misogyny and government oppression forced them into seclusion, but as they stepped forward, authors who tackled the issue attempted to maintain a balanced dynamic between speaker and listener/recorder. It is essential to emphasize that although "comfort women" are considered subalterns, their positionality is elevated through their presence in certain novels discussed in this dissertation. Their relationship with the authors is not hierarchal, but there have also been instances where survivors remained on the periphery. Therefore, it would be inaccurate to claim that they are no longer subalterns merely because they have begun to

regain their agency and subjectivity over time, and literary works contributed to strengthening their voices.

By analysing the "comfort women" novels written by Korean and Korean American writers in the following chapters, I wish to better understand the different stylistic approaches between these two groups. They may not all share the same patterns of dealing with historical events or figures. Still, there may be similar ideologies that these authors shared which may have been conveyed or filtered through in their novels, whether intentionally or not.

Chapter 3. Reimagined “comfort women” Testimonies in Korean American Novels

This chapter explores how Korean American novels such as Nora Okja Keller’s *Comfort Woman*, Therese Park’s *A Gift of the Emperor*, Chang-rae Lee’s *A Gesture Life*, Kalliope Lee’s *Sunday Girl*, and Mary Lynn Bracht’s *White Chrysanthemum* utilise and apply historical and fictional elements to reimagine the “comfort women” narratives. There indeed exist observations on differentiating Korean American works from Korean novels, but some Korean scholars that analyse Korean American “comfort women” novels simply identify them as Korean literature. However, examining how Korean American works depict the lives of “comfort women” and how they reflect “comfort women” testimonies may suggest a new way of understanding Korean American “comfort women” literature.

Korean American novels addressing the "comfort women" issue appear to combine elements from testimonies with imaginative elements created by the authors, thereby recontextualising these testimonies. Korean American writers localized the "comfort women" issue by incorporating a Korean American protagonist and situating the literary setting within the U.S. As with Korean American novels, it is necessary to look into how American society considered the issue and why the Korean American authors approached it in such a manner. Despite a substantial increase in the number of immigrants to the U.S. since the 1960s and onwards, marginalisation and racial barriers still existed. Social sentiment towards minorities such as newly settled immigrants was still retained. Within the context of Korean American literature centred on the theme of "comfort women" and diasporic identity, the presence of Korean American characters in these novels can be assumed as a literary strategy to reach the English-speaking readership. Moreover, this may also be due to the fact that "comfort women" issue is an unfamiliar historical issue for the American readership. This deliberate

choice stems from their consideration of the target readership, as they aimed to cater to the needs of American readers who may be unfamiliar with World War II atrocities such as the "comfort women" system.

In her examination of Korean American-authored novels centred on Korean "comfort women",[26] Kim Mee-young asserts that recontextualised narratives of "comfort women" narrow the gap between the past and the present and through such "re-enactment", it exposes problems of imperialistic and patriarchal capitalism (Kim, 2006: 327).[27] She also highlights the importance of representation, adding that representation brings life into historical details with new meanings that seem more relatable to the present (Kim, 2006: 328). Korean American literary works containing the "comfort women" topic incorporate reimagined details about the subject, ultimately rendering the narratives more accessible to English-speaking readers. The choice to feature a Korean American protagonist and a U.S. setting further enhances this accessibility for an American audience previously unaware of the "comfort women" system.

3.1 Roles and Effects of "comfort women" Testimonies in the United States

Various socio-political conditions prevented victim-survivors from disclosing their trauma in public. One of the reasons that silenced their voices is the androcentric and conservative Korean government and society. Diplomatic tensions between Japan and Korea prevented the victims from coming forward.[28] Yang Hyunah claims that the Korean government and the society pretended as if "comfort women" did not exist and left these women in poverty and prejudices, making them feel as if they were sinners and subalterns of

[26] In the article, she introduces the titles of two Korean writers' works, which are Yun Chŏng-mo's *Emi Irŭm* and Ko Hye-chŏng's *Narara kŭmbit nalgaerŭl t'ago* (날아라 금빛 날개를 타고, 'Fly, on a set of golden wings,' 2006). However, the article focuses on the analyses of Korean American "comfort women" novels.
[27] "Yŏksa Kisulgwa Pyŏnbyŏltoenŭn, Munhagŭi Naerŏt'ibŭŭi T'ŭksŏng Han'gugin Chonggunwianbu Sosŏrŭl Chungshimŭ-ro" (An Essay on Time, Trauma, Narrative with Analysing Novels about Korean Comfort Women)
[28] See Chapter 1.

society where they could not fit in (Yang, 2006: 136).[29] According to the Korean "comfort women" research institute and the first Korean "comfort women" activist group known as Chŏngshindae Yŏn'guso and the Korean Council,[30] due to a lack of data on women's history or life records during the colonial period, testimonies from the survivors helped reimagine the time and fill in the gaps that military documents failed to provide (Chŏngshindae Yŏn'guso and the Korean Council, 1993: 313). Initially, Kim Hak Sun was the first and only Korean to divulge her experience as a former "comfort woman" during World War II. With intentions to discover more survivors like Kim, the "Volunteer Service Corps Report Line" was set up in Seoul and Pusan. However, as the survivors were too afraid and traumatised, only a few registered, and even these members wished to stay anonymous or use pseudonyms (Hicks, 1994: 152).

In *The Comfort Women,* Chung-hee Sarah Soh states, "in order to better understand the social, cultural, psychological, and economic forces that shaped the circumstances of individual Korean survivors prior to their recruitment we can, and should, direct our attention to their individual testimonial narratives" (Soh, 2008: 79). Furthermore, while she asserts the importance of individual testimonies, Soh also mentions the limitations of the testimonies and discredits those who are blinded by compassion for the survivors: "Their memories are now at a remove of more than sixty years from their days at comfort stations, and yet in colonial studies such oral histories, with their strong emotional resonance, are often invoked to counter official versions of documented history" (Soh, 2008: 97). Hence, Soh applies the term "testimonial narrative" to specify how testimonies tend to take the form of a narrative, which involves editing by historians. She intentionally uses the time, "testimonial narrative (testimonio) […] to refer to survivors' published personal accounts, which anthropologists would call 'life stories,'" differentiating it from legal testimonies. Soh further admits to her

[29] "Chŭngŏn-ŭl t'ong-hae pon Hankuk-in Kunwianputŭl-ŭi P'o sŭt'ŭ-Sikmin-ŭi Sanghŭn (trauma)" (Lasting Postcolonial Trauma in Testimony of Korean' Comfort Women' Survivors)
[30] See Chapter 1.

part in the intervention: “A note on the composite and crafted nature of the reported first-person narratives: Mun’s voice in this book is, unavoidably and necessarily, a result of my analytical distillations of the published materials as well as my ethnographic fieldwork” (Soh, 2008: 267). Also, she insintuates that historians also tailor the testimonies as they are rendered in a first-person narrative style: “This note on the crafted nature of the reported first-person narratives applies to the life stories of other survivors in this study as well when given as first-person narratives” (Soh, 2008: 267). Soh’s argument is not entirely wrong as Sangmie Choi Schellstede, and the Washington Coalition for Comfort Women Issues (WCCW) compiled a collection of testimonies called *Comfort women to speak testimony by sex slaves of the Japanese military*, which includes a new United Nations human rights report in which Schellstede admits to editing like Soh. They collected videotaped testimonies and transcribed and translated them, and this “collection of testimonies in English [is] the first of its kind in the United States” (Schellstede Choi, 2000: ix). She explains their task and involvement in detail, but also asserts how she and her team endeavoured to keep to the original:

> Then began the arduous, time-consuming task of transcribing the testimonies in Korean, made difficult by heavy regional accents, and then translating them into English. The translations were edited to be understandable in English, keeping very close to the original text. (Schellstede Choi, 2000: ix)

Apart from historical records compiled by historians, survivors also directly participated in voicing their experiences in written forms by writing their memoirs. Jan Ruff O’Herne is Dutch Australian who was coerced into Japanese military sexual slavery during World War II, and she wrote a memoir with the title *Fifty Years of Silence* (1994) to record her traumatic experience as a “comfort woman”. As with the convention of a memoir, the work consists of a first-person narrator, O’Herne, who delivers the occasion of her life before she was captured as a “comfort woman” and during her time as a captive. Four years after her press conference in 1992, a former Filipina “comfort woman” Maria Rosa Luna Henson also released her autobiography in English. With the assistance of the Philippine Centre for

Investigative Journalism, Henson wrote *Comfort Woman: Slave of Destiny* (1996) to disclose the atrocities that the Japanese military committed during World War II. An edited version of her testimony appears in David Andrew Schmidt's *Ianfu—The Comfort Women of the Japanese Imperial Army of the Pacific War.* He provides it in a first-person narrative. Interestingly, historians who introduce testimonies by the victims usually deliver them in a first-person narrative style, except for George Hicks, who maintains his distance and presents the testimonies in a third-person narrative: "One of the victims in the Semarang case, Jan Ruff, has given a vivid public account of her experiences. She is among the few non-Korean comfort women to talk about her trauma" (Hicks, 1995: 34). Not only Jan Ruff O'Herne, but he presents the victims in the third-person narrative with all accounts that he cites in his work, maintaining his distance as the *compiler* of these accounts.

On the other hand, in *Lolas' House* (2017) a collection of testimonies given by Filipina "comfort women" titled *Lolas' House* (2017) before each testimony, the Filipino American activist and author, M. Evelina Galang inserts her interpretations and personal interactions with Filipina "comfort women". *Lola's House* stands out as it contains the compiler's subjective voice, which recontextualises the "comfort women" narratives. Although this is a historical record of testimonies, Galang's work resonates with some of the Korean American novels that deal with the historical issue. As Korean "comfort women" testimonies were presented in the United States, they became sources for the Korean American novels to appear in the literary market with reimagined voices.

3.2 Fictional Representations of "comfort women" in Korean American Novels

As stated above, testimonies serve as primary sources for historians to compile or write historical records. A historical novel borrows historical facts and becomes an extended form of history. However, even now, literary critics and scholars have refrained from

acknowledging “comfort women” literature as a literary genre, especially Korean scholars. Nevertheless, it became a popular topic in the United States as “comfort women” became activists and travelled abroad to share their testimonies.. Laura Hyun-yi Kang notes how the representation of “comfort women” in Korean American novels was constrained to creating well-written literary works in English since these works were to publicise the history of “comfort women” to American readers (Kang, 2003: 32). As the “comfort women” novels in English are intended for readers with less knowledge on Korean “comfort women”, they had to be relatable for the readers. Almost all Korean American novels have Korean American protagonists, and the setting of the novels takes place in the United States. However, transference of “comfort women” figures to the United States even in fiction may incite awkwardness and stylistic eccentricities throughout the novelisation process (Kang, 2003: 32).

Prior to more “comfort women” novels being published in the United States, in California, on June 22, 1999, Assembly Joint Resolution 27, Chapter 90, titled “Relative to the War Crimes Committed by the Japanese Military during World War II”, was initiated by Mike Honda, a Japanese American politician, hoping to “urge the President of the United States to take all appropriate action to bring about a formal apology and reparation by the Government of Japan” (Yoneyama, 2003: 63). Honda’s participation in redressing the survivors ignited awareness for the reparation act in the United States. Though this redress initiative may not have directly influenced Korean American authors, it must have played some part in their awareness of the issue. Regardless, it was the testimonies by the victims that inspired many of the authors to take up their pens.

Korean American and Korean novels on “comfort women” are structured in a testimonial style, but the ways they are constructed are dissimilar. Korean American novels are mainly read by English-speaking readers, and the novels on “comfort women” do not focus soley on historical facts. Moreover, the way that the writers have utilised history seems

to vary. Except for Mary Lynn Bracht, all the other Korean American authors used a first-person narrator as their protagonist. Even though they present matters such as identity issues of Asian immigrants or diasporas in the United States (which will be discussed later), the authors still amalgamated details of testimonials with their imaginations.

Nora Okja Keller's *Comfort Woman*

After Kim Hak-Sun's public testimony in 1991, Nora Okja Keller's *Comfort Woman* is the first novel on the "comfort women" issue written in English.[31] *Comfort Woman* reached its prominence the moment it entered the market. It is currently deemed part of the Asian American literary canon; moreover, with this work, Keller received four literary awards and was highly praised for her artistic rendering of the historical issue. Kim Hae-jin states in her article on *Comfort Woman* that Keller successfully depicted the "comfort women" experience by writing in English, "the most universal language" (Kim H., 2015: 8).[32] Kim further adds that Keller's work is praiseworthy for it is in English, allowing exposure to global readers and enlightening them on the sensitive historical issue. Nora Okja Keller was inspired to write *Comfort Woman* when she attended a human rights symposium at the University of Hawaii in 1993, where public testimony was given by one of the "comfort women" victims, Hwang Kŭm-chu, and she "learned the truth of Japanese military sex slavery in World War II" (Lee, 2004: 431).

When she first learned about the issue through Hwang's testimony, she felt appalled and asked her journalist friend to investigate the matter further. However, her friend suggested to Keller that she should write the story since she is "Korean" (Kim and Keller, 2005). According to Keller, "there was very little information about comfort women available

[31]Yun Chŏng-mo's *Emi irŭm* is the first historical fiction on "comfort women" issue in Korean.
[32] "가장 보편성을 지닌 언어인 '영어'를 통해 전 세계적으로 비참하고 끔찍했던 "한국 일본군 위안부"의 실상을 알린다" (Kim H., 2015: 8).

in English" at the time, and she had to "imagine their daily lives, their physical and emotional anguish, the aftermath" (Keller, 1997: 5). Due to the lack of information on the victim-survivors, Keller became determined to work against "the willingness of society to forget or exclude the history of the comfort women from the record of official, historical memory" (Hansen, 2007: 53). Through her conviction and devotion, she produced a novel that dealt with the sensitive historical issue, and her work is now deemed as a part of the Korean American literary canon. Most of all, it was highly praised for the author's dedication to tell the stories of the victim-survivors. In an interview with the author conducted by Young-Oak, Lee, Keller admitted her satisfaction of noticing the changes her work prompted:

> I feel both humbled and proud that my novel helped these women gain acknowledgement. When I wrote the novel, I would type in "comfort woman/women" in the internet search engines and only get things like "homemaking" back. After my book was published, I was gratified to see that when I typed in "comfort woman", reviews and news stories about Korean and Filipina comfort camp survivors appeared. (Lee, 155)

Though they brought to attention the "comfort woman" issue through their novels, Keller and other Korean American writers tend to share certain conventions of presenting "comfort women" victims that reflects their own positionality. In Keller's work, the United States appears as the central setting. She has a more personal attachment to America as her place of home and presents a Korean American narrator-protagonist that dominates the main narrative. Keller juxtaposes two first-person narratives given by Beccah, a Korean American protagonist, and her Soon-Hyo/Akiko, a Korean "comfort woman" victim-survivor. Even if the voice of the "comfort woman" victim is placed alongside that of the Korean American character, her voice in these chapters seems to echo in the periphery. This style or approach is what Lisa Yoneyama referred to as overlooking the "comfort women" issue: "The history of military sex slavery becomes a supplementary text through which the second-generation daughter's/narrator's American political will is enabled" (Yoneyama, 2003: 70). While the voice of the "comfort woman" victim is present alongside that of the Korean American

character, her perspective seems to be less central and noticeable in these chapters. In other words, the issue of "comfort women" is employed to address and highlight the position of Korean American immigrant-citizens within the United States. Hence, the "comfort women" issue is used as a means to discuss and understand the experiences and identity of Korean Americans in the U.S., potentially overshadowing the direct voice of the victim herself. The Korean American daughter, Beccah, is the one who provides closure for her mother while Soon-Hyo is depicted as uncommunicative and inarticulate. Moreover, Beccah makes peace with her mother only after Soon-Hyo's death. Indeed, Keller's work also presents an intricate and complex relationship between a detached mother and a daughter.

In spite of the American elements and the language the novel was written in (English), some Korean scholars such as Byun Hwa-young have argued that Keller's work should be considered in the realm of Korean literature:

> Though *Comfort Woman* was written in English and released in the United States, this work should be studied within the realm of Korean literature. The novel is not written from a "minority" Korean American female writer's perspective to defy the mainstream American society, but it centres around the lives of "comfort women", a Chosŏnin[33] and a Korean woman, who are marginalised from the official history of Korea. (Byun, 2004: 37)[34]

For Byun, the importance lies not in the language used to write the text but in the author's historical or ethnohistorical context and positionality. She argues that the novel serves as a

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[33] Byun uses "Chosŏnin" to refer to "comfort women" as they were taken to the "comfort system" at the time when Korea was known as Chosŏn (Byun, 2014: 35, 37, 39, 40, 41, and 48). There is no appearance of the term "Chosŏnin" in Keller's novel. This is purely Byun's choice to use the terminology in her article. The purpose of using both Chosŏn and Korea is to underscore that this issue is not an outdated problem of the past. She believes that writing about "comfort women" is essential for "us" the readers at present to remember and continue the discourse (Byŏn, 2014: 38-39). Hence it can be assumed that she wants to appeal to contemporary Koreans to continue the discussion about the "comfort women".

[34]"종군위안부의 증언을 받아 형상화된 <종군위안부>는 미국에서 영어로 출간되었지만 이는 한국문학의 영역에서 다뤄져야 할 소설이다. <종군위안부>는 소수민족 한국계 미국인 여성이라는 경계인의 위치에서 주류사회 미국의 중심에 대항하는 소설이라기보다는 한국의 공식 역사에서 밀려난 종군위안부 들의 존재를 담아낸 조선인 이자 한국인 여성에 관한 소설이라는 데 그 무게가 실려 있기 때문이다". (Byun, 2004, p. 37).

medium that enables the connection between the past, the present and the future of Korea, which may be the reason why she believes that the novel should be acknowledged as a Korean novel (Byun, 2014: 38-39). Moreover, she highlights the importance of remembrance of "comfort women" and continuation of the discourse to redress these women:

> The reason why we should not forget and continue to mention these women is that through such terminologies [the terms that we use to refer to these women], we can determine where our own positions lie. Interpellation itself means existence, and this very existence manifests our society's pain. Therefore, "comfort women" is our problem of the present and the future that we cannot separate ourselves from. (Byun, 2004: 40)[35]

Like Byun, Koo Jae-jin also believes in the power of passing on or circulating (Korean) history through ways such as Keller's novel and contends that her work should be claimed as 'Korean literature (Koo, 2007: 381). Byun and Koo's acknowledgement of Keller's work is significant, yet it seems unnecessary or questionable to label Keller's work only as a Korean novel. Apart from the "comfort women" issue dealt with in the novel, critics have also talked about the uniqueness of Keller's narrative techniques and how it restores the shattered mother-daughter relationship, and how such restoration could lead to discussions on global feminism or transnational feminism, initiating a new type of feminism (Schultermandl, 2007; Byun, 2014; Koo, 2007).

Therese Park's *A Gift of the Emperor*

Therese Park published *A Gift of the Emperor* in the same year as *Comfort Woman*. In Park's case, she decided to write her debut novel on "comfort women" when she saw a documentary about the victims (Kang, 2013: 29). Park's work was criticised of presenting a "simple" rendering of the past that seemed to be weak in attracting readers in comparison to

[35]"우리가 그들 할머니들의 존재를 잊지 않고 거론해야만 하는 것은 이 용어들이 다름 아닌 우리 자신의 위치를 살펴볼 수 있는 통로이기 때문이다. 명명은 곧 존재이며 그 존재는 우리의 사회적 고통을 표상하고 있다는 점에서 종군위안부 는 결코 우리와 분리해서 생각할 수 없는 현재와 미래의 문제인 것이다". (Byun, 2004: 40)

other historical novels with "a reinterpretation of the past that has the power to lead into future discourses" (Kim M., 2006, 338). Park attempted to depict "comfort women" from the first-person perspective of a character named Soon-ah. Unlike the narrative techniques employed in Nora Okja Keller or Chang-rae Lee's novels though, *A Gift of the Emperor* presents the story solely from the victim character's perspective.

Some historical fallacies appear from the beginning of this novel. In a Japanese school, Korean girls, who are forbidden to speak Korean or use their Korean names, are educated and instilled with an ideology that they will serve the Japanese Emperor by joining the Voluntary Labour Corps. The story unfolds at the beginning with how Soon-ah is conscripted to join the "comfort system". Soon-ah is nominated by her homeroom teacher to serve in the Women's Voluntary Labour Corps and educated accordingly. Though elements of these scenes may not be entirely historically inaccurate, there is no distinction between the "Voluntary Labour Corps" from the "comfort women" system throughout the novel and both terminologies are used to describe "comfort women". Though there have been unresolved contestations that *chŏngshindae* is another term for "comfort women", the functions of these two systems were different although they shared the same objective of serving the Japanese Emperor and his military. The different functions of the two systems were explained earlier in this dissertation.[36] The Women's voluntary labour corps existed to have women work in factories and other facilities to assist the functions of the military. There were many reported cases of "comfort women" victims being told that they would work at the labour corps but placed at "comfort women" stations. By presenting the two systems and terms as one and the same, the

[36] According to Chung Chin-Sung, *chŏngshindae* referred to 'both men and women who were mobilised for various activities, including reportage, medicine, and manual labour during the 1940s. The women's voluntary labour corps and the women's voluntary corps (for the most part, the names were used interchangeably) mobilised women to work in munitions factories in both Japan and Korea beginning in the early 1940s. These bodies gained legal status with the promulgation of the Order for the Women's Voluntary Corps for Labour in August 1944.' (Chung, 1997: 304). Chung and others have argued that unlike what was stated in the Order, Korean women were drafted or coerced to join. And although the Women's Voluntary Corps and "comfort women" functions differed, people have often mistaken them for the same service or system.

novel could prevent readers from understanding certain historical details and complexities around “comfort women” issue.

The work also uses biblical or Christian references to present attitudes toward “comfort women”. Soon-ah’s father is a Presbyterian minister, and Soon-ah judges her mother for being impure and tainted after she witnesses a Japanese police officer raping her mother. When her father gives a sermon on “God’s unconditional love”, she judges her mother harshly for having been raped.

> I felt compassion for her, yet strangely, I couldn’t look at her face. I thought somehow she was dishonest, unclean, and had fallen out of God’s grace. My father didn’t know she had been raped. This thought tortured me. Didn’t he have to know? Wasn’t it up to him to forgive her or divorce her? […] She wasn’t intellectual like my father: she couldn’t read, talk intelligently, and fiercely protective of my little brother and me since my older brother had been taken by the Japanese. [S]he knew that I didn’t respect her as I respected my father. (Park, 1997: 24)

She later repents about her past judgment of her mother when she gets raped (“I wanted to run to her and ask her to forgive my bad attitudes”, Park, 1997: 24) and alludes to how “since the Creation”, Korea and her body were destined to be conquered (Park, 1997: 28-9).

There are also many references to overcoming trauma by letting go of the past and making peace with oneself. An example is in Soon-ah’s conversation with Robert, an American soldier whom she befriends when she is stranded on an island. Robert is a Japanese American who was discriminated against after the Pearl Harbour attack and lost one leg in New Guinea while stationed there.

> No matter who caused it, your pain is yours, no one else’s. You can’t force people to apologise, Robert. What’s done is done. Even if they apologise, it wouldn’t do us any good. The best thing we can do for ourselves is let our painful memories fade away with time, so we’ll have room for hope. (Park, 1997: 225)

Soon-ah’s suggestion may be to Robert, but it also seems to reflect the struggles of the “comfort women” victims, who have yearned for an official apology by the Japanese

government. Here, Soon-ah insinuates that all 'victims' should let go of the past and their trauma in order to find peace within oneself. By extension, it could imply that she herself, once a victim of the "comfort system", has overcome her trauma and has found peace with herself. However, Soon-ah's lack of empathy can be interpreted as questionable and may generate different understandings and insights. It could be interpreted as criticism towards "comfort women" survivors who seek the Japanese government's official apology.

Chang-rae Lee's *A Gesture Life*

Korean American writers seemingly exercise more freedom in their literary creations on the "comfort women" issue than Korean writers. Both groups of writers generally use first-person narrative to deploy a similar effect as actual testimonies, but there are more alterations of historical facts in Korean American novels. These writers have shared their authorial intent more than Korean authors. For instance, when asked about the "comfort women" issue during an interview, Chang-rae Lee (2000) said that he had a manuscript of a story about "comfort women" prior to the publication of *A Gesture Life* (1999) but discarded this draft: "It [was] about comfort women. And maybe I just couldn't make it interesting aside from being horrible and tragic. So, I threw it away after two years and started a brand-new book [which is *A Gesture Life*]". Based on his claim, as a writer, the "comfort women" issue is deemed as literary material that he utilised to create his work, and, at the time, it was not desirable material for him to develop into a novel. This resonates with how Gillian Polack, a historian of Holocaust studies, underlined that history is used as an apparatus for historical fiction writers. She highlighted that the writer uses history "as part of the formulation of a story", which makes history just one of the writer's tools (ibid., 2016: 56). In Lee's case, he selected Franklin Jiro Hata, a Japanese Korean medical officer as his protagonist to present his understanding of his life in the United States as a foreigner and about "comfort women"

during World War II. The story is centred around Hata's ethnic and national positionality within the United States. Even during World War II, his involvement with a "comfort woman" character, Kkutaeh, only reinforces his obsession as a Japanese, denying his Korean identity. When she asks him if he is Korean, he curtly says, "No", and he further adds, "I have lived in Japan since I was born" (Lee, 1999: 234).

Kalliope Lee's *Sunday Girl*

Likewise, Kalliope Lee's *Sunday Girl* seems to take the form of historical fiction, yet it focuses on other themes more than the "comfort women" issue. The novel nevertheless describes a scene of Kim Hak-sun's public press conference in Korea borrowed from history to retain its identity as a historical fiction. The novel's protagonist watches Kim's press conference that was televised at the time: "I turn the channel again searching for what I'm not sure. […] My heart begins to pound as I listen to her tell of her sale at the age of sixteen to a Japanese army unit in Manchuria. […] She was also given a Japanese name. She was no longer Kim Hak-Soon but became Aiko" (Lee, 2013: 366). However, the novel has Korean American protagonists, Sibyl and Jang-Mee, as the only figures who can provide justice for the "comfort women". The two Korean American characters travel to Korea to rediscover their Korean roots. However, Jang-Mee, a Korean American adoptee, connects with "comfort women" spirits when she gets raped. She exposes herself to more harms in order to reconnect with "comfort women" ghosts, but due to the extremity of sexual violence that she exposes herself to, she ends up in a coma (Lee, 2013: 120). Sibyl continues the ritual of getting raped to connect with "comfort women" ghosts, whereupon rape becomes a "transaction" that allows "comfort women" to have a voice in the novel (Lee, 2013: 120). At the same time, these two characters use "comfort women" to find their identities (Lee, 2013: 120, 369).

The novel pairs “comfort women” with words that incite violent imagery, such as “colonise”, “pillage” and “rape” (Lee, 2013: 369). Sibyl, in her monologue, comments that she allowed “comfort women” spirits to “colonise”, “rape”, and “pillage” her and through that process she claims that “[she] had let them have their say, those who never had a voice” (Lee, 2013: 369). Even when she watches the public testimony by Kim Hak-sun, she reiterates how she has given justice for the “comfort women:” “When I saw Kim Hak-Soon come forward that afternoon, the vibrations of her rage rupturing through my scars, I knew my work was done. She had broken through the silencing barrier of shame. My debt to Jang-Mee was paid” (369). Throughout the novel, the “comfort women” appear as voiceless ghosts who can only gain agency through the help of the Korean American characters.

A Korean medical officer similar to Chang-rae Lee’s protagonist also appears in Kalliope Lee’s *Sunday Girl*. As the author condones Sibyl (before she was Jang-Mee) with the role of a saviour for “comfort women”, Dr Young-Soo Noh seems to resemble Hata from *A Gesture Life*, who appears as a person of conscience. He witnesses the atrocities of the Imperial army, but he does not expose his ethnicity to any of the Koreans he tested for venereal disease. Both are medical officers during wartime, and they do not pity “comfort women”. Though he does not go through Hata’s assimilation as a Japanese American as he is not based in the United States, Noh chooses to pass as Japanese. Many Korean men forcibly drafted into the Japanese military chose silence and disappearance: “The historical reality of Korean soldiers in the Japanese army was ignored or denied by both the Japanese and Korean sides, and Korean soldiers became invisible to history” (Aiko, 2005: 81). In the novel, Noh decides to save the Korean girl Yuki Tada by visiting the comfort station. He discovers through another Korean girl that Yuki committed suicide. Like Hata, he maintains his position as a perpetrator when he decides to rape the other Korean girl since he can no longer have Yuki. He shows no empathy or emotion towards her and rapes this other girl twice with

a “sudden rage”, that he failed to save Yuki, which contradicts his intentions as a saviour (Lee, 2013: 225). Exerting force on a weaker subject reinforces his position as a Japanese officer, and Noh does not necessarily feel responsible for the other girl. Still, his intention seems questionable, for his act reconfirms that his intention was not to save a “comfort woman” but a girl he found attractive, just like Lee’s Hata.

Mary Lynn Bracht’s *White Chrysanthemum*

Mary Lynn Bracht’s novel also mentions Kim Hak-sun, but the approach to the “comfort women” issue differs from the other Korean American novels. In *White Chrysanthemum,* Bracht introduces various cultural and historical facts such as the 1948 Jeju uprising, *haenyeo* (woman divers), Wednesday Demonstrations, and the Statue of Peace. Her work is the only novel with a third-person omniscient narrator and a protagonist who is not Korean American. Like Keller’s alternating narratives between mother and daughter, Bracht juxtaposes testimonial narratives by Hana and Emi, the two *haenyeo* sisters. Apart from this, the protagonist Emi also recalls real-life figures like “Kim Hak-sun” and “Jan Ruff O’Herne”, who were the first two victims that testified in public (Bracht, 2018: 131). The writers’ insertion of real-life figures and use of historical references can be interpreted as the authors’ historical awareness.

Nevertheless, regardless of what other issues are factored into their works, the primary objectives of these novels could be perceived as a “gesture toward a collectivity that does not rest on the logic of ethnic or American nationalisms, but one that is grounded upon a contagious sense of justice that allows a transformative vision of history and society” (Yoneyama, 2003: 73). Therese Park, in her chapter “To Give a Voice” from *Legacies of the Comfort Women of World War II,* mentions how she had felt drawn to the subject on “comfort women” after watching the documentary film about World War II and former

“comfort women”. She claimed that after watching the documentaries, she decided to write about the women and become their agents to carry their voice, connecting between the “comfort women” and the West (Stetz and Oh, 2001: 220). However, she acknowledges the conventions of Korean American writers, including herself, and how their works cannot exclude Korean Americans’ questions on identity: “Wittingly or unwittingly, a writer also portrays herself in her characters. Soon-ah’s determination to survive throughout her daily torture came from my struggle as an Asian woman transplanted to American soil, which is harsh to nonwhites” (Stetz and Oh, 2001: 221). Mary Lynn Bracht is perhaps the only author among these who does not assign a Korean American agent/protagonist to bring justice for “comfort women” characters in her work.

Tessa Morris-Suzuki, a historian and an Asian studies specialist, delineates the necessity of “look[ing] beyond textbooks, to how images of the past are framed by popular culture”. This process will enable countries like Japan, Korea and China to discover ways to understand “the conflicting views of the past [just as] the Holocaust is remembered within Europe and worldwide” (Suzuki, 2005: 15). Hence, historical fictions about the “comfort women” become an alternative to approaching and understanding the voices of “comfort women”. History is not fixed or unchangeable. This brings to question what can be regarded as “historical facts”. Historians may write “history” books based on evidence and facts collected during their research, but this does not mean that their work is the ultimate truth that no one can challenge. Whether facts used in historical fiction are genuine or authentic, such cases demand “ethical judgment, " as Emily Budick has asserted. Budick highlights that historical fiction is “a form of moral thinking”, which can and must yield ethical judgements (Budick, 2015: 3). Following Budick’s view, “comfort women” literature is thus not required to be didactic or pedagogical, but as historical fiction, it incites “ethical judgements”.

Chapter 4. Re-contextualisation of Memory in Korean Historical Fiction

In this chapter, I will investigate the characteristics of historical fiction written by Korean authors. Historical facts play a dominant role in Korean "comfort women" novels. These novels use details gathered from testimonies to reimagine the survivors' lives. Particular incidents that many survivors recounted in their testimonies, such as conscription methods, interpellation of Japanese names when the women were taken, and systematic violence inflicted on these women, reappear in Yun Chŏng-mo's *Emi Irŭm*, Pae Hong-chin's *Kŭrim sok*, and Kim Sum's *Hanmyŏng*, *Hŭrŭnŭn P'yŏnji*, *Kunini ch'ŏnsa*, and *Sunggoham*. The Korean "comfort women" novels, with Korean "comfort women" as protagonists, centralise testimonies and reimagine the stories of the victims, reconstructing the past and enabling the readers to join the witnessing act. Through the testimonies in these novels, the readers empathise with the victims' experiences, and through this connectivity, the victims can also reclaim their subjectivities. From testimonies to a collective voice delivered in these novels, the narratives of "comfort women" facilitate those involved, including the survivors, writers, and readers, to overcome the historical trauma.

Memory and trauma are essential elements of Korean historical fiction on "comfort women". However, despite the survivors' efforts, revisionists continuously condemn the survivors for not providing consistent details and question the testimonies' authenticity (Kimura, 2015: 130). Indeed there exist limitations on the victims' remembering and memory. In *Witness and Memory,* Harriet Davidson states that testimony is not a recitation of history. It is a creation of history in which the speaker and listener form a witnessing subjectivity through knowledge released from the testimony (Davidson, 2003: 165). The witnessing is achieved as speakers, writers, and readers submerge in the traumatic memory together

(Davidson, 2003: 165). There are possibilities for unintended revision as these accounts are based on human memory. Chŏng Mina has advocated for these victims, arguing that transient memory loss, one of the psychological defence mechanisms, is natural for someone who experienced unbearable trauma at a young age (Chŏng, 2016: 68).[37] She also claims that many former "comfort women", due to the prolonged war, could not provide exact details of their experience and names of places where they stayed. (Chŏng, 2016: 68). In an interview, the author Kim Sum also expressed her support for the victims by defending minor inconsistencies in the details found in testimonies: Kim asserted that there are limitations to remembering the incidents that happened more than seven decades ago; furthermore, these victims were different from Holocaust survivors as former "comfort women" were deprived of education and opportunities to record their experience (Park, 2016).[38] Despite attacks on the accuracy of the survivors' memory, literary creations have utilised memory to flesh out the stories on "comfort women".

The survivors need to tell their experiences to overcome their trauma, and such feelings of duty reflect how Hong Kal described museums and temples. In her "Commemoration and the Construction of Nationalism", Kal asserts that historical platforms such as museums serve as mediums for people to remember their duty to acknowledge the existence of their ancestors and keep the memory of them (Kal, 2011: 65). Yun Chŏng-mo reflects this dedication to the victims. She confesses in the "author's note" that she decided to release her new edition of *Emi irŭm* after 15 years of its first publication because she believed it would help people better understand and remember the "comfort women" issue. She also asserted that the purpose of writing *Emi irŭm* was to promote the Korean Council. The activist organisation exists to assist former "comfort women" in receiving apology and

[37] "Ilbon'gun 'wianbu' so-jae ta-k'yu-men-t'ŏ-ri-ŭi kiŏk kirok-kwa tam-lon chŏn-kae pang-sik" (The Record of Memories and the Development of Discourses in Documentaries of the Korean Comfort Women for the Japanese Military)
[38] *Joongang Ilbo*

reparation from the Japanese government (Yun, 1997: 8). In the "Introduction" of *Kŭrim sok*, Pae Hong-chin describes himself as a ghostwriter, who willingly volunteers to write about Kang Tŏk-kyŏng, a former "comfort woman" who died as an activist, to inspire his readers to commemorate her (Pae, 2008: 9). Just as Kal depicts the process of building a museum, in which pieces of the past are reconstructed and contextualised, historical fiction functions similarly to that process, recontextualising the fragmented narratives (Kal, 2011:61). Tessa Morris-Suzuki, in *The Past Within Us*, states that our relationship with the past should not evolve only from facts or intellectual knowledge of cause and effect. She claims that connecting with the past requires imagination and empathy, similar to what the Korean literary works try to achieve (Morris-Suzuki, 2005: 22). However, not all historians value the memory of the survivors. Despite the efforts of former "comfort women", just as James Young asserted how Holocaust survivors were treated, testimonials of former "comfort women" were always not appreciated by historians. In *Witness and Memory*, Young argues that Holocaust survivors' memory was not valued in Holocaust historiography because memory is dependent on remembrance; hence it is not considered objective by historians (Young, 2003: 278). Therefore, recontextualised testimonies in historical fiction add more content and context to the existing testimonies, facilitating the witnessing.

4.1 Testimonies and re-contextualisation

Social stigma is produced and reproduced, silencing the women via avoidance, Korean nationalist discourse, and (appropriation of) Confucian ideology. In the case of the Holocaust, survivors often fear testifying about their traumatic experiences. Due to these suppressed thoughts, silence about the truth takes over (Laub, 1999: 78). However, when confession is made, the survivors can proceed with witnessing even after forty years since the

incident (Laub, 1999: 78). These steps of witnessing have relevance to how "comfort women" victims come to witnessing their past after fifty years after WWII.

Literary creations also achieve similar effects as testimonies, enabling the witnessing act by the readers as they immerse themselves in the "comfort women" narratives. However, Kim Sum cautioned over her imagination in the author's note of *Hanmyŏng.* She was afraid that her fiction might inadvertently distort or exaggerate the experience of the victims or infringe on their human rights (Kim S., 2016: 285). Korean novels remind the readers about the survivors' attestations. Considering how revisionists and right-wing Japanese historians have accused "comfort women" victims of being inaccurate, it is understandable how Kim's works reflect specific details of testimonies. Though her novels are all fictional representations of "comfort women", the readers are informed of factual evidence simultaneously due to historical references. There are 316 footnotes in which the author gathered information from the published testimonies of the victims. Kim Sum stated in the author's note of *Hŭrŭnŭn P'yŏnji* that the birth of her novel was greatly indebted to the victim-survivors of the Japanese Military "comfort women" and their testimonies (Kim, 2018a: 308). In an interview with *JoongAng Ilbo,* a South Korean Newspaper, the author stated that she considered the victims' testimonies as the foundation for her story because she wanted to centralise on "objective facts". She admitted that the list of references and use of footnotes intentionally highlighted that she based her story on testimonies. She also felt that if she did not verify her sources, she was afraid that her readers would think of these historical facts as fictional incidents (Park, 2016). As shown through her comments, it is evident that she deems these testimonies reliable and purposely uses the survivors' testimonies to retaliate against any possible accusations. According to Oh Yŏng-suk, as the victims are "subalterns", testifying about their past experiences becomes a process of forming one's identity, or

subjectification (Oh, 2017: 162). To achieve the subjectification of the survivors, the novels on "comfort women" use testimony as their primary sources.

The process of the Korean girls being taken into the system are narrated in Yun Chŏng-mo's *Emi Irŭm*, Pae Hong-chin's *Kŭrim sok* and Kim Sum's four novels (*Hanmyŏng, Hŭrŭnŭn P'yŏnji, Kunini ch'ŏnsa,* and *Sunggohamŭn*). The details about how "comfort women were forced into the system are reiterated in most testimonies. Korean "comfort women" are given Japanese names once they enter "comfort stations". This practice leads to a cycle where one's identity becomes replaced. At the "comfort stations", a newcomer replaces a dead member and inherits the deceased's Japanese name. All three protagonists in the novels by Yun, Pae and Kim reflect on the systematic practice of interpellation at the "comfort station". In Yun's novel, *Emi Irŭm*, Sun-i tells her son, "My name was Mitchiko" (Yun, 1997: 127). From *Kŭrim sok*, Kang Tŏk-kyŏng's name is also replaced by a Japanese name: "She was named Harue" (Pae, 2008: 78).[39] Speaking was strictly controlled as they were forbidden to speak in Korean. In *Hanmyŏng*, when Ki-suk, one of the protagonist's comrades at the "comfort station", passes away, her Japanese name "Yuriko" is passed onto a newcomer named Hyang-suk: "Haha would, time to time, pass on the dead girl's name to a new girl as if she was stripping clothes off from the dead girl and put them onto the living" (Kim, 2016: 172-73).

Yun Chŏng-mo's *Emi Irŭm*

[39] In reality, Kim Bun-sun, a "comfort woman" survivor, recalls how a Japanese name replaced her Korean name: "My name then was 'Hanako'" (Schellstede Choi, 2000: 22). Another victim called Park Du-ri signed up to work at a factory, but she later discovered that she was deceived: "The manager gave me a Japanese name, 'Fujiko'" (Schellstede Choi, 2000: 70). Kim Dae-il, who was taken along with forty women to Manchuria was forbidden to speak Korean and was forced to forget her name. A Japanese military first lieutenant told her, "From now on, you must not speak Korean. Your new and only name is 'Shizue'" (Schellstede Choi, 2000: 25). These are just a few out of 19 testimonies that are featured in *Comfort Women Speak: Testimony by Sex Slaves of the Japanese Military*, which discusses the interpellation process. Everyone was given a Japanese name and had to forget and remove one's original name.

Though their Korean names were removed, these women survived the war to tell their stories. The idea of telling their stories led to their survival, which correlates to what Dori Laub discusses in relation to Holocaust survivors' imperative to tell. According to Laub, to overcome the trauma, survivors must stay alive to tell their stories and tell their stories to survive. Survival and attestation are reciprocal, facilitating the survivors to reflect on their experiences (Laub, 1991: 77). This is reflected in Yun's novel, *Emi Irŭm,* as the protagonist, Sun-i, decides to survive due to the imperative to tell. When she was violated, she wished to die. The thought of exposing the atrocities they underwent keeps the protagonist and her friend alive. After the assault, when Sun-i decides to kill herself, her friend tells Sun-i, "Why should we die now when we are already violated? We have to stay alive to tell everyone of this trickery" (Yun, 1997: 126). The conversation between Sun-i and her friend reflects what actual victims may have felt at the time.[40] Sun-i from Yun's *Emi irŭm* is more intent on proving to her son that he is the biological son of his father, Pae Kwang-su (Yun, 1997: 114, 183). The novel's protagonist is Sun-i's son, Pae Mun-ha, the first-person narrator who presents his views of his mother. Until she speaks about her past, Sun-i is shown through her son's perspective and voice. He assumes his mother used to be a sex worker or lived with a Japanese man before she met his father: "Mother, I heard that you used to live with a Japanese man before you met dad, correct?" (Yun, 1997: 111). Sun-i finally speaks for herself when she tells her son about her experience as a "comfort woman". Pae is then placed as a listener, and Sun-i's confession is akin to a form of a monologue. Her narrative is uninterrupted, and she owns full authority over her voice.

However, throughout the novel, both Japanese and Korean men verbally and physically abuse Sun-i. At the "comfort station", Sun-i was treated like merchandise: "I was

[40] According to an actual survivor, Kim Sang-hi testified that she has trouble forgetting her painful memory, which led her to testify. (Schellstede Choi, 2000: 35).

no longer Sun-i, and soldiers began to call me 'Chosenppi,[41] three won for a night'" (Yun, 1997: 127). Even when she fainted out of shock, countless Japanese soldiers sexually violated her unconscious body (Yun, 1997: 129). Later, after her return home, her Korean husband and the father of their son, Pae Kwang-su, calls her "Kalbo" (a slang word for "whore") (Yun, 1997: 28). He believes and accuses their son to be an illegitimate son, referring him as "Kalbo Saekki" (a son of a whore) or "Sasaenga" (a bastard/an illegitimate child) (Yun, 1997: 25). He physically hurts her for money and calls her by names as mentioned above. Chung-hee Sara Soh highlights how the novel seems to focus more on the violence inflicted by her Korean husband, instead of the Japanese soldiers: "[Y]un Chŏng-mo's fictional account is supposed to tell the story of military sexual violence against women, but the physical violence Sun-i suffered comes, ironically, from her husband back in postliberation Korea well after the war" (Soh, 2008: 165). Indeed, the novel presents both Japanese and Korean men inflicting violence on her, during and after the war, but the novel still serves as a platform for a "comfort woman" to speak. After listening to Sun-i's story, her son is convinced that he is indeed the legitimate son of Pae Kwang-su, and his appreciation for his mother is due to securing his legacy as a Korean descendant.

While the novel finishes with the son's sense of reassurance, Sun-i also gets her share of justice via her testimony as she ends her story (Yun, 1997: 185). Kim Mee-young states that Sun-i successfully escapes from past pains through her testimony, and her son learns to forgive his father through Sun-i (Kim, 2006: 339). Sun-i's narrative resembles Dori Laub's definition of Holocaust testimonies. Laub argued that testimonies that are told to be heard are essential because they enable the survivors to bear witness and the listener (in her case study, the interviewer of Holocaust survivors) to become witness to the Holocaust (Laub, 1991: 85). Through Sun-i's testimonial, she witnesses her past along with her son (the listener), which

[41] Ppi is a derogatory term referring to female genitals.

also involves the readers to partake in the witnessing of the "comfort women" experience during World War II.

Pae Hong-chin's *Kŭrim sok*

Pae Hong-chin's novel *Kŭrim sok* has a narrative of the author as a character and a witness in the novel to share his observation and understanding of Kang Tŏk-kyŏng. In his "Introduction", Pae suggests to his readers to join in the witnessing to remember Kang's life with compassion by empathising with her experience (Pae, 2008: 9). As an omniscient narrator and character in the novel, Pae witnesses and follows the trails of Kang's life in the times before, during, and after being a "comfort woman" (Pae, 2008: 26). The difference between Kang's testimony and Pae's recontextualised narrative of Kang is that there exists an entire chapter on Gobayashi Dadaiho (hereafter, Kobayashi Tat'eo[42]), a sergeant in the military police who first kidnapped and raped Kang (Schellstede Choi, 2000: 17). In Kang's official testimony, she stated how she had sought help from Tat'eo so she could escape, and though he promised to do so, he did not help her in the end, and she left the station only after Japan lost the war (Schellstede Choi, 2000: 18). Despite Kang's story, the novel depicts Tat'eo as a helpless and irresponsible lover, an ordinary man who perhaps should not be condemned as merely a 'beastly' perpetrator. The author speaks as the narrator, stating that it only becomes possible to judge him for his violent acts if Tat'eo is also presented as a person with weaknesses (Pae, 2008: 103-104). The inclusion of the author's voice also reminds us that the chapter on Tat'eo is strictly fiction and originates from his own imagination (Pae, 2008: 91, 103).

[42] Pae transcribed the name of the same sergeant in the Japanese military police as Kobayashi Tat'eo.

Kim Sum's *Hanmyŏng, Kunini ch'ŏnsa* and *Sunggoham*

In *Hanmyŏng,* the protagonist, P'ung-kil is shown to suffer from trauma.[43] She is often caught in a hallucination and imagines having marsh snails on her palm because it is what she had held in her hand when she was kidnapped and taken to the "comfort station" (Kim, 2016: 27). She also identifies herself with a dead moth which is swarmed up with ants (Kim, 2016: 22), and she feels attached towards a sick dog which is abused by her owner, forced into constant surrogacy, giving birth to fifty offspring that are all sold off to a market (Kim, 2016: 50). Since traumatic experience is generally submerged for a long time, it can get distorted during the prolonged period of submersion. However, if these memories are reflected and revived, a new relation or linkage to present-day life can be built, and the memories can be retained (Laub, 1999: 76). Laub also delineated that survivors of trauma tend to attach or cling to the past (the brutal loss of what they were forced into) and continue to seek restitution from their new/present lives. The danger of this is that the victims is prone to face difficulties adjusting to their new lives, continuously reminiscing about their past and family members (Laub, 1999: 76). It is this that P'ung-kil faces in different phases as she reconnects with her present-day life.

Kim Sum's literary creations achieve the harmonious unity of history with testimony and memory of "comfort women". In her works, history does not (and cannot) entirely eradicate memory of these victim-survivors. The two activists and survivors of the "comfort women" system remain together in Kim's novels, and their voices synchronise when they talk about their historical experiences. However, their stories and lives after the war are individualistic. Kim Sum's *Kunini ch'ŏnsa* and *Sunggoham* consolidate the collective memory of two "comfort women", Kim Bok-dong and Kil Wŏn-ok. Reconstitution of their

[43] Based on her understanding of Freud, Cathy Caruth defines that "the term trauma is understood as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind" (Caruth, 1996: 3). She further delineates that "trauma" as "an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, the uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (Caruth, 1996:11).

past and present lives in the narratives allows them to redeem their identities and empower their voices as "comfort women" victims. Through testimony, listeners/readers can gather "a new knowledge of the past in the intersubjective performance of the present" (Kim, 2018b: 166). Moreover, passing knowledge on testimonies incites transnational effects on all who experienced, addressed, and accessed.[44]

Fictional and non-fictional characters from *Hanmyŏng*, *Hŭrŭnŭn P'yŏnji*, *Kunini ch'ŏnsa*, and *Sunggoham* all show sympathy toward the Japanese soldiers. Kim Bok-dong says that not all Japanese soldiers were terrible. She shows compassion by adding that the soldiers had to leave their parents and family just like any of the Korean girls or women (Kim, 2018c: 85). In *Hŭrŭnŭn P'yŏnji*, the protagonist, Kŭm-cha prays for the Japanese soldiers' safe return even though they constantly rape her (Kim, 2018a: 29, 61). Also, after hearing about the death of a soldier whom she serviced, she dreams of carrying the dead soldier on her back in the middle of an empty meadow (Kim, 2018a: 64). Kŭm-cha does not pray for the men because she has romantic attachments to these soldiers. There are no detailed descriptions of the soldiers' appearances or features. Praying for these men appear to stem from her sense of humanity and her sorrow about the war. Through these portrayals, it is evident that the novels do not dichotomise between good and evil. These attempts of re-contextualisation reveal that the victims or the writers demonstrate that their trauma is not just a personal issue, and that violence originates from war.

4.2 Collective Silence, Memory and Identity

All "comfort women" testimonies reflect that the women feel traumatised and traumatic about their past, and Korean society and the perpetrators of the "comfort system" had

[44] According to Kim Hyun-gyung, transnational effect of historical events such as the Holocaust, the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings, and the "comfort women" issue are all essential and inclusive. These historical incidents are no longer limited only to those who instigated or suffered from them but belong to all who have lived or have lived from the end of the war to the present (Kim, 2020: 2).

silenced them. Then they chose to speak, and these are represented in the literary works that attempted to revive their collective memory. As highlighted in the commentary of Kim Sum's novel, Park Hye-chin contends that literature's role is to bring change into the world by transforming an individual experience into a collective memory (Kim, 2018b: 164). Moreover, as defined by JaHyun Kim Haboush, testimonial narratives attempt to prove the innocence and undo wrong accusations of the speaker or someone the writer represents (Haboush, 2003: 124). Korean novels on "comfort women" invite the readers to become a cohort of witnesses to understand, learn to empathise, commemorate the memory of the survivors, and join in the collective memory.

Kim Sum's *Hŭrŭnŭn P'yŏnji,*

As mentioned earlier, the contents of "comfort women" accounts sometimes overlap as the victims shared similar experiences. At the same time, these converging trauma and memory strengthened them as a collective. Interpellation of random Japanese names, sexual abuse, and comradeship formed during their sexual slavery were unsummoned, but they also formed part of the collective memory of these women. The interpellation process eradicated women's identities, but at the same time offered a form of connection between them. Though their experience may be traumatic, inheriting a fellow member's name can also strengthen the attachment between "comfort women". In *Hŭrŭnŭn P'yŏnji*, a new girl who arrives at the station becomes Yoshie once the previous Yoshie dies:

> Fifteen days had passed since the death of Yoshie, when a new girl was brought in. Ochisan named her Yoshie, 'From today, your name is Yoshie.' The girl became Yoshie and received soldiers in Yoshie's old room. She wore Yoshie's clothes, used her things, and turned into a real Yoshie (Kim, 2018a: 152).

Like everyone else at the camp, the protagonist Kŭm-cha is also given a Japanese name, Fuyuko. Not only at the same camp, but this name is used everywhere. Kun-cha (a senior to

Kŭm-cha) asks Kŭm-cha's name when they first meet, and when Kun-cha hears the (Japanese) name, she immediately recalls another "Fuyuko" that she used to know from another camp, who had died of venereal disease (Kim, 2018a: 172). The same name is often given to countless victims, so if one dies, the name is then passed on to a newcomer. On the other hand, many "comfort women" are given more than one Japanese name: "Though I already have a Japanese name, Fuyuko, Japanese soldiers would still give me new Japanese names. Suppose I were to include the new name that the soldier gave me last night. In that case, I own more than ten Japanese names" (Kim, 2018a: 142). These practices, renaming and attaching countless names to "comfort women", may eradicate individuality, yet this practice also consolidates them into a collective that shares the same experience and similar memories.

Besides the interpellation process, the victims were also silenced by being forbidden to speak in Korean. Japanese soldiers and traffickers practised the interpellation and banned the victims from speaking Korean. In *Hŭrŭnŭn P'yŏnji*, the Japanese soldiers would hit Kŭm-cha's head and curse at her if she spoke in Korean (Kim, 2018a: 86). Despite the restrictions, "comfort women" characters in the novels maintain collective unity. In the same novel, when Hae Kŭm complains in Japanese about her headache, the rest of the "comfort women" repeat after her as if singing in unison (Kim, 2018a: 112). Silencing was conducted during the war by Japanese traffickers and soldiers, and after the war was over, it was still implemented by both Japanese and Korean societies. As Yonson Ahn explains in her book on "comfort women", *Whose Comfort?*, both the Japanese government and Korean nationalists ignored or denied the existence of "comfort women". Both societies turned the issue into a taboo. This tendency from both countries hindered the opportunity to construct a stronger collective memory. Silence is a common feature of many war crime victims. They are forced to forget, which is what both Japanese and Koreans did to "comfort women". According to Ahn, the

victims/survivors felt humiliated, and due to Koreans' national pride and the Japanese government's denial, women were induced into a state called "collective amnesia" (Ahn, 2020: 121). The same kind of remorse is exhibited in the words of Sun-i in Yun's novel. She tells her son that she was not the only person that had to go through such humiliation and that several hundred thousand of women in the country all underwent that same trauma (Yun, 1997: 115). Here the author chose the word "humiliation", which reflects the forced sentiments that "comfort women" were made to feel, ending up in silence.

Works by Yun, Pae, and Kim

Kim's four works focus on the collective voice of the victims and elucidate the pain and trauma that the women experienced as a collective, highlighting their unified subjectivity. The necessity of remembering and sustaining collective memory manifests in various forms of Kim Sum's works. Her testimonial narratives are concrete materialisations of collective memory that Chris Weedon and Glenn Jordan articulated in their co-authored journal article, "Collective memory: theory and politics", on the importance of upholding memory (2012). Weedon and Jordan underscored the necessity of preserving collective memory (of wars and genocide) since the number of survivors who can give first-hand testimonies gradually diminishes (Weedon and Jordan, 2012: 145). Their claims are valid as Kim Bok-dong passed away on January 28, 2019, and Kim Sum's novel is the last literary record of Kim Bok-dong before her death. The author vowed to piece together untold stories about Kim Bok-dong in her novel (Kim, 2018c: 222). Each work on "comfort women" function as a medium to deliver collective memory while also preserving individual experience.

Fictional and non-fictional figures confess they cannot let go of their past, and such grief motivates literary characters that represent "comfort women" and actual survivors to speak. Kim Bok-dong, a real-life figure and a protagonist in Kim Sum's novel *Sunggoham,*

expresses such inclination. Her family attempted to prevent her from testifying for fear of public shame, imploring her to think of her nephews and nieces. Despite her sisters' entreaties, Kim chose to speak up and registered herself as a "comfort woman" (Kim, 2018c: 136). Her actions, even at the risk of going against her family, could be understood through what Dori Laub discussed regarding silence - if one chooses silence, that person can never find peace (Laub, 1999: 78). In *Sunggoham,* Kim Bok-dong recovers her subjectivity by giving her testimony and finds her peace. She is described as having felt like living an empty life while everyone went off and regained their inner selves (Kim, 2018c: 135). *Sunggoham* reveals the submerged voice and thoughts of Kim Bok-dong. Giving testimonies cannot guarantee happiness, but as shown in the novel, giving her testimony allowed Kim Bok-dong to (re)discover herself.

Pae's novel emphasises Kang's narrative and her experience, but the work also emphasises other victims' experiences. While *Kŭrim sok* focuses primarily on Kang's life, he states in a footnote at the end of chapter 6 that chapters 3 and 4 are about other "comfort women" named Kim Sun-tŏk and Pak Tu-ri (Pae, 2008: 65). The novel recontextualises the feelings of fear and desperation that Kim, Pak and Kang underwent when they had to travel to reach an unknown destination to face their unwanted consequences. As mentioned in the footnote at the end of chapter 6, the novel arouses sympathy for the "comfort women" by presenting their collective experience. Morris-Suzuki asserts that the witnesses become empathetic toward the survivors through their testimonies. The witnesses generally form ties with the speakers of the past. This cohort also imagines what the victims underwent, grieves, and sympathises with their pains and sufferings (Morris-Suzuki, 2005: 22).

Similarly, actual survivors dealt with in Kim Sum's novels strengthen the collective bond between the victims and the readers. The first "comfort woman" who had a press conference to testify about her experience is Kim Hak-sun; as mentioned earlier in previous

chapters, she appears as a symbolic figure in Korean American novels and Korean "comfort women" works. P'ung-kil from *Hanmyŏng* identifies with Kim Hak-sun, feeling empathy and sorrow as she recalls watching Kim's public testimony. Through reading about her, the readers are encouraged to feel empathy and feelings toward both figures (the real-life figure and the fictional character). Identifying oneself with others of the past can affect one to reflect and actualise one's present identity (Morris-Suzuki, 2005: 22-23). P'ung-kil seems to do so by sympathising with Kim. She learns to identify her feelings by relating to Kim's claims of devastation and sorrow when people scorned the existence of "comfort women" (Kim, 2016: 143). Hence, P'ung-kil's empowerment becomes the foundation for reconstructing her present identity through her reflection and identification with others who underwent the same past. Her recollections and past experiences validate her identity. P'ung-kil can retrieve her name when she owns up to her history. She decides to face her past and become a witness to her past. This awakening also contributes to the imperative to speak out as P'ung-kil chooses to meet the last surviving "comfort woman". As she actualises her present identity, she does not shun her past. Through her monologue, she says that by going to meet "the last one", she feels like she will be able to connect with the deceased members through this meeting (Kim, 2021: 186).

Individual experience and pain are retained in the novels by Yun, Kim and Pae, but the idea of "comfort women" as a collective is also evident in all six novels. Her Korean husband and son neglected Sun-i, but she regained her voice when she decided to tell her story. Kang Tŏk-kyŏng, in Pae's novel (and in her real-life testimony), expressed her hatred of her perpetrator and partook in activism to support other "comfort women". P'ung-kil from *Hanmyŏng* stayed reticent and chose to live like a hermit after her return to Korea, but she decided to show support for the last surviving "comfort woman" in a hospital. Kŭm-cha, in *Hŭrŭnŭn P'yŏnji*, offers help to her fellow members at the "comfort station" when necessary

and leads the narrative as the first-person narrator. Works on Kil Won-ok and Kim Bok-dong, *Kunini ch'ŏnsa* and *Sunggoham* show how Kil interacts with various war crime victims who were sexually abused, and Kim reflects on her past and wishes to forgive. Their choices in the novels vary, but they are connected as a collective. Kim Sum explained in an interview that she visualised the spirits of all the victims, those who survived, and the girls who had failed to return (Park, 2016). Jang Soo-hee asserts that Kim Sum's *Hanmyŏng* does not suppress the voices of the survivors or prevent the subjects from being heard or read, unlike other existing works written for the victims and to enlighten the readers on the issue (Jang, 2019: 106).[45]

Collective memory is extended further through Kim's last two novels on Kil Wŏn-ok and Kim Bok-dong. Both novels are not structured in a conventional novel format. Both have varying chapter lengths, stage directions, disruptions and detailed delineation of painful experiences. The characters talk to each other and talk of their own stories. Some sentences sound like mere utterances or monologues, and some are directed at an unknown listener. Near the end of *Sunggoham*, the observer's voice starts to enter by placing the speaker, Kim Bok-dong, in the third person. By breaking conventions, the writers add realistic features to these testimonial novels. Kim and Kil regain their identities, connect, and reach out to the readers. These two novels may not be deemed historical records, but they are more effective in delivering unresolved issues over historical records and the sentiments of the victims, which are often left out in history books. The two testimonial novels on Kil Wŏn-ok and Kim Bok-dong are not presented in a refined or polished language. They do not display consistency, and they seem disconnected. The chapters come in various lengths; some appear in a paragraph or two. They sometimes appear as if they are stanzas in a poem. The chapter lengths also vary considerably. Chapter 29 only consists of five lines which are utterances by Kim, expressing her fatigue over fighting for so long without any hopeful news: "'Any

[45] "Chŏngdongjŏk Chŏnhoewa Chŭngŏnŭi Ssŭgi" (The Turn to Affect and Writing Testimony)

news?' I am fighting……. I am tired. I thought it would end soon. I waited and waited in earnest……". (Kim, 2018c: 92). The formats of the chapters are unique in that they lack consistency. They also contain titles, and some just appear without any. Their contents may be about their experiences as "comfort women", but they also have anecdotes about their lives after their freedom from sexual slavery. The chapters contain sentences that are fragmented. Through their fragmentation and disorderliness, connections are made. Lyrics of the song that Kil often sings appear in the novel about Kim Bok-dong, and Kim is mentioned by Kil Wŏn-ok in *Kunini ch'ŏnsa*. Countless memories narrated by two survivors are tantamount to collective memory.

The danger of collective memory may be that it designates one memory to represent the whole. This practice may hold a possibility of amalgamating each experience as one. Nevertheless, the objective of these two novels is to present the lives of Kil and Kim and their thoughts and recollections. The author's commentary states that she wished to depict these two survivors' undiscovered features and aspects. Oh Young-suk argues in "Chŭngŏnŭi Maengnakkwa Ŭimihwa" (The Context & Signification of Testimony) that to historicise the "comfort women" memory, a compilation of these women's voices as a collective voice is an indispensable step since it can hold more historical meaning and emphasis (Oh, 2017: 161). *Kunini ch'ŏnsa* and *Sunggoham* are different novels but are interconnected. The characters' pain is mutual. Their experience as "comfort women" is not too different from one another. Hence, the two novels are related and even can be perceived as one narrative.

Kunini ch'ŏnsa contains Kil's anecdotes that may set her apart from the novel about Kim Bok-dong, yet her letters sent out to contact other war crime victims link her back to each other. Two chapters of Kil Wŏn-ok's novel have the same title, "reply" (Chapters 11 and 33), but the recipients of these letters seem to vary (Kim, 2018b: 56, 148). The first letter is addressed to the victims of the Vietnam War, and the latter seems to be written for the

readers or her listeners. Though it may seem vague whom the recipient is in the second chapter entitled “reply”, it sounds as if the speaker, Kil Wŏn-ok, is answering the questions that have tormented her ever since the release of her testimony. Kil’s letter is addressed to Nguyễn Thị Thanh, the victim of the Vietnam War.[46] Another letter appears in chapter 19, in which Kil addresses a letter to Marwa Al Aliko.[47] Kil tells Aliko, “Are you in pain? I know you are… I know so well… Even in agony, you have to tell” (Kim, 2018b: 57). Her empathetic expressions about Aliko’s pains reconfirms the collective memory that is extended to not just “comfort women” but women of similar experiences. Through these relationships, “comfort women” realise their agency and can become activists by reflecting and partaking in the unspeakable past. Chapter 31 is about a letter received by Kil, which Rebecca Masika Katsuva wrote, a survivor of sexual crime during the Second Congo War in 1999 (Kim, 2018b: 141). Katsuva beseeches Kil to remember and pray for her (Kim, 2018b: 142). Collective memory is sustained through such connections that Kil constructed. Though Kim Bok-dong’s involvement with Vietnamese war victims or other survivors around the world does not explicitly appear in the novel, in reality, Kim Bok-dong gave an opening speech as a guest speaker at the “People’s Tribunal on War Crimes by South Korean Troops during the Vietnam War”, to show her support for the victims of the Vietnam War, who underwent almost identical sexual violence as “comfort women” victims.[48] Even if this fact is not mentioned in the novel, references about each other consolidate the connection between them and all other victims of similar experiences. Therefore, through these involvements and extended relationships, “comfort women” become agents to assist others by helping other victims of sexual abuse (Chŏng, 2016: 68).

[46] On the 18th of April 2015, Kil Wŏn-ok sent out a letter to one of the Vietnamese victims, Nguyễn Thị Thanh (Kim, 2018b: 58).
[47] Al Aliko is a Yazidi refugee who suffered from sexual abuse.
[48] (베트남전쟁 시기 한국군에 의한 민간인학살 진상규명을 위한 시민평화법정)

These two works, *Kunini ch'ŏnsa* and *Sunggoham,* exhibit elements that make them seem more connected than other works. These two can be perceived almost as one long narrative with two narrators. Kil and Kim share the traumatic "comfort women" experience and homesickness and have strong empathy for each other, the Vietnam War victims, and other survivors of different war crimes. If a fact about Kim Bok-dong is not mentioned in her novel, then the missing pieces of information can be detected from the novel on Kil Won-ok and vice versa. Apart from their efforts to remember and continue the testimonial processes, there also exists a personal tie between them. Kil's fondness for Kim Bok-dong is highlighted: "I missed Bok-dong when I heard that she was not doing well. I miss Bok-dong, and she misses the sea" (Kim, 2018b: 128). The lyrics of the song Kil Wŏn-ok often sings are quoted in the work of Kim Bok-dong, *Sunggoham,* to show the solidarity between the two survivors of collective trauma, even if they are published in separate novels.

From testimonies, the novels were written, and historical fiction leads the readers to understand the survivors better. Through these processes (telling, listening, writing, and reading), the readers are offered opportunities to share the collective experience of "comfort women". Though testimonies can be questioned and differentiated from history, historical literature is essential in delivering different aspects of the "comfort women" experience and trauma, which can be discovered in their testimonies. Testimonies presented in the novels facilitate the readers to form an empathetic relationship with the speakers of the past ("comfort women"). Even if many stayed silent for decades, countless survivors eventually decided to testify. Each individual's account tells personal experience, exhibited in the novels. Through witnessing one's past through recollections, protagonists such as Sun-i, P'ung-kil, Kŭm-cha, Kang Tŏk-kyŏng, Kim Bok-dong, and Kil Won-ok can retain their history and avoid an annihilation stage, where history is lost. One's identity perishes (Caruth,1995: 67). The relationship with the past cannot simply be constructed with facts or through an

understanding of cause and effect. The process of connecting with the past is through imagination and empathy (Morris-Suzuki, 2005: 22). Forming connections and sharing memory is the purpose of Korean “comfort women” of “comfort women”. Kim Mee-young highlights sharing memory through literary creations. She asserts that if memory is not shared, it becomes non-existent. She claims that sharing the memory of “comfort women” is a step towards healing the pains of the survivors (Kim, 2006: 328). Hence, revisiting testimonies and collective memory of “comfort women” with imagination and empathy shown in these novels helps the readers form a new tie with the victims, which then becomes a healing process for the “comfort women”.

Chapter 5. Localised “comfort women” Discourse in Korean American Novels

The first English-written testimony was released in 1994, which contained the “comfort woman” experience of a Dutch-born Australian, Jan Ruff-O’Herne (Soh, 2008: 46). Two years after the publication of *50 Years of Silence* by O’Herne, in 1996, a Filipina survivor, Maria Rosa Henson’s autobiography, *Comfort Woman: Slave of Destiny* was published (Soh, 2008: 46). English-written works by O’Herne, and Henson were published in affiliation with international organisations such as United Nations (U.N.) and International Court of Justice (ICJ) that initiated international discourse on “comfort women” system as sexual slavery (Soh, 2008: 47). In 2007, U.S. congressman Michael Honda introduced the House Resolution 121 to the American House of Representatives, stating that the Japanese government should take historical responsibility for forcing young women into sexual slavery during World War II. He also asserted that the Japanese government should officially apologise and educate present and future generations about “comfort women” (Honda, 2007). In 2015, twenty American historians sent a joint petition titled “Standing with historians of Japan” to *Perspectives on History* of the American Historical Association (AHA), reproaching the Japanese government’s effort to remove references to “comfort women” by asking McGraw-Hill publishers, an American publishing company of world history textbooks, to revise its textbook *Traditions and Encounters: A Global Perspective on the Past* (Adelman et al., 2015).

The dedication to “comfort women” history in the United States is also evidenced by memorials that are erected in the cities of North America as there are ten memorials of “comfort women” in the United States, which is the second country that has the highest

number of “comfort women” related monuments after Korea, which has forty memorials (Taylor, 2017). International tension between the United States and Japan ignited due to the “comfort women” issue. Osaka Mayor Hirofumi Yoshimura ended the sister-city relationship with San Francisco when the city installed a statue of “comfort women” (Taylor, 2017). In “Writing rape, trauma, and transnationality onto the female body”, Silvia Schultermandl examines various kinds of “comfort women” representations in the United States. She warns that bringing the “comfort women” issue to American attention and generalising it as an Asian American issue can result in Americanising the “comfort women” discourse (Schultermandl, 2007: 73). Lisa Yoneyama defined “Americanisation” as “the U.S. government’s claims to power and authority with which it has defined an administered justice for the rest of the world” (Schultermandl, 2007: 58). With this general understanding of the U.S. as the supreme guarantor of world justice, the “Americanisation” of Japanese war memories would refer to merging Japanese war atrocities in Asia with U.S. war memories (Schultermandl, 2007: 60). Laura Hyun Yi Kang also stated that Korean American authors who address “comfort women” in their novels may have struggled as they attempted to find a balance between Korean victims, marginalised Asian Americans and American protectors in their works (Kang, 2003: 42). According to Elizabeth Son, many Korean Americans’ works are rooted in social justice when they reconstruct “comfort women” narratives. However, she states that some Korean Americans see discussions of “comfort women” memorials in the U.S. as an opportunity to reinstate their U.S. identities. Hence, the motivations that drive Korean Americans to address the “comfort women” issue are divided (Son, 2018: 162).

5.1 Korean Americans’ Interest in Narrativising “comfort women” Experience

The reparation movement conducted by writers in the United States began slowly and steadily in the 1990s. Nora Okja Keller, the first Korean American author to write about

"comfort women", discovered this historical fact by attending a public talk presented at the University of Hawaii by a victim-survivor known as Hwang Kŭm-chu (Lee and Keller, 2003: 145). Keller admits that Hwang's testimony significantly impacted her writing *Comfort Woman* (Lee and Keller, 2003: 145). However, she also relied on her imagination to recreate everyday life, physical and emotional trauma, and the post-war experience of the victims, as there were not enough resources on "comfort women" in English (Keller, 1997: 5). In another interview with Robert Birnbaum, Keller reiterated how her work enabled global awareness on "comfort women" (Keller 2002). She asserted that after the release of her novel, search engines which only featured "homemaking" when one looked up "comfort woman/women" began to provide information and news about Korean and Filipina survivors of "comfort camps" (Keller 2002).

Korean American writers contributed to initiating global awareness of the "comfort women" issue and passing on historical knowledge; however, before representing the victim-survivors, they are bound by their positionality in American society. Although many criticisms exist of his definition of "orientalism", Edward Said's description of "American identity" can be applied to understand Korean American identity. In his *Culture and Imperialism* (1994), he delineates the versatility of American identity and how its complexity makes it impossible to be unitary and homogenous (Said, 1994: xxv). Korean American identity stems from such complication and versatility. From the early 1970s onwards, they were not unitary and could not be defined by either. Asian American scholars such as Frank Chin, Jeffery Paul Chan, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Shawn Wong, who composed *Aiiieeee!* exclusively identified only three ethnic Americans as Asian Americans: Chinese Americans, Japanese Americans, and Filipino Americans are identified as Asian Americans (Chan et al., 2019: xxv). Korean Americans were not included in this cohort. In *Aiiieeee!* Chin and others express their disappointment in being identified as foreigners and not recognised as

Americans despite their long settlement in the United States for seven generations. According to these scholars, excluding Asian American novels from American literature is also a sign of rejection and refusal by American white culture (Chan et al., 2019: xxvii).

The leading role of conducting the redress movement was assigned to Korean Americans due to their ethnicity. According to the definition of "ethnic" that Rey Chow offers, though it seems universal, it is somewhat restrictive as it is a condition that applies to only some people who are marginalised and branded as others (Chow, 2008: 28). Regarding this definition, as marginalised others in the American society, ethnicity is what distinguished Korean Americans. Yoneyama discusses in detail these social expectations bestowed on Asian/Americans[49] (the American society anticipating Korean Americans to take part in the redress movement for "comfort women" due to their ethnicity) and explains that the United States empowered Asian/Americans, especially Korean Americans, to bring historical justice for the victims (Yoneyama, 2016: 149). These immigrant citizens were asked to act as "speaking subjects" to advocate for the victims and even expected to own and speak as if they underwent and witnessed Japanese war crimes in Asia (Yoneyama, 2016: 150). Kandice Chuh explicates why Asian Americans claim the "comfort women" issue as their history (Chuh, 2003: 9-10). Chuh further explains that Asian Americans "claim" "comfort women" history as their own, thinking that, through this process, discourses on subjects such as "apparatuses of gender, sexuality, race, class, empire, and nation" can take place (Chuh, 2003: 10). Hence, Korean American authors' participation in the redress movement in the United States had two objectives: incite more international discourses on the topic and reinstate their identity.

5.2 Americanisation of "comfort women" Discourse

[49] Yoneyama adds a slash sign between "Asian" and "American" because she wants to highlight the individual characteristics of Asian Americans that can sometimes be either "Asian" or "American".

The five Korean American writers' representation of "comfort women" reflects their complex positionality within the American realm and their duty as speaking agents for the victims. Understanding "comfort women" history also affects how these authors interpret and depict the victim characters in their novels. When asked how she addressed the topic in her first novel *Comfort Woman*, Nora Okja Keller confessed that she felt burdened with the history of "comfort women" (Wilcox and Keller, 2008). While feeling this profound historical responsibility, the author emphasizes that her book serves as a heartfelt apology to her mother. This expression of remorse stems from her previous denial of her Korean identity, reluctance to immerse herself in Korean culture, and refusal to wear hanbok dress[50] (Wilcox and Keller, 2008). Her comment reflects the author's awareness of her Korean American identity and positionality within the United States. She feels responsible for bringing justice for the Korean "comfort women" and simultaneously re-claiming her Korean identity through her novel as she believes writing about the Korean issue will consolidate her relationship with her Korean mother. However, not all Korean American writers considered redressing "comfort women" as their duty.

Chang-rae Lee prioritised his authorial license. He confessed that he conducted extensive research on "comfort women", but he chose not to let guilt or pressure of ethical responsibility affect his writing (Garner, 1999). In an interview, the author highlighted that the story about Hata,[51] a medical officer in the Japanese military, seemed better than his earlier draft on the "comfort women", which he eventually discarded (Lee, 2000). In another interview on *A Gesture Life*, Lee reiterated that he initially wrote his work from the perspective of a "comfort woman" victim but discarded this draft. He mentioned that his draft with the "comfort woman" protagonist did not feel new or different to his findings (Johnson,

[50] Korean traditional costume.
[51] The protagonist's full name is Franklin Jiro Kurohata; however, his full name is rarely mentioned throughout the novel. Also, his Korean name never appears in *A Gesture Life*. The protagonist, Franklin Hata, is a Japanese-adopted Korean man who serves as a medic in the Japanese military dispatched in Burma.

2005). He reiterated that Hata's story is fresh and stimulating because the book is no longer about "comfort women". This book is more in-depth since it focuses on one man and his effects on other people's lives (Johnson, 2005). Based on his statements, it is evident that he prioritises his status and license as a creative writer and his novel over historical responsibility. Even though his novel is sourced from historical records, his consideration of the "comfort women" is his literary tool. However, in a Korean translation, the author added a comment which does not appear in other previous interviews. In the preface to the Korean translation of *A Gesture Life*, Chang-rae Lee emphasised how he felt inexpressible grief when he listened to the "comfort women" testimonies that led him to write his novel (Rhee, 2012: 95).

Unlike the two Korean American writers who moved to the U.S. at a young age or were born there, Therese Park emigrated to the United States when she finished her university education. However, in her blog, Park numerously highlights her American identity by calling herself a "U.S. citizen" or "Korean-American" and how she yearned to be an American since she was nine. In her articles featured in *The Kansas City Star*, she consciously identifies herself as a "Korean-American" (Park, 2018). In the other column, she compares the reparation movement for "comfort women" to doing a dirty load of laundry for one's grandfather. She also adds that the survivors should forgive even though history should be remembered (Park, 2016).

Unlike other previous "comfort women" novels, Kalliope Lee's historical fiction has contemporary Korea as the primary setting. However, it still contains Korean American characters as the protagonists, just as in other Korean American writers' works. Korean American characters in the novel choose to be speaking subjects and agents for bringing justice to the victims though they lack knowledge of "comfort women". During an interview on *Sunday Girl*, Lee conveyed her concern about having her work read by Korean readers,

commenting that it makes her think of her own identity and what she can do to serve her home and roots. Yet, though she is a Korean American residing in the U.K., she claims she does not feel entirely American or British (King, 2013). Hence, while she refers to Korea as her home and roots, she also expresses uncertainty about her identity.

Mary Lynn Bracht also exercises her status or authority as a writer like Chang-rae Lee or Kalliope Lee. Still, unlike other Korean American authors, [52] she presents a different version of the "comfort women" story. Bracht finds it her duty to write about "comfort women:" "I knew I had to tell their story" (Bracht, 2018). As soon as she decided to write about "comfort women", she started her research on the subject, and did not stop until she finished the final draft. To fully prepare herself, she spent four months just reading about the "comfort women" from books, online articles, documentaries to poems (Bracht, 2018). Still, somewhat similar to Chang-rae Lee, she exercised her license as the author since she provides a happy resolution for Hana and Emi, unlike the "comfort women" in reality, because she wanted the two sisters to have a better ending than the reality (Bracht, 2018).

It seems that Korean American authors have been burdened with two duties: redressing the victims and redefining Korean American identity within American society through their novels. Based on how authors perceive their positionality in the United States and "comfort women" history, Korean American writers present different levels of Americanisation in their works. In Korea, scholars consider the novel as either Korean or American fiction. Koo Jae-jin claimed that even though *Comfort Woman* was written in English and published in the United States, it should be classified as a "hankukin ŭi munhak" (literature written by a Korean) (Koo, 2007: 384). Here, he does not identify it only as a novel that belongs to Korean literature, but he specifies it as a novel written by an *ethnic* Korean by

[52] While other Korean American writers are immigrants or the second generation of Korean settlers in the U.S., Bracht was born to parents of two different nationalities: Korean and American. At an interview, Bracht commented on how familiar she is with her mother's homeland as she grew up listening to stories from her mother (Cowdrey, 2018).

highlighting “hankukin” (Korean) (Koo, 2007: 384). His attempt to claim Keller as a Korean author can be subjective to the prejudice of ignoring her American identity. While this work was written and published outside Korea, he believes that the work contains “Hankuk naebu ŭi moksori” (an internal voice of Korea), consolidating his belief that this work is Korean literature (Koo, 2007: 381). It is not just Koo who claimed that Keller’s work is Korean. His view is mirrored by other Korean literary critics such as Choi Hye-sil (2002), Lee So-hee (2005), and Byun Hwa-young (2014), who considered Keller’s work in the realm of Korean literature. They all asserted that Keller provided a new space to rewrite Korean history and give voice to the marginalised Korean “comfort women” victims. However, a Korean cultural critic and literary scholar, Kim Wook-dong, defined “Korean American literature” differently from the aforementioned scholars. He states that even if a writer is born in Korea or is of Korean ethnicity, if the author writes in English while based in the United States, the work should be classified as “Korean American literature” (Kim, 2009: 18). On the other hand, for novels written by a Korean American writer in Korean he would refer it as “migrant literature”, and not “Korean American literature” (Kim, 2009: 19). In other words, he defines the character and identity of a novel based on the language it is written in.

In *Identities: Race, Class, Gender, and Nationality,* Ross Poole explicated how is not a conscious selection but a product of the circumstances of our birth and upbringing (Poole, 2003: 274). He defines that national identity is decided by “birth and upbringing” such as language, culture, and political responsibilities that one associates with (Poole, 2003: 274). The formation of national identity actually involves a complex process, although deciding factors may seem rather arbitrary and simple. Sonia Ryang, who has extensively examined Korean diasporas, expands upon the idea of "Koreanness" or national identity in her work *Writings Selves in Diaspora: Ethnography of Autobiographics of Korean Women in Japan and the United States*. Using her data collection on Korean diasporas, she expounds on what

“Koreanness” is. She also asserts the challenge of defining this notion and adds that “Koreanness” is “laden with thick ambiguity and multiply disconnected and simultaneously overlapping points of reference to ethnicity, politics, and culture, all traversing transnational, transcultural spheres” (Ryang, 2008: 20). Similar to Poole and Ryang's claims, the absence of a concrete definition for national identity implies that explaining "Koreanness" is likewise not achievable through forthright explanations. What is more, especially with Korean diasporas, it becomes more difficult to understand what “Koreanness” is. This is due to the fact that the identification of diasporas varies based on when and where they were born. John Lie similarly underscores this notion in his discussion of Korean diasporas and suggests the impossibility of “the existence of unified Korean diasporic nationalism”:

> Korean diasporic communities are separated by language and culture, history and citizenship status, and therefore do not possess a unified organisation or consciousness. Although we can conveniently talk about Korean Americans or Korean Russians, it is difficult to adduce any substantive commonalities even among national diasporic communities. (Lie, 2017: 251)

As shown through these scholarly analyses on national identity, Korean diasporas, and “Koreanness”, *Comfort Woman* or works by Korean American writers should be understood in a broader sense due to their complexity and ambiguity. Keller is ethnically Korean, but she is second-generation Korean American who was born and raised in the U.S. Therefore, underscoring only her “Koreanness” to address the Korean history in her novel should be seen as one feature of her work.

There might not have been direct interactions between Korean writers and Korean American writers, but they still shared common goals and engaged with readerships of both Korea and the U.S. Their works contributed to a sense of historical and socio-political awareness about “comfort women”, an understanding about Korean nationalism, and diasporic identity of Korean Americans. These shared efforts could indeed be interpreted as a form of mutual collaboration, even if it wasn't intercommunicative. Korean writers and

Korean American writers likely had similar goals in terms of redressing the "comfort women" and bring historical justice through their works. The absence of official dialogues doesn't necessarily negate the impact of their efforts or the fact that they aim for the redress. Literature has a unique way of transcending borders and connecting people, and the fact that both groups of writers were striving to convey their experiences and perspectives to different groups of readers (one that is familiar with Korean history and the other that is not as familiar with "comfort women" issue) suggests a form of shared purpose. Over time, as more works in various cultural forms are formulated and distributed around the world, there might be increasing opportunities for interaction and collaboration between Korean and Korean American writers.

Nora Okja Keller's *Comfort woman*

Classifying Nora Okja Keller's novel as a Korean, Korean American, or American novel seems less significant than discussing how she contextualises and handles the "comfort women" issue. The novel *Comfort Woman*, though it is the first "comfort women" literature composed by a Korean American writer, displays scenes of subordination of a Korean "comfort woman" character, concentrating more on issues of assimilation. The work consists of two narratives, which belong to Beccah and Soon-Hyo. Beccah is a Korean American daughter of a "comfort woman", and Soon-Hyo is her mother, the victim of Japanese military sexual slavery during WWII. Though Keller presents the "comfort woman" victim in a first-person narrative, granting Soon-Hyo's voice to offer her sufferings, the author focuses more on Soon-Hyo's failure in assimilation rather than her experience as a sex slave. Also, she is subjected to ridicule and subordination by her Korean American daughter and her American husband. The author seems to "re-orientalise" Korean immigrant life and the "comfort women" issue in her work. In "Re-Orientalism: The Perpetration and Development of

Orientalism by Orientals", Lisa Lau introduces "Re-Orientalism", to discuss how a "diasporic writer" can practice "Orientalism" when one is placed in a different cultural setting (away from one's ethnic roots) and obtains a new understanding of identity. Though she focuses on South Asian women writers, her argument seems helpful in understanding Korean American diasporic writers' re-orientalising process: "[T]he diasporic authors necessarily have any insidious intention, or consciously conceived aim, to re-orientalise, but that it is precisely their positionality, both individual and collective positionality, that has rendered this process of Re-Orientalism" (Lau, 2009: 574). The positionality of Korean American writers also affects them in practising "Re-Orientalism", which may be detected in their literature. The positionalities of Korean American writers similarly influence their practice of "Re-Orientalism," a phenomenon conspicuously observable within their literary works. This is evident in the characterisation of Soon-Hyo in *Comfort woman*. The character of the former "comfort woman" is depicted as a misfit, leading to her becoming a source of shame for her Korean American daughter. Her constant derision by other American characters, including her husband, is compounded by her daughter's feelings of disgrace and critical judgment towards her mother. Indeed, with Nora Okja Keller, she cannot be condemned for intentionally Re-Orientalising the "comfort women" issue. As mentioned earlier, her moral duty and historical responsibility, which she has explicitly confessed in her past interviews, prove that she has no intention of misrepresenting "comfort women" figures in her novel. Nevertheless, the portrayal and treatment of Soon-Hyo by her Korean American daughter and other American characters raise concerns that her depiction could inadvertently contribute to a form of Re-Orientalism, leading to question the author's underlying intentions.

Chapters containing the voice of Soon-Hyo can be seen as empowering the "comfort system" survivor. Still, she is depicted as immature, eccentric and inferior to her Korean American daughter. Moreover, her voice is silenced by the author's insertion of a language

barrier. Soon-Hyo's English is eloquent in her chapters, but, in reality, she can barely hold a conversation in English. The author displays Soon-Hyo as mentally unstable when she is depicted outside her chapters, deepening the divide between Soon-Hyo and Beccah. The disconnection between Soon-Hyo and Beccah accentuates her limitation as a reliable narrator. Beccah's imperfect Korean is not highlighted or portrayed as a defect, but Soon-Hyo's English skill is a subject of mockery and jokes. This particular scene of Soon-Hyo contrasts with how Beccah describes her mother earlier in the novel. She states that her mother can speak three languages—English, Korean and Japanese. She then adds that her mother's language skills are a huge advantage in Waikiki (Keller, 1997: 5). Yet, there are no scenes in the novel where Soon-Hyo uses her language skill.

Unlike the earlier depiction of Soon-Hyo in the novel, she is later described as an odd Korean immigrant. Soon-Hyo cannot even pronounce her daughter's name correctly. In addition to her grammatically incorrect sentences, the author adds hyphens in between her words to signify the slowness of Soon-Hyo's speech: "I looking for daughter. Name is Roh-beccah Blad-u-ley" (Keller, 1997: 88). When Soon-Hyo goes to Beccah's school, she is surrounded by her daughter's classmates, and they soon make fun of her. The kids imitate her accent to embarrass her: "'Shame-u, shame-u!' they mimicked in singsong voices" (Keller, 1997: 87). Moreover, Soon-Hyo's appearance is shown as ungroomed and eccentric as she visits her daughter's school in her pyjamas and with dishevelled hair. Her Korean American daughter is ashamed of her mother and leaves her at the scene of harassment. Keller's generalisations of a Korean immigrant speaking in poor English and presenting her as a shaman can be interpreted as how Lisa Lau defines "re-orientalism" practised by South Asian American writers. Lau explains that diasporic writers volunteer to act as a guide and translator of their South Asia customs, yet they do not wish to be confused with local South Asian (Lau, 2009: 585). Keller's re-orientalising act seems to mirror what Lau underscores

on diasporic South Asian women writers who tend to repeat stereotypes, clichés, and totalisation can be understood as re-orientalising (Lau, 2009: 584). Intentionally foreignising Soon-Hyo as a Korean immigrant and Beccah as a local American may reinforce stereotypes of Asians living in the United States. Beccah, a bi-racial child of Soon-Hyo and an American missionary, is depicted as superior to her mother due to her English fluency and appearance.

The author also exposes Beccah's inner sentiments and thoughts on her mother, but this only happens internally, and there is no connection between Beccah and Soon-Hyo. Beccah never owned any respect for her mother and was ashamed of her. The reconciliation between mother and daughter takes place only after Soon-Hyo's death. Beccah utters that her mother is subsumed into her as she puts Soon-Hyo's ashes into her mouth: "Your body is mine" (Keller, 1997: 212). Only when her mother is dead, Beccah connects with her. Silvia Schultermandl interprets this preverbal reconciliation between mother and daughter to be unsatisfactory. As an act of orientalism (Schultermandl, 2007: 80). Schultermandl underscores such limitation of this reconciliation: "Keller's construction of a preverbal, amniotic condition between mother and daughter as the ultimate reconciliation between two women is therefore unsatisfactory" (Schultermandl, 2007: 78). She rebukes that it seems unlikely that Beccah and Soon-Hyo can hold allegiance with her daughter just because they once shared Soon-Hyo's body. (Schultermandl, 2007: 85).

Racial hierarchy exists in the mother-daughter relationship and Soon-Hyo's matrimony. Soon-Hyo is objectified and commodified by her American husband. Even when an American missionary saves her, her situation does not improve. The American minister, just like the Japanese soldiers, treated Soon-Hyo the way he wanted and showed no respect for her. Hence, regardless of her repulsion, just as in her past as a "comfort woman", she is asked to perform as a sex worker by her husband during their intercourse to satiate his sexual desires (Keller, 1997: 107). If the Japanese Imperial Army used the coloniser's power over

the victim-survivors during World War II, the American husband abused and restricted Soon-Hyo by using religion. He tells her that he is the head and saviour of her body (Keller, 1997: 112). Other missionaries also tell her at the site of baptism that she is reborn as an American once baptised as a Christian (Keller, 1997: 104). Her identity as a Korean woman is eradicated and replaced by religious and a new nationalistic American identity. Instead of feeling cherished or saved, she only feels empty, sensing her doomed future with her American chauvinistic husband.

Therese Park's *A Gift of the Emperor*

In the same year that Keller released her work on "comfort women", Therese Park published her first book. Park's historical fiction presents various aspects of "comfort women" victims that requires much attention. Her work consists of a first-person narrative by the victim-survivor. There is no intervention in the narrative by any other character; however, the plot unravels many symbolic scenes that highlight Americanized understanding of the situation. Most of the novel's historical facts are accurate, except that the author does not clearly distinguish the "Voluntary Labour Corps" from the "comfort women" system. She uses both terminologies to describe "comfort women". As mentioned previously, there have been unresolved contestations that *chŏngshindae* (Voluntary Labour Corps) can be used as another term for "comfort women". Initially, they were both used to refer to "comfort women", but these two systems were designed for different purposes. Hence, women who served in the Corps were victims of harsh labour against their will, and "comfort women" were sex slaves.[53]

To familiarise or make Korean history relevant to non-Korean readers, the authors all insert Korean American characters as their protagonists. If the protagonist is Korean, the

authors insert an additional Korean American protagonist but show her affinity towards America in different ways. In *A Gift of the Emperor*, Therese Park presents scenes where America, the American military, and Americans are deemed heroic, ethical, and necessary in the novel. In her first chapter, there is a scene where an American military plane distributes flyers above Soon-ah's village. The dispatched brochure contains a message from General MacArthur of the U.S. military, promising liberation of Koreans from Japanese control (Park, 1997: 8-9). When her mother hears the protagonist read out the contents of the flyer to her, she starts to cry in happiness and relief (Park, 1997: 9). This specific scene exemplifies the American military's portrayal as a peacekeeper or an ultimate saviour. The novel subsequently exposes various other instances where both the American military and culture are portrayed in an idealized manner. As demonstrated earlier, General MacArthur is depicted as a peacemaker who guarantees the liberation of Korea. This admiration for America's influence does not end here. The protagonist, Soon-ah, daydreams about residing in one of the luxurious houses featured in an American lifestyle magazine (Park, 1997: 31).

The novel, *A Gift of the Emperor* shows a scene where Soon-ah sings American songs to cheer herself up with other victims. Soon-ah states that all her classmates knew the lyrics of "Danny Boy" [54] (Park, 1997: 35). However, Soon-ah also adds that singing American songs will put their lives at risk. An embodiment of unity is shown through their singing together, and this is achieved through American songs, as Soon-ah does not mention singing any Korean songs. Throughout the novel, American culture or American soldiers are praised and idolised. This admiration started with Soon-ah, as explained earlier. Still, a Japanese war correspondent, another protagonist of the novel, Sadamu, who is romantically attached to Soon-ah, also partakes in the fantasising American military. He repeatedly praises an American pilot whom a Japanese Sergeant beheads. Sadamu depicts Japanese soldiers as

[54] In the novel, Soon-ah mentions that she and the girls sang American songs, and names "Danny Boy" as one of them. However, the song, "Danny Boy" is a ballad written by an English songwriter and set to a traditional Irish melody, often associated as an Irish song.

barbaric and violent. He also describes Japanese soldiers' patriotism as fake, while he explains the American pilot's choice of death is an act of true dedication to his country (Park, 1997: 128). Hence, though they may intend to stay objective, they end up placing "comfort women" figures or issue at the periphery, presenting voyeuristic views of the victims and focusing more on strengthening their Korean "American" identity.

Not all literary critics have cast pessimistic views on the representation of "comfort women" by Korean American writers. A Korean scholar, Ko Jeong-yun, argued that it is unnecessary to verify the authenticity of literary representations because no one should judge the genuineness of literary representation of history (Ko, 2014: 22). Indeed, Korean American works contain Korean American characters that serve justice for the victims, whether this may be consistent with historical fact or not. She further supports individual writers' imagination and artistry since these novels are works of fiction (Ko, 2014: 22). At the same time, Ko borrows Rey Chow's notion of "coercive mimeticism" to delineate why Korean American writers even attempt to address the issue of "comfort women" in their literary creations. According to her understanding of Chow, "[A]sian Americans' dilemma is that they are constantly forced to perform their highly visible ethnicity regardless of how many generations they have lived in the U.S". (Ko, 2014: 27). What is more, these writers are inundated with feelings of responsibility and unable to shun away from their shared ethnicity and history (Ko, 2014: 29). Hence, as Ko argues, some of the Korean American writers may feel responsible for addressing the issue in their works.

Chang-rae Lee's *A Gesture Life*

Chang-rae Lee's protagonist is a Korean Japanese American who chooses not to divulge his past. *A Gesture Life* is narrated by the perpetrator of the "comfort system", unlike works written by Keller or Park. The novel is centred around the protagonist's assimilation

process and objectifies the “comfort woman” character. While alive, she lacks agency, and after her death, she is sensualised. Most scholars examine the diasporic identity of Dr Franklin Hata, an immigrant who is a minority citizen, which is deemed as the novel's central theme (Lee C., 2005; Moraru, 2007; Park, 2005; Lee, 2011). Christopher Lee asserts that the diasporic identity is one of the limitations and defects of Hata as he yearns to pass as a perfect American citizen (Lee C., 2005: 102); Lee Young-Oak makes a similar point by claiming that even if he conforms to colonial ideology and performs hybrid identity, he is passive and lacks recalcitrance (Lee Y., 2005:148) Lee Seon-joo avers that Hata conducts “passing” to acquire identities as a Japanese/American and a coloniser (Lee S., 2008: 238) Kim Mi-Hyeon advocates Hata is in loss of any concrete identity and lacks subjectivity due to his traumatic past, which affects him to be indecisive in making choices (Kim, 2010: 3). Lee Myung-kyun, in his article “The Aspects of the Main Characters’ Identities in *Native Speaker* and *A Gesture Life”,* claims that the protagonist Franklin Jiro Kurohata or Hata is a perpetrator of the “comfort system” but the novel centralises not on the pains of victims, but it depicts the psychological state and behaviours of this perpetrator (Lee, 2018: 76). However, he also adds that the author’s unique approach to the “comfort women” history is a way to understand the matter from different perspectives (Lee, 2018: 84). Nevertheless, as scholars acknowledged, Lee’s novel prioritises Hata’s narrative and his positionalities in other settings.

Hata denies his Korean identity during his encounter with the “comfort woman” figure, which maintains his distance from taking any responsibility for her. Even though he admits that he was born into a Korean family and his parents' surname is “Oh”, he cuts ties with his birthparents (Lee, 1999: 244). In “An Unhomely Text: Belonging and Identity: in *A Gesture Life*”, Park Su-jung delineates that Hata’s use of his Japanese surname is a clear indication that his Japanese identity defines his life system (Park, 2008: 24). Mentioning his

birth parents' surname only once in the novel shows he wishes to detach himself from being associated with the notion that he is a person from Chosŏn (Park, 2008: 24).

His passing process includes his identity as "the number-one citizen" in the United States (Lee, 1999: 95). Hata is perceived as a flourishing community member and a model minority. "Hata's emphasis on the word 'citizen' erases his racial "Otherness" by ignoring how his racial visibility structures his life in that community. But on the other hand, this erasure of race enables racially violent acts to occur even within Hata's psyche. Hata's racial visibility as a model minority- as a generic Asian American- allows him to expunge his past life as a Korean. Therefore, Hata's removal of his Korean identity establishes him as an Asian American, where all Asians are the same (Ang, 2011: 125).

Lee Myung-Kyun wrote two articles on Chang-ae Lee's works (2015 and 2018). In one of them, he provides a definition of assimilation that Hata utilises for his survival: "[Assimilation is] sociocultural fusion wherein individuals and groups of differing ethnic heritage acquire the basic habits, attitudes, and mode of life of an embracing national culture—distinguished from acculturation" (Lee, 2015: 168). Park Bo-ryang also emphasises the process of mimicry: "The natives who are colonised by the colonisers, through colonial discourse, accept the superiority of the colonisers and end up believing in their inferiority and attempt 'mimicry' of the colonisers" (Park, 2005: 133). In the U.S., unlike at the military camp in Burma, Hata chooses mimicry for his survival. Instead of being identified as who he is, he is defined by his occupation in the U.S. His past is dissolved. As he runs a "medical supply store" at Bedley Run, without people's knowledge of his background as a medical officer at the Japanese military camp, people all call him "Doc", even though he is "not a physician" (Lee, 1999: 45). He is mindful that people do not call him by his English name: "I wish sometimes it wasn't so, but nobody seems to want to call me Franklin. I don't mind, but I would never wish to mislead anyone" (Lee, 1999: 45). Though he does not wish to mislead

people, he lets people call him “Doc”, and does not correct people. He knows that people do not call him by an English name that he owns, which can be interpreted as that he is aware that people do not want to associate him as an American citizen with an English name, keeping him on the periphery.

The novel focuses more on Hata’s efforts to maintain and secure his Japanese American identity than on “comfort women”. Kandice Chuh also explicates how paradoxical a “character/narrator and author” Lieutenant Kurohata, who belongs to the positions of power and authority to represent K, “the powerlessness” (Chuh, 2003: 16). K or Kkutaeh (“comfort woman” character) is the only “comfort woman” character in the novel, and she seems to exist only to distinguish and contrast Hata’s identity and positionality. Through his relationship with K, Hata denies his Korean identity and consolidates his position as a Japanese perpetrator, which places him in a position of authority and power. As he accepts his position as the perpetrator, he lacks empathy for Kkutaeh as the victim of sexual slavery. At the same time, Kkutaeh wants to build a connection with him because she believes him to be Korean (Lee, 1999: 234). In response to her certainty that he must be Korean, he introduces himself as a Japanese medical officer of the Imperial Forces (Lee, 1999: 235). By correcting her, he underscores his Japanese identity, eradicating any chance of associating him with Korean-ness. Again, she appears in the novel to reinstate his Korean identity, which he denies. Later in the novel, Kkutaeh asks Hata to kill her as a fellow “countryman”, but he again strongly rejects her by saying, “I am not your countryman” (Lee, 1999: 238). As shown in this conversation, even when Hata is romantically attached to Kkutaeh, he prioritises his Japanese identity over his lover. Before his encounter with Kkutaeh, he only saw “comfort women” as servants or as tools and parts that function to assist the Japanese military (Lee, 1999: 251). When he finally decides to save her, he vows to preserve her from “all uses" (Lee, 1999: 251). Again, his choice of word “use” signifies that he considers her as an object.

Ultimately, she is violated by about thirty soldiers and brutally severed (Lee, 1999: 304). Throughout the novel, Kkutaeh is presented only through the biased gaze of Hata, and she has no agency even to end her own life.

Hata, though he lived with his Korean biological parents until he was twelve, consciously deleted his memory of his Korean background and became Japanese, which is a clear indication of his successful passing as a Japanese, rejecting his past as a Korean (Ahn, 2016: 140). By confiscating his biological connection and refusing K's approach to build ties as a Korean, he settles in the United States when the war is over. After the war, he blends into a posh white neighbourhood called Bedley Run as a model minority, a successful Japanese immigrant. Though Hata witnessed the death of K in his American home, he visualises K naked and around him as a real being (Lee, 1999: 286). This illusion validates that his understanding of Kkutaeh has never altered, which affects his efforts to redress her after his settlement in the United States. Although Lee Myung-Kyun differentiates Hata from the rest of the Japanese soldiers because he owns a bit of guilt for failing K; consequently, as he lacks any understanding of her as a "comfort woman", he is not too different from the rest of the Japanese military (Lee, 2018: 81). In *A Gesture Life*, K's existence is dependent on the power of Hata, and throughout the narrative, it becomes clearer that Hata is given more spotlight than K and that he owns authority over her existence within the novel, leading to the decentralization of the "comfort woman" character.

Hata adopts a Korean-born Sunny, thinking he can bring her security and wealth as his atonement for failing Kkutaeh. However, the exact figure exposes his efforts to assimilate and mimicry. Hata's adopted daughter Sunny reprimands her father's obsession to pass. She calls him "good Charlie", a nickname Hata's neighbours use to refer to Hata behind his back. (Lee, 1999: 95). Park Bo-ryang, in her article, "*A Gesture Life*: Hata's seeking identity in the immigrant society", explains further that "Hata became a 'good Charlie' to admit himself into

the White mainstream as an Asian American, exercising kindness without self-opinion" (Park, 2005: 138). His white neighbours are content to have this "good Charlie" organise the garbage and manage sidewalk-cleaning (Lee, 1999: 95). When Sunny openly rebukes Hata for being pretentious and eager to please his community, he shouts back at Sunny by only saying, "I am a Japanese!" and he also retorts "what is so awful about being amenable and liked?" (Lee, 1999: 95). Indeed, he is committed to being "the number-one citizen" as Sunny says of him, and his obsession of being a Japanese has not ceased even during his settlement in the U.S. (Lee, 1999: 95). The author's depiction of Hata's obsessions over his Japanese identity and arduous attempts to assimilate in the United States reflects author's focus on Hata, the Japanese immigrant rather than "comfort woman" figure in the novel. Moreover, though he adopted Sunny out of guilt for failing K, he still treats her the way he did with K, imposing only his thoughts without paying any heed to her needs and ideas.

The novel presents an ending with Hata reconciling with his daughter. He goes on a journey that he dreamed of going with K. However, as Lee Myung-Kyun puts it, Hata's failed attempt to save K due to his obsession over his reputation and his failure in helping his adopted daughter only consolidate his position as a perpetrator, inflicting pain on both women (Lee, 2018: 83). On the other hand, Yu Je-Boon, in his article, "Ethics of Representation", advocates for Hata's journey in the ending as the start of a mourning process for "comfort woman" K and Korean history who sacrificed K as a "comfort woman". Moreover, when he sacrifices for Sunny and later saves his half-black grandson Thomas from drowning, his efforts can be perceived as his way to redress K. His efforts can be perceived as overcoming his past hesitancy and selfishness (Yu, 2006: 93). However, Yu's analysis of Hata's "mourning" raises doubts as Hata's perception of K remains unchanged, even after he embarks on a new life in the U.S. His entire existence is anchored in past fantasies. Although his decision to start a new journey suggests a fresh beginning and a hopeful future, it is

inevitable to discuss the potential for readers to empathize more with the perpetrator, thereby emphasizing the wrongdoer and his life choices. Overall, the "comfort woman" figure is relegated to a marginalized and voiceless role, depicted solely through Hata's recollections as the perpetrator. Even within the context of literary creation, it becomes necessary to examine how "comfort women" are portrayed and the impact these representations may have on readers.

Chang-rae Lee's novel is entirely written from the perspective of a former Japanese soldier. Kalliope Lee includes a chapter from the viewpoint of a Japanese doctor who deeply cared for a particular 'comfort woman' he failed to save, as does Pae Hong-chin. Pae also presents a chapter solely from a perpetrator's perspective, exploring his love for Kang Tŏk-kyŏng. Interestingly, all three authors depict their Japanese soldier characters as sympathetic, humane, soft-hearted, and filled with regret for their inability to save the “comfort women” figure in the novel. To a certain extent, these characters are portrayed as helplessly romantic. In Hata, the protagonist of Lee’s novel, we see a sympathetic and soft-hearted individual burdened with guilt for his failure to protect the “comfort woman” during his time as a Japanese soldier. Lee's approach is fresh and captivating, as it is the only work that exclusively presents the “comfort women” experience from a perpetrator's perspective. Nevertheless, there is no definitive right or wrong, and literary representations of “comfort women” should not be bound by strict rules. However, it is worth noting that consistently depicting perpetrators as empathetic characters burdened by guilt for not saving “comfort women” may perpetuate a pattern of portraying perpetrators solely as villains.

Kalliope Lee’s *Sunday Girl*

Kalliope Lee’s novel also centralises around Korean American protagonist, struggling with a responsibility to relieve the anger of the “comfort women” ghosts and her

Americanised understanding of the issue. The novel consists of a collection of multiple narratives containing many different characters and layers of plot lines, allowing readers numerous interpretations. The main two protagonists, Sibyl, a bi-racial Korean American, and Jang-Mee, a Korean American adoptee, come to Korea to discover their Korean roots (Ko, 2016: 106). The novel is set around the time when "comfort women" have not yet made public testimony, and the novel constructs the narrative as these two Korean American characters Jang-Mee (until she falls into a coma) and Sibyl, play the role of saviours (Ko, 2016: 106). Though this novel is written to redress "comfort women", just like other Korean American novels on the issue, two Korean American female protagonists' attempt to re-claim their ethnic roots in Korea is the central plot.

The author confessed the uncertainty of her identity during an interview on *Sunday Girl*, which seems to be projected in her main character Sibyl. Lee introduces "gyopo" into her text to distinguish her Korean American characters from locals of Korea. The author, intentional or not, marginalises "comfort women" by placing "gyopos" as hierarchically superior to local Koreans. Through this placement, Korean Americans become the speaking subjects and saviours of voiceless "comfort women" ghosts. Sibyl and Jang-Mee represent "gyopos" in the novel and dominate the text. According to the Kungnipkugŏwŏn (National Institute of Korean Language Dictionary), "gyopo" means Korean diasporas who have moved over to a foreign country and obtained "nationality" from there (Kungnipkugŏwŏn, 2018). Since they consider themselves "gyopos", they only associate with English-speaking Korean Americans. As for Sibyl, she judges Koreans and keeps her distance from her Korean co-workers while she freely socialises with Korean American friends. Sibyl, in her monologue, specifically identifies herself and Jang-Mee as "gyopo:" "We were called gyopo. Those who'd left Korea and returned after a long time. Revenants" (Lee, 2013: 23). In her monologue, she conveys her negative sentiment that she and Jang-Mee are referred as

"gyopo" as if they are victims of marginalisation; however, she uses this term to differentiate her and Jang-Mee from rest of Koreans.

Furthermore, she only associates with people who can speak English, and she judges those who are not fluent in English. Such characteristic is somewhat like Beccah's from Keller's novel. Proficiency in English in Korean American novels is a deciding factor of racial hierarchy that Korean American characters maintain in the novels. No one interpellated Sibyl or Jang-Mee as a "revenant". Still, Sibyl uses the term to identify herself and Jang-Mee, intentionally differentiating her and Jang-Mee from Koreans. Ironically, despite Sibyl's claim that she is a "gyopo", she does not fit the definition since she also admits to being biracial. She states that she is half Korean and half Caucasian, and that people do not know how to identify her, which reflects the uncertainty of her position within Korea (Lee, 2013: 65).

The author emphasises racial hierarchy than focusing on "comfort women" spirits. Racial demarcations and hierarchy incited by Asian Americans using whiteness as their barometer are examined by Susan Koshy in her article, "Morphing Race into Ethnicity: Asian Americans and Critical Transformations of Whiteness". According to Koshy, it is not only white elites but also Asian Americans who engender racial reconstruction and demarcation. (Koshy, 2001: 159). Whiteness/Americanness was a cultural marker that immigrants used to set ethnic boundaries. Still, whiteness was also what they believed to guarantee the upper hand in class stratification (Koshy, 2001: 61). Regarding Koshy's claims, Sibyl's containment of racial and ethnic whiteness seems to set her apart reinforce her U.S. identity. Indeed the new definition of multiculturalism does not put her superior since whiteness only functions as a modifier of ethnicity, and non-whites are granted equal opportunity (Koshy, 2001: 194). Caught in the past definition of whiteness, condoning power only to herself, she distinguishes herself and local Koreans by ethnicity and whiteness.

The local Koreans are shown as barbarous or shallow in the novel. Sibyl's neighbour, Mrs Kim, runs a Chinese restaurant. While she watches her customers' leftover food, she mutters how she can "make a good koolkoolrheejook" (mixing leftover food like pig feed: people used to make it when the country was at war and short on food) with them and how mouth-watering it will be (Lee, 2013: 100). The word "koolkoolrheejook" literally translates as pig feed and Koreans only made this dish when they were suffering from poverty and food shortage during wartime. Biases over the local Koreans led to misinformation in this scene, and the prejudice deepens as the protagonist is disgusted by the thought of eating scraps of leftover food (Lee, 2013: 55). If not barbarous, Sibyl regards Koreans as shallow as it is explicitly reflected through her depiction of her co-worker named Miss Pak. Miss Pak takes a photo of Sibyl without permission and says she will have plastic surgery to get her nose done like Sibyl's by showing her picture to a plastic surgeon (Lee, 2013: 100). Again, the author presents Sibyl judging Miss Pak. She inwardly scoffs that her nose will not look good and will be exposed when she gives birth to children as their noses resemble her pre-surgery nose (Lee, 2013: 104). Her inner judgements of Koreans around her are judgmental and condescending. The casualness and insensitivity of disclosing her and her friend's private lives are juxtaposed with Sibyl's silent responses, accentuating, once more, the superiority that Sibyl feels over the local Koreans.

In other words, retelling the readers of the existence of "gyopo" can be conjectured as a new type of marginalisation. Emphasis on the difference between "gyopo" with local Koreans, dismissing the presence of a hybrid identity, seems to highlight a possible existence of social hierarchy. The author's emphasis on existing "gyopos" in Korea not only marginalises Koreans in Korea, but such rendering can also be seen as ostracisation of the "comfort women" victims. Through her addition of "gyopo", Korean American characters are situated at a higher hierarchical position, further limiting the voice of "comfort women" and

even locals in Korea. Setting Sibyl apart from locals and then trying to link her up with "comfort women" victims seem ironic and far-fetched portrayal, which incites the possibility of confusing the readers with the author's role in this novel.

Ko Jeong-yun elucidates how "Lee generates an almost omnipresent effect of comfort women's presences throughout the narrative" by having "Korean American women suffer from similar physical violence comfort women faced" (Ko, 2016: 108). Ko further advocates Lee's representation methodology that Lee attempts to "alleviate the ethical burden involved in representing abused comfort women's bodies" (Ko, 2016: 108). Jang-Mee communicates with the spirit of a "comfort woman" whenever she sexually endangers herself (Lee, 2013: 110). However, there are no other explanations for how she is allowing the spirit to own a voice.

After Sibyl becomes the successor of Jang-Mee, who first connected with "comfort women" ghosts by being raped, she continues the extreme acts. She uses the term "whore", or "prostitute" to identify her new self (Lee, 2013: 233 and 236). The usage of the word "whore" or "prostitute" can be seen as misleading and problematic, especially when she considers herself as the medium of "comfort women" victims. In real life, prostitutes are female sex workers objectified and commodified for the sexual desires of men; however, the term contains various derogatory connotations that are unsuitable to be associated with "comfort women" victims. Park So-yang explains how the victims misrepresent themselves as they inadvertently misuse ideology's language and refer to their past slavery as prostitution. She warns that the subaltern subject lacks the agency to choose adequate language to represent their experiences (Park, 2005: 193). Hence, their lack of knowledge of the ideological language may invoke the possibility of misrepresentation by using the word prostitution when what they suffered was sexual slavery (Park, 2005: 193). Having Jang-Mee and Sibyl as the mediums that will appease the anger of "comfort women" ghosts seem to

have limitations as the Korean American agents only interpret the trauma of "comfort women" as erotic and graphic. Her decision to become promiscuous does not reflect what victims went through during their forced sexual slavery.

After Sibyl uses her body as a platform to connect with the "comfort women" victims, she starts to become bold with her sexual life. She becomes an unpaid "whore" out of her choice, and her transformation does not align with the "comfort woman" experience. Furthermore, these extreme actions and language can be problematic because she states in the novel that she is redeeming and redressing the victims through her exposure to sexual violence. Before she fell into a coma, Jang-Mee believed she was serving justice for the "comfort women" ghosts, and Sibyl thought she was carrying out the redress act. Still, scenes like herself asking her sex partner to inscribe the word "MINE" with a shard of glass from a cup he shattered invoke images of "comfort women" whom Japanese soldiers forcefully tattooed. These perpetrators not only raped the victims but tattooed their names and scribbles onto the victims' "lips", "chest", "stomach", and "body" (United Nations Report, 1996) and the scene of Jang-Mee's wanting "MINE" etched onto her thigh, seems to reflect Chung Ok-soon's account recorded in the United Nations Report. The tattoos were traumatic scars for Chung, and the way the author presents the scene of Sibyl liking the pain and the tattoo contradicts the purpose of consolation or reparation.

The author's understanding of "comfort women" is limited, manifested through Sibyl's monologues. Sibyl believes she has connected with the victims and allowed them to let them release their anger. The author uses terms that might cause shock the readers as well as victim-survivors because she uses the words like "colonise", "rape", and "pillage" to depict the actions of the spirits of "comfort women". Sibyl said she allowed the ghosts of "comfort women" to "colonise, rape, and pillage" her body. By letting them take their anger out on her, she is letting them have a voice and their "han" (sorrow) is relieved (Lee, 2013:

369). Sibyl highlights that she granted “voice” to the victims. When Sibyl sees Kim Hak-Soon, an actual victim-survivor, on television, the author compounds reality with fiction, fortifying her protagonists as ultimate saviours: “When I saw Kim Hak-Soon come forward that afternoon, the vibrations of her rage rupturing through my scars, I knew my work was done. She had broken through the silencing barrier of shame” (Lee, 2013: 369). Sibyl’s monologue emphasises that she has enabled the public testimony to take place. Her soliloquy mirrors Jang-Mee’s letter to her. Jang-Mee states how she, as a medium, “offer[ed] them what they have never had—a voice” (Lee, 2013: 146).

The author presents several stages to render “comfort women” in her work, which raises doubts about the author’s intentions. At the initial stage, Sibyl and Jang-Mee are emphasised as different entities. The author delineates them as “gyopos”, setting them apart from other Korean locals. In Lee's Sunday Girl, the Americanisation and localisation of “comfort women” can be detected. Like Hata from Chang-rae Lee’s novel, Sibyl emphasises her American identity and empathises with other Korean Americans in Korea: “The Korean American contingent, of which I was peripherally a part. We were called gyopo. Those who’d left Korea and returned after a long time” (Lee, 2013: 23). Then, the author inserts a frame narrative to give an inside view of the “comfort” system via a Korean Japanese soldier. The author presents the ironies that these demarcated “gyopos” or Japanese Korean suddenly become the ultimate saviours and relieve the rage of “comfort woman” victims. None of them fully understand the trauma of these victims, but they claim, except Dr Noh, that they brought justice for the victims and served as agencies for them.

Authors should rightfully have control and authority over their work. With Park Yu-ha's publication, the historian faced severe criticism and legal consequences from Korean "comfort women" for presenting the victims from the perpetrator's perspective and suggesting an empathetic understanding of the Japanese soldiers. However, her personal assessment and

judgment of 'comfort women' and Japanese soldiers are unjustifiable since her work constitutes historical data rather than fiction. When sensual imageries are associated with the "comfort women" figures in Lee's writing, it can lead to inappropriate perceptions of these individuals. While literature should not be held to the same standards of historical accuracy as official records, it cannot escape the ethical and moral questions that arise when historical facts are woven into historical fiction. There should not be a rigid rule governing the use of "comfort women" as protagonists in historical fiction. While it is not mandatory for such novels to centre around "comfort women", it is crucial that they are not marginalized or devalued in narratives focusing on this subject, particularly when authors intend to address the issue of redressing these women.

Mary Lynn Bracht's *White Chrysanthemum*

Mary Lynn Bracht's *White Chrysanthemum* is a work that shows similarities of past Korean American novels on "comfort women" but is also very different since she does not centralise the narrative on Korean American identity or Americanising the "comfort women" discourse. Like the matrilineal connection between Beccah and Soon-Hyo in Nora Okja Keller's *Comfort Woman*, the two sisters in Bracht's *White Chrysanthemum* also mention Kim Hak-sun. Still, her approach to the issue differs from other Korean American writers. In *White Chrysanthemum,* chapters containing the narratives of the two sisters, Hana and Emi (Emiko), alternate throughout the novel. The author introduces various cultural and historical facts such as the 1948 Jeju uprising, haenyeo (woman diver), Wednesday Demonstrations, and the Statue of Peace. Haenyeos are known to be independent, autonomous women, and this also connects the two sisters. Bracht's work is the only Korean American novel with a protagonist who is not Korean American, and the setting does not include the United States. Apart from this, the protagonist Emi recalls real-life figures like "Kim Hak-sun" and "Jan

Ruff O'Herne", who were the first two victims that testify in public (Bracht, 2018: 131). Unlike Sibyl from *Sunday Girl*, when a reference to Kim Hak-sun is made, it provides the background story of how her testimony inspired other "comfort women" victims to follow her lead and testify (Bracht, 2018: 131). The novel has a villain; a Japanese soldier called Morimoto. He obsesses over Hana, and she is pursued by him even after the war is over. He resembles Kobayashi from Pae's novel, who expressed his obsession over Kang Tŏk-kyŏng, but the author exercises her authorial license to give a happy ending for Hana. Though she fails to return home, she meets a kind Mongolian family who buys her freedom for her and settles down in Mongolia (Bracht, 2018: 296).

In sum, Korean American writers have taken part in the reparation act to console the victims of the "comfort system" through their literary works and actively participate in the campaign until the present. However, due to the complexity of their identity, the authors may sometimes create scenes and characters that could demarcate Korean American protagonists from the "comfort women" in the novels, re-orientalising the victims. Indeed, Kalliope Lee presents several stages to render "comfort women" in her work, which raises doubts about the author's intentions since "comfort women" characters only appear as voiceless ghosts. They are only shown through the eyes of the perpetrator or the visions that Korean American protagonists own. Then, the author inserts a frame narrative to give an inside view of the "comfort" system via a Korean Japanese soldier. The author presents the ironies that these demarcated "gyopos" abruptly turn into the ultimate saviours and reified beings of "comfort woman" victims. Though the author should exercise his/her authority in his/her work, misrepresentations of "comfort women", inciting wrong imageries of the victims, do require extra attention from the readers and critics.

As shown in the aforementioned Korean American novels on the "comfort women" issue, the setting of the stories generally takes place either in the United States or Korea.

Historical and cultural misunderstandings also appear in these works. However, despite minor fallacies, historical fictions written by Korean Americans are valid as they present or reinstate a new/old understanding of "comfort women" history, expanding the scope for more discourses on "comfort women" and spreading global awareness of the victims of war crimes. As some scholars praise these novels, these authors raised an international understanding of the "comfort women" issue. On representing history, Victor Bascara highlights how important it is to remember the forgotten or suppressed memory: "To reckon with the past historically does not mean to narrate what happened, but rather to appreciate the return of the repressed and the conditions that made that return possible" (Bascara, 2006: 25). Korean American writers' literary works enabled the return of "comfort women" redress movement. The existence of Korean American novels facilitated the discourse on "comfort women" to return and continue despite the diplomatic tension between Japan and Korea. Though they may seem to focus more on their uncertainty of Korean American identity and Americanise the understanding of the "comfort women", they bring back the repressed anecdotes and add more fleshes to the unfinished narratives. In the following chapter, Korean writers' representation of "comfort women" will be discussed as how they are bound by ethnic nationalism and duty when they bring the history of the oppressed and silenced victims to resurface.

Chapter 6. Ethical Redress Movement by Korean Authors

The previous chapter discussed how Korean American “comfort women” novels address this issue to redress and publicise the struggles of the Korean diaspora and Korean Americans in the United States. We also saw that they also use their work to convey other messages. At certain moments, the diasporic Korean American writers tend to Americanise the issue and introduce the assimilated Korean Americans in their historical fiction. Korean novels on “comfort women” convey specific characteristics, just like Korean American works on the same issue. The question of Korean identity and positionality of Korean writers is a complex one as it requires a significant consideration for Korean writers, especially when addressing historically sensitive topics like the "comfort women" issue. There has been a continuing growth of interest in Korea ever since the first “comfort woman” survivor Kim Hak-sun provided testimony about her traumatic experience. Since then, various forms of literature and artworks such as paintings, films, short stories, and novels have appeared in Korea. Novels received less recognition than films since movies had exposure to more people. The first novel on this issue was composed by Yun Chŏng-mo and was released in 1988. The novel’s general plot is about a former “comfort woman” who reveals her past to her son when questioned about her history. The second edition of this work was published in 1997 with an author’s note. Korean writers have written more novels on this topic since her work.

Though writing styles vary, some Korean novelists seem to apply a narrative style, which seems analogous to one another. One type of writing style that most Korean authors apply is historical accuracy influenced by ethical and national duty. To practice this, they use methods like referencing details from testimonies or historical records to build credibility. Their words and descriptions repeat what is stated in historical records. The boundary

between reality and fiction becomes somewhat blurry through their appliance of such a writing technique. Indeed, some Korean writers exercise their author's license like Korean American writers. These authors merge the present and past through characters and plots that are unconventional and strictly fictional. Some writers also uniquely deal with the "comfort women" issue, inserting their narratives and voices. Korean novels centre around historical accuracy.

Korean writers struggle with their complex identity and positionality when addressing historical and national aspects of the "comfort women" issue. The sensitivity of the "comfort women" issue necessitates careful ethical and moral considerations for writers. Historical atrocities and trauma cannot be treated lightly, so ensuring accuracy, empathy, and respect for the victims and their experiences is essential for Korean authors. They may face ethical dilemmas in balancing historical accuracy with creative storytelling, especially when addressing a topic with ongoing political and social discourses. Hence, ethical and moral principles decide the positionality of these authors' approach to the subject matter, ensuring a responsible and empathetic portrayal of historical events and characters, given the sensitivity of the topic.

Another methodology that these writers use is their awareness as the intellectual that represents the subalterns ("comfort women"). This consciousness correlates to their historical duty. Yun was clueless about "comfort women", and she only learnt about chŏngsindae through reading Yim Chong-guk's *Chŏngsindae Sillok*, who spent his whole life compiling data about the harm inflicted on Koreans by Imperial Japan (Soh, 2008: 163). She was so affected by her discovery that she decided to write about chŏngsindae (Soh, 2008: 163).[55] As the author of the postliberation generation, she had the power as an intellectual to address the topic in her novel. However, her message was misconstrued in the film adaptation as it

[55] At the time, the term chŏngsindae was used simultaneously with "comfort women". See Chapter 1.

focused on sensual aspects of sexual slavery (Soh, 2008: 163).[56] Even if the three Korean authors are aware of being intellectual, they do not erase the subjectivities of the victims throughout their novels. For these writers, finding the balance between history and creativity/fiction is their primary objective in writing their novels on "comfort women".

6.1 Korean Authors' Historical Duties and Nationalism

Korean authors approach the "comfort women" topic through an ethical lens. They mostly write their novels with objectives such as staying faithful to history and attempting to avoid any subordination of "comfort women" or historical distortions. In *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life, Tim Edensor discusses* how the nation and national identity can be constructed through cultural productions such as media, films and literature. He adds that a nation is complex and versatile and has a hybridity of cultures (Edensor, 2002:9). Due to its versatility, historians no longer have to conduct the representation of a nation or history. He believes national culture can be delivered and formulated by various means (Edensor, 20002:9). In his later chapter, Edensor discusses the artistic representation of the nation and national identity. He claims that popular cultural productions can reconstruct identity and nationalism, providing a setting for a strong national identity (Edensor, 2002: 152). Edensor asserts that cultural nationalists must be careful as the power to represent the nation can detain progressive thoughts, leading to a clash between modern and traditional national identities (Edensor, 2002: 150). Yun Chŏng-mo, Pae Hong-chin and Kim Sum are all aware of their national identity as they approach the national issue in their cultural productions. However, nationalism does not restrict the authors or how they understand and represent the victims. Their cultural medium, the novels, strengthen their national identity while representing "comfort women". Simultaneously, the national identity

[56] The film was pornographic and made by an adult movie director. See Chapter 1.

of the survivors is also consolidated as the authors support the anecdotes of the victims by providing data that they collected during their research on "comfort women".

Yun Chŏng-mo's *Emi Irŭm*

In *Emi irŭm*, Yun's protagonists are Pae Mun-ha and his mother, a former "comfort woman". In the novel, the author uses the terms *chŏngsindae* and *wianbu* interchangeably to refer to "comfort women" (Yun, 1997: 117). Using both terms as alternatives to each other was often the case at the time when Yun's novel was written.[57] In Yun Chŏng-mo's novel, the novel renders shaming and defamation of "comfort women". When the protagonist, the son of a "comfort woman" victim, attends his father's funeral, he learns from his dad's concubine that his father disparaged his mother by saying that "she comes from a disgraceful background" and "this statement equates [what he used to call her, which was] the word 'whore'" (Yun, 1997: 83).[58] According to Soh, Kim Hak-sun, who was the first "comfort woman" to testify about her experience during a press conference, also claimed that her husband would often call her by names such as a "whore" (Soh, 2008: 165). She also believes the scene in which the name calls Sun-i seems to resemble Kim Hak-sun's anecdote. The author presents the prejudiced misogynistic view that encouraged the silence of female victims.

A friend of the Sun-i prevents her from killing herself on the night of her violation and tells her, "We have already been badly abused, so what's the point of dying now? We need to stay alive and make the scam known" (Yun, 1997: 126).[59] All the victim-survivors shared this general sentiment when they decided to stay alive. Moreover, this statement reflects the author's will as she re-released her novel to help the public to learn about

[57] See Chapter 1 for definitions of chŏngsindae and wianbu.
[58] "[…] 한때 잠깐 정을 나눈 일이 있었는데 그 여자의 출신 성분이 하도 더러워서 그만뒀다고 말하더군" (Yun, 1997: 83).
[59] "실컷 당했는데 뭣 땜에 죽어? 우린 살아서 이 속임수를 알려야 해" (Yun, 1997: 126).

"comfort women" and assist the Korean Council's campaign (Yun, 1997: 8).[60] Edensor also mentioned how the representation of the past might not be aiming for a political project to promote contemporary nationalism (Edensor, 2002: 150), which is what Yun decided to do and practised by her character in the novel.

Kim Sum and Pae Hong-chin

Kim and Pae share many similarities, and they do not carry out representation of "comfort women" to consolidate their national identity; their nationalism is strengthened through their cultural presentations. Pae is not famous and describes himself as a ghostwriter who writes books that he cannot claim as his own (Pae, 2008: 8). However, he decides to deliver Kang Tŏk-kyŏng's (a former "comfort woman") life stories by "lending his hands" (Pae, 2008: 9).[61] Out of 58 works that she composed, Kim wrote five historical novels on "comfort women", including a graphic novel that she recently published in 2021 (Yu, 2022).[62] Out of these five "comfort women" novels, she was appointed to write two by the Korean Council. Kim Sum experimented with various writing techniques while maintaining her devotion to the victim-survivors. Kim's works offer a resolution for misoriented novels on "comfort women" as she attempts to exercise her authorial license in a reserved manner.

Kim Sum delivers historical facts as her characters are all based on specific victim-survivors to uphold credibility. Before Kim's works entered the literary market, Pae Hong-chin released a testimonial novel, *Kŭrim sok,* on Kang Tŏk-kyŏng, which exhibits similar traits as Kim's novels on Kim Bok-dong and Kil Wŏn-ok. In his novel, Pae chooses Kang Tŏk-kyŏng as his protagonist, which parallels Kim's novels on Kim Bok-dong and Kil Wŏn-ok. Pae's work came into existence in 2008, and a decade later, Kim Sum's two testimonial

[60] See Chapter 4.
[61] "[…] 내 손가락의 힘을 빌려 적어나간 자신의 삶에 대한 기록이다" (Pae, 2008: 9).
[62] *A-i-wa k'al* is an illustrated book for children, which is based on Kim Bok-dong (Yu, 2022). Kim Sum's other work, *Kunini ch'ŏnsa* is also about Km Bok-dong.

novels, *Sunggoham* and *Kunini ch'ŏnsa,* entered the literary market. They are all based on testimonies she accessed, and her research results are reflected through her footnotes, appendices, or explanations within the brackets. Kim's works bear strong resemblances to Pae's novel as their novels underscore the authors' findings. The difference between Pae's work from Kim's novels such as *Hŭrŭnŭn P'yŏnji* and *Hanmyŏng* may be that Pae focuses on one person while Kim attempts to merge the voices of almost all "comfort women", who gave testimonies. However, her later two works centralise on each individual, just like Pae. Also, Kim Bok-dong and Kil Wŏn-ok were alive when Kim gathered information about them through interviews. At the same time, Pae had to rely only on the remaining documents since Kang was already deceased when he decided to write about her.

Pae Hong-chin's *Kŭrim sok*

Pae's novel focuses on one comfort woman victim, Kang Tŏk-kyŏng, who had already passed away when the writer decided to write about her. He voluntarily chooses to become a ghostwriter of Kang's life story. He refers to his work as "a documentary created from his imagination" (Pae, 2008: 9).[63] Though he claims to be a ghostwriter, the author's interventions are obvious since he appears in the novel as a speaking subject in many of his chapters. The first chapter begins with his observation and understanding of a photograph of Kang, and he claims he will start the narrative with a picture of Kang (Pae, 2008: 13). Here, he appears as a first-person narrator. Throughout the narrative, he would appear as the first-person narrator or disappear and present the stories of Kang in a third-person omniscient narrator. When he announces that he will start the story of Kang with a description of her photo, the explanation of her is subjective and in first-person as he adds his voice, saying she

[63] "[…] 한 여자의 삶을 연민하며 적어나간 상상 속의 다큐멘터리이다" (Pae, 2008: 9).

looked "sad and blank" (Pae, 2008: 13).[64] Again, his choice of words reflects his sentiments. In the novel, the author repeatedly mentions that he listens to the voice of Kang in mp3 recordings that he compiled from video clips of her,[65] emphasising his presence as a character in the novel (Pae, 2008: 16). Unlike Kim Sum, Pae consistently appears in the novel and presents his voice and views. When he talks about the school that Kang claimed that she went to, he asserts, "[H]almoni's testimony is based on an accurate memory" (Pae, 2008: 42).[66] He feels empathy and is sympathetic towards one figure, Kang Tŏk-kyŏng that he admires. The author's intervention is visible since he adds footnotes at the beginning of specific chapters that he has fictionally recreated to contextualise the narrative. Out of 21 chapters, excluding the writer's introduction and conclusion, 8 are fictional representations of Kang Tŏk-kyŏng. As if looking into his stream of consciousness, the time sequence of the chapters is inconsistent, and the lengths of the chapters also vary.

When there is not enough evidence to prove Kang's claims, he uses his voice to support her. When he fails to find proof of Kang's attendance at the school she claimed to be a student of, he enters the narrative. However, Chapter 4 suddenly breaks into six sub-sections. The author inserts a footnote, specifying that the subchapters 3, 4, and 6 are fictional creations with borrowed details from testimonies (given by Kim Sun-tŏk, Pak Tu-ri, and Kang Tŏk-kyŏng) (Pae, 2008: 65).[67] The rest of the chapters also contain historical facts, which reinforce a historical authenticity of the victims' narratives. Chapter 8 is about Kobayashi Tateo, a Japanese soldier known to have feelings for Kang. The whole chapter is an imagined story about what he might go through while serving in the military during World War II. The writer again adds his voice through his open comment: "Yes. I am visualising

[64] "나는 이 한 장의 사진으로부터 이야기를 시작하고 싶다. […] 슬프고 망연해 보이는 시선으로부터" (Pae, 2008: 13).
[65] "[…]나는 여러 비디오 테이프에서 엠피쓰리에 녹음한 강덕경 할머니의 목소리를 들었다. […] 나는 그녀의 생전 모습이 담긴 비디오테이프를 구해 목소리를 녹음해 들었다" (Pae, 2008: 16).
[66] "말하자면 할머니의 증언은 정확한 기억을 바탕으로 이루어졌다는 것이다" (Pae, 2008: 42).
[67] "3, 4, 6 장에 나오는 이야기들은 각각 김순덕, 박두리, 강덕경 할머니의 증언을 토대로 장착했음을 밝혀둔다" (Pae, 2008: 65).

him now" (Pae, 2008: 89).[68] After a sixteen-page long chapter on Kobayashi, he adds a footnote at the end of the chapter, admitting that this chapter is fictional, which derives from his imagination (Pae, 2008: 104).

The following chapter, chapter 9, is also a fictional depiction of Kang's sentiments and her experience at the "comfort station". Still, the author does not mention that this is also a fictional representation of Kang. Chapter 8 presents Kobayashi Tateo's inner thoughts about the war and Kang. The scene in which Kang is captured by the military police Kobayashi is presented in three different perspectives in this novel. Two are fictional. One is presented from Kang's perspective, and the other narrative is presented from Kobayashi's view. Then, the writer/character/narrator in the novel offers his account of this abduction scene, providing probable dates when this incident must have occurred based on his research (Pae, 2008: 77).[69] Like Kim Sum's works, Pae's novel also contains conjectures of Kang's life after she left the "comfort station". Often, cultural productions on "comfort women" tend to deliver the time when they were forced into the system at an incredibly early age or show their lives after they came out to the world. However, due to the focus on young or old age, cultural products were often rebuked for assertions of victimhood. Since Pae's work is somewhat like Kim Sum's testimonial novels, it deals with all aspects of Kang's life. It shows Kang's life before she was taken into the "comfort system", during her life at the station, and after escaping the system. As a fictional character, chapters on Kang are depicted by an omniscient third-person narrator. The chapters are composed based on written and oral testimonies that the writer has collected. Some chapters are about the perpetrator, the Japanese soldier who forced Kang into the comfort station, and her life after her escape. The

[68] "그렇다. 나는 지금 그 남자를 상상하고 있다" (Pae, 2008: 89).

[69] She made two testimonies in 1993 and 1994 about her experience. According to the author, the series of events she provided at both interviews match except the date when she went to Japan seems inconsistent. She claimed that she moved to Japan was 1944 and in her second interview, she said that she arrived in Japan in 1943 ("두 번째 판본에선 근로정신대에 자원하여 일본 공장으로 간 것이 44 년이 아니라 43 년 여름이라고 적혀 있다") (Pae, 2008: 77).

possible danger of Pae's interventions and involvement with the narrative is that the author's license in Korean literature on "comfort women" tend to be purveyed by adding subjective views and understanding of the historical issue.

According to Heo, in the 1950s, the Japanese Military "comfort women" or *wianbu* did not appear in public narratives and were associated only with terms used to refer to U.S. military "comfort women" such as "yanggongju" (western princess) or "UN-puin" (wife of the U.N. member)" (Heo, 2018: 103).[70] Similar to the term "comfort women", the words "yanggongju" or "UN-puin" have negative connotations and arouse sensual imageries. For example, "yanggongju" would be depicted as a threatening character that is capable of betraying her nation and people and often plays the roles of a spy or femme fatal when presented in cultural presentations (Heo, 2018: 137).[71] However, "comfort women" depicted in Pae or Kim's novels explain the backgrounds of "comfort women" before presenting the aftermath and results.

Nevertheless, all these authors are emotionally drawn to the victims, which is reflected in their literary creations as they carefully depict the victims as their protagonists. All writers conducted thorough research on the topic and read/listened to the testimonies. The objective of publishing these novels for them is explicit in remembering history and redressing the victims. Edensor argues in his work that nationalism is no longer restrictive but popular every day and can be practised freely, reproducing and reformulating the idea of national identity (Edensor, 2002: 7-8). The authors as intellectuals but do not impose their positionality or subordinate "comfort women" with the pretext of bringing them justice. They

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[70] "1950 년대 공론장에서 위안부 는 대부분 양공주, 유엔부인과 같은 '미국군 위안부'를 지칭한다" (Heo, 2018: 103).

[71] "이후 1950 년대 문학이나 대중서사에서 '정신대' 혹은 일본군 '위안 부'는 거의 등장하지 않는다. 대신 미군 '위안부'에 대한 재현이 증가 한다. '양공주'는 언제든 국가와 민족을 배신할 수 있는 위험한 존재이 자 경계인이었으며, 스파이나 팜므파탈로 재현되었다" (Heo, 2018: 137).

attempt to follow historical accuracy by representing historical issues, which enables them to rethink and consolidate their national identity. A statement made by So Chae-won, one of the Korean writers who wrote about Koreans' sufferings during Japanese colonisation, reflects the historical duty that Korean authors would feel: "Before seeing myself as a writer, I am a Korean, living in the Republic of Korea. I yearned to record not create, our historical pain known as "comfort women" and our historical sorrows known as "Hansen's disease" (So, 2014:304).[72] Sonali Das who focuses on what national identity and the nation mean for Indians after postcolonial era is useful to understand how Korean authors consider "comfort women" issue. Das states that patriotism brought people together, and this was maintained through the notions of nation and nationality (Das, 2017: 9). Though his statement does not entirely echo what Yun, Pae, and Kim did, it contains elements that reflect what they intend to achieve with their cultural representations. The three authors also add their creativity, which sets their works free from subordinating "comfort women" and silencing their voices. Through So's statement, the notion of national identity is what strengthens. It motivates the authors and practices nationalism in the case of "comfort women" literature to support the victim-survivors.

6.2 Connectivity between the Intellectual and Subaltern

In the previous section, I tried to look into how nationalism is manifested differently by Korean authors who deal with the "comfort women" issue in their cultural productions and how their national identity is strengthened through their patriotism. This nationalism can be perceived as a form of support for "comfort women" victims. Within the Korean context, nationalism takes on various forms. As previously discussed, the 1965 Japan-Korea Agreement led to the closure of investigations into Japan's wartime actions and its

[72] So Chae-won's novel *Kŭnal* deals with victims who were taken to an island called Sorokdo. See Chapter 4.

responsibility for damages inflicted on the Korean people. The nationalism practised during that period was closely linked to diplomatic relations with Japan and deeply influenced by Confucianism, which had a significant impact on Korean society. Korean nationalist ideals were entwined with Confucian beliefs about womanhood, and the objective was to rebuild a stable nation while maintaining friendly ties with the Japanese government. Under this prevailing form of nationalism, "comfort women" were compelled to remain silent about the injustices they endured. However, as some of the surviving women courageously stepped forward to bring to light the atrocities they had suffered during their time of sexual slavery, a different type of nationalism emerged. This new form of nationalism is what both authors and activists rally behind to provide support and seek redress for the survivors. It represents a shift from silence and complicity to a stance of advocacy, demanding justice and recognition for the victims of the "comfort women" system.

In this section, I wish to look into how intellectuals, the authors, in this case, are necessary, and their balanced relationship with the victims ensures that the voices of subalterns are voiced and presented in their historical fiction. For the representatives of “comfort women” to be heard, the involvement of intellectuals or people of a third party is inevitable, especially with “comfort women” victims. Plus, their voices are never silenced, or their subjectivity is subordinated. They later join the reparation campaigns and participate in conferences and other social events to voice their experience. Discussions on such subjects are often conducted by scholars interested in the topic, aspiring to bring feminism into the “comfort women” discourse. Gayatri Spivak asserts that there is no unrepresentable subaltern subject and that intellectuals should not refrain from representation. Yet, she also warns the intellectuals should be aware of the consciousness of the subalterns (Spivak., 1993: 80). Korean authors do not belong to either the dominant foreign cohort or the dominant indigenous group, which are defined as social elites by Spivak, but these writers can serve as

agents to represent the "comfort women" without silencing the subaltern voice (Spivak, 1993: 26). Although the authors avoid stratification of the power from the author to the "comfort women", some of Pae's interceptions of Kang's narrative by dedicating a chapter on Kobayashi Tateo pertains the danger of ostracisation despite his overall deliverance of Kang's voice.

Pae Hong-chin's *Kŭrim sok*

Pae Hong-chin appears within the narrative of Kang as he inserts his views and voice along with anecdotes of Kang.[73] Tessa Morris-Suzuki articulates how historical novels deal with the past as a process of social transition that affects the living experience of all individuals (Morris-Suzuki, 2005: 39). Indeed, the past is more valued and outweighs the present in Pae's or Kim's works as their novels centralise around the past. Pae is fixated on the past, and his life is affected by this attachment. He feels empathy and is sympathetic towards Kang Tŏk-kyŏng, whom he admires. Most of his chapters focus on Kang's life and background stories about her life that she could not disclose in public. His understanding of the history and use of his literary skills to fill in the missing narrative seems to embody the positive function of an interdependent relationship between the intellectual and the subalterns. Though the time sequences of his chapters are inconsistent, and the lengths of the chapters drastically vary as well, but details of his novel constantly reiterate the importance of history.

Pae Hong-chin's voice dictates the novel; out of twenty-two chapters, eight are fictional representations of Kang. He does not place Kang in the shadows, but some parts of his novel show aspects which improvise and marginalise Kang's positionality. The novel contains chapters with a first-person narrator, the author himself, and the rest in a third-person narrative to describe Kang's experience. The author claims in the foreword that his

[73] See Chapter 3.

work is “an imagined documentary”[74] which came into existence “by borrowing the strength of his hand [(his pen)]”[75] (Pae, 2008: 9). Unlike Pae’s claim that he is lending a hand to reify Kang’s voice, his presence over the novel is sometimes greater than Kang. While his writing technique is experimental and unique, the novel contains his sympathetic understanding of the perpetrator, which may endanger his previous claims to lend his hand to Kang. His depiction of Kobayashi Tateo, who kidnapped, raped, and admitted Kang to a “comfort” station against her will, is somewhat questionable. One entire chapter is dedicated to Kobayashi Tateo. At the end of the chapter, Pae adds a personal comment in a footnote stating, “this is a fiction, derived from my imagination of Kobayashi” (Pae, 2008: 104).[76] He explains his positive portrayal of Kobayashi: “Only when we start to see through his identity as a Japanese soldier and think of him just as a human being like any one of us, do we get to criticise him strictly and reflect on brutalities that humans committed in history” (Pae, 2008: 104).[77] Even though the commentary states that the chapter on Kobayashi is fictional, it pertains to the dangers of romanticising Kobayashi as a timid, clueless, and naïve man in love with Kang, mitigating the level of violence he imposed on Kang. He advocates for his brutality as if it derived from ignorance and innocence: “Surely he is not aware that the place would become her living hell. It also does not occur to his mind that he is committing an unforgivable sin” (Pae, 2008: 91).[78] Pae’s portrayal of Kobayashi’s sentiments seems to reflect what Spivak argued about in relation to effaced subaltern women since this novel is intended to focus on female victims of war; however, they are once again ostracised: “If in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the

[74] “상상 속의 다큐멘터리” (Pae, 2008: 9).
[75] “내 손가락의 힘을 빌려” (Pae, 2008: 9).
[76] “이 글은 픽션으로 고바야시에 대한 나의 상상에서 나온 것이다” (Pae, 2008: 104).
[77] “그를 일본 군인이기 전에 우리와 다를 바 없는 똑같은 인간으로 생각할 때 그때야 비로소 우리는 그를 준엄히 비판하고 역사 속에서 벌어진 인간의 잔악한 행동들에 대해 반성할 수 있을 것이다” (Pae, 2008: 104).
[78] “물론 그는 그곳이 그녀의 생의 구렁텅이가 되리란 사실을 알지 못한다. 자신이 한 여자의 삶에 씻을 수 없는 죄를 짓고 있다는 사실 또한 생각조차 하지 못한다” (Pae, 2008: 91).

subaltern as female is even more deeply in the shadow" (Spivak, 2010: 41). In this novel, just as Spivak argued in her essay in relation to Indian women during the colonial era, Korean "comfort women" are sometimes effaced in the novels that are written to redress them.

Furthermore, Pae states that it is a well-known fact that Kang was captured and raped by Kobayashi and then was taken to a "comfort station" by him. Even if the whole incident was not based on history, his renderings of Kobayashi betray his intentions to be a medium. By "carefully tracing his face and facial expressions that [he has] never seen", Pae meticulously and also gently describes the facial features of Kobayashi, through which Kobayashi is reified into a humane figure (Pae, 2008: 89).[79] Throughout this entire chapter, the "comfort woman" character and also an actual victim-survivor, Kang is interpreted and described only through the gaze of Kobayashi: "Besides her, he shamelessly feels comforted and a relief that he's alive. […] He is safe. He is even moved to tears. His protected soul is intoxicated by her warmth" (Pae, 2008: 94).[80] Pae's speculations that Kobayashi was unaware of hurting Kang can almost be perceived as his endeavour to advocate for Kobayashi: "I think that is what he must have felt" (Pae, 2008: 92).[81] By adding such a statement, the author is revealing his empathy for the perpetrator, which again seems to contradict his initial mission and asserts his authority over the narrative by inserting his subjective opinion.

Pae asserts that it was Kobayashi who forced Kang to the "comfort" station: "It is widely known that she was first taken into the site of forced loyalty [to the Japanese Empire] when Kobayashi captured her as she escaped from an aeroplane factory [where she worked as a member of cho'ngsindae]" (Pae, 2008: 79).[82] Moreover, Pae also states that Kang and Kobayashi were not intimate. He cites Kang's description of her perception of Kobayashi:

[79] "나는 지금 그 남자를 상상하고 있다. 그의 얼굴을, 본적이 없는 그의 표정을 조심스럽게 더듬어 보며 […]" (Pae, 2008: 89).
[80] "뻔뻔하게도 그는 그녀 곁에서 살았다는 안도감과 위안을 느낀다. […] 그는 안전하다. 그는 감동적으로 눈물을 흘리기까지 한다. 보호받은 그의 영혼은 따뜻함에 도취한다" (Pae, 2008: 94).
[81] "생각하건대 그는 분명 그러했을 것이다" (Pae, 2008: 92).
[82] "그녀가 그 강제적인 애국을 하는 장소로 처음 끌려간 것은 주지하다시피 비행기 공장에서 도망치다가 고바야시에게 붙잡혔기 때문이다" (Pae, 2008: 79).

"loathed Kobayashi Tateo until the end of her life for making her fall into a bottomless pit" (Pae, 2008: 79). [83] Despite Kang's sentiments, he still depicts Kobayashi almost as a pitiful victim of unrequited love. The novel illustrates the last scene of Kobayashi as a sad lover after the defeat of Japan: "With his worn-out military cap pulled down, he walks to the corner of the room and sits down, curling up his naked body" (Pae, 2008: 104).[84] In this scene, Kobayashi clutches the air in hopes of holding Kang's wrist again, and when he realises that he no longer can do this, he strips naked and miserably scrunches up in the corner of the room where Kang used to live. His misery is highlighted by the author, which seems to be an attempt to arouse pity from the readers. Kobayashi is a by-product of a malicious system such as war and military; however, depicting him as a naïve and pure character can mislead the readers to unfounded generalisation, and this act can simultaneously be perceived as a misrepresentation of Kang or "comfort woman". Though Kobayashi's entire narrative is fictional, the fact is that he is the main culprit in turning Kang's life into a tragedy as she describes her relationship with Kobayashi. Hence, romanticised Kobayashi Tateo in the novel seems to pertain to a potential of misrepresenting "comfort women".

Kim Sum's *Kunini ch'ŏnsa* and *Sunggoham*

Park So-yang explicated the interdependent relationship between subaltern subjects ("comfort women" in this case) and intellectuals (feminists, scholars and authors) and why it was inevitable for the intellectuals to intervene to have the voices of "comfort women" heard (Park, 2005: 185). Park further provides the historical background of Korea's social and political situation. At first, Kim Hak-sun, the subaltern subject herself, initiated the project of restoring the voices of the "comfort women" victims. It took courage for her to do this and

[83] "하지만 죽는 날까지 그녀가 자신의 인생을 나락으로 떨어뜨린 고바야시 다테오를 증오한 것을 보면 그들은 스짱 관계는 아니었던 것 같다" (Pae, 2008: 79).
[84] "그는 알몸인 채로 낡은 모자를 푹 눌러쓰고 구석으로 걸어가 쪼그려 앉는다" (Pae, 2008: 104).

through her testimony. However, the Korean government and society were not equipped to support these women. Post-war Korea heavily depended on financial aid from Japan and the United States, and it could not demand redress or compensation for the war victims. Simultaneously, the Japanese government refused to admit its involvement and the Japanese military in establishing and managing the "comfort system". Park also adds that the social environment in which "comfort women" were placed was restrictive and complacent about their pains and sufferings. Hence, they became afraid to speak and considered their past shameful. (Park, 2005: 182). Due to such social and political limitations, it was essential to have intellectuals to assist the victims in delivering their voices. Kim Sum was an eligible intellectual as the Korean Council appointed her to write about "comfort women". Kim also admits in her novel that she was approached by the head of the Korean Council to represent the "comfort women", particularly Kim Bok-dong and Kil Wŏn-ok. Kim further adds in the author's note that she vowed to represent the two survivors as she felt so attached to the victims (Kim, 2018c: 222). Through her confession, there is no sign of any hierarchy or stratification of power, as her message shows that her decision is based on devotion and commitment.

Unlike Pae, Kim Sum does not appear in the novel as a character or a narrator, yet she is committed to carrying out the voices of all the victims. While her presence is unexposed, she refers to minute details of traumatic experiences that the "comfort women" had throughout all her works. Even though her novels are all fictional representations of the "comfort women", the readers are informed of factual evidence simultaneously as they access her stories due to the writer's decision to assert her usage of historical references. Kim inserts three-hundred-sixteen footnotes in her *Hanmyŏng*, which she gathered from published testimonies from the victims. In her *Hŭrŭnŭn P'yŏnji*, Kim also has many footnotes, which

add up to a total of twenty-six. There are eighteen footnotes in *Sunggoham* and twenty-one in *Kunini ch'ŏnsa*.

Almost seemingly unrealistic violent scenes at "comfort station" are recreated by her research and detailed information in her footnotes; hence, she mastered merging creativity with historical facts. During an interview with the South Korean Newspaper *JoongAng Ilbo*, the author stated that she considered the victims' testimonies as the foundation for her story because she wanted to centralise on "objective facts". If she "did not highlight that her story is based on testimonies, then the readers will think of the real incidents as fiction" (Park, 2016).[85] Hence, she admitted that the list of references and use of footnotes was intentional, as she believed that if she did not verify the source, facts might be deemed untrue. As shown through her comments, it is evident that she thinks these testimonies as reliable and purposely uses the survivors' testimonies to retaliate against the criticisms mentioned above.

What is more, the author maintained a distance between herself and the subject matter, using only the survivors' voices: "Indeed, Kim decided to structure her narrative on the foundation of the voices of the survivors themselves that distinguishes her novel from the few English-language novels in which we find images of the survivors. The novel is also objective in giving voice, albeit sparingly, to the Japanese soldiers, who in many cases were also coerced into service on behalf of Imperial Japan's war effort" (Fulton, B. and Fulton, J., 2020: 190). The English-language translators of Kim's *Hanmyŏng*, Bruce Fulton and Ju-Chan Fulton, claimed that Kim owns an objective voice, as she adds the survivors' statements that do not necessarily instil resentment towards the Japanese military. Yun Jeong-ok, a feminist and a historian who voluntarily researched "comfort women" as she was from the same

[85] "이 소설은 객관적인 사실이 중심이어야 하는데, 저의 소설적 상상력이 피해자들의 경험을 과장할까 봐 조심스러웠어요. 그리고 실제 일어난 사건임에도 불구하고 차라리 허구였으면 좋겠다는 증언들도 있었고요. 제가 증언을 바탕으로 했다는 점을 부각시키지 않으면 독자들이 허구처럼 느낄까 봐 의도한 면이 있죠". (Park, 2016)

generation as the victims, established the support system between herself and the survivors so that she was able to have the "comfort women" begin their speech process (Park, 2005: 169).

The two novels on Kil and Kim provide their collective voice. Kil does not generalise that all Japanese soldiers are villains: "Amongst Japanese military, there also were kind soldiers" (Kim, 2018b: 67).[86] If the works aimed to instil hatred or intense nationalism, statements like the above may have been omitted. Kim's works do not attempt to dichotomise the Japanese military just as good or bad. Instead, the protagonists, including Kim and Kil, show the empathy and sympathy that victims bestowed on Japanese soldiers. The novels display various sentiments that the women felt instead of filtering out aspects that may seem more suitable to fit the image of the Japanese military as the ultimate nemesis. In *Sunggoham*, Kim Bok-dong utters how she no longer holds any grudges against the Japanese military: "I no longer wish to hate anyone. I no longer wish to hold any grudges against anyone. […] I want to forgive before I leave" (Kim, 2018c: 163).[87] Kil and Kim think in a synchronised manner. Even when she was enslaved, the protagonist from *Hŭrŭnŭn P'yŏnji* prays for the soldiers when they ask for her prayer: "When I see a soldier who is swept over with fear for an upcoming battle, out of pity, I pray for him" (Kim, 2018a: 29).[88] The same sentiment was conveyed in Kim's first novel *Hanmyŏng*: "There were soldiers who cried knowing they were going off to battle. […] Even though she wished that none of the Japanese soldiers would come back alive, this soldier, crying like a child, captured her sympathies" (Fulton, B. and Fulton, J., 2020: 64).[89] Though Pae's novel also contained an empathetic representation of the perpetrator, Pae's work differs from Kim's novels as the author intervenes in the scene and presents his authorial voice and understanding of the perpetrator instead of presenting his

[86] "군인들 중에는 착한 군인도 있었어" (Kim, 2018b: 67).
[87] "아무도 미워하고 싶지 않아. 아무도 원망하고 싶지 않아. […] 용서하고 떠나고 싶어" (Kim, 2018c: 163).
[88] "전투를 앞두고 겁에 질린 군인을 보면 나는 불쌍한 생각이 들어서 빌어준다" (Kim, 2018a: 29).
[89] "전투를 앞두고 울던 군인도 있었다. […] 전투를 나간 일본 군인들이 한 명도 살아서 돌아오지 않기를 바라면서도, 겁에 질려 아이처럼 우는 군인이 안쓰러웠다" (Kim, 2016: 89).

"comfort woman" character to express such thoughts. Moreover, unlike Pae, Kim's presence in the novel is undetectable. She distances herself when she has to present the victims' sentiments (whether it be sympathy or mixed feelings) toward the Japanese soldiers and only the voices of the victims exist in her novel.

Kim Sum's novels on Kil and Kim provide the subjective voice of the victim-survivors. They are presented objectively, reflecting a solid support system between the author and the "comfort women". Park So-yang's comment reflects such a relationship: as the support system between the subalterns and intellectual women consolidates, their voices took the form of testimonies, which led to an interdependent relationship, enabling a new space for speech and history to emerge (Park, 2005: 169). Considering the intensity and depth of her research and her ties to "comfort women" survivors, the author could have been tempted to use the issue politically and project nationalistic agenda on her readers. As conveyed in many of her past interviews, Kim applied various writing techniques to address the issue to fulfil her desire for redress. Undeniably, Korean novels are more fixated on ethical responsibility, even though these works are fiction. Kim Sum's novels dexterously balanced the level of creativity with history. Spivak concludes her essay on subaltern by stating, "the subaltern cannot speak", but her conclusion does not seem to imply that the subaltern women cannot be represented (Spivak, 1993: 104). Unlike Spivak's understanding of subalterns, Park So-yang's perception of subalterns is different because she deems that the "comfort women" are subalterns who can coexist with the intellectuals and cooperate to have their speech to be heard.

7. Limitations and Resolutions for “comfort women” in Korean and Korean American Novels

This chapter will discuss both cohorts of novels written by Korean and Korean American authors. Although the novels reflect the authors’ desires to redress the survivors, certain differences and limitations are discovered in both groups of works. Within the realm of Korean American novels, the character of the "comfort woman" frequently experiences a lack of agency, enduring ridicule, marginalisation, and exposure to male aggression and scrutiny. In some Korean American novels, the “comfort woman” character lacks agency, is ridiculed, marginalised and exposed to male violence and gaze. However, there are also instances when these limitations are transcended.

Though a writer should be granted unrestricted freedom as an artist, it remains crucial to uphold a delicate balance when depicting "comfort women" in the context of historical fiction. This balance requires manoeuvring between unrestrained imaginative expression and conscientious dedication to historical and ethical obligations. Authors who willingly portray "comfort women" in their literary compositions assume a significant duty that extends beyond the boundaries of fiction.

7.1 Objectified Again: Re-objectified Survivors in “comfort women” Novels

Korean American novels inadvertently present “comfort women” figures in a more restrictive setting than Korean works. From certain scenes in the novels, the characters conform to the racial stereotypes, and it feels as though the authors (or narrators) ostensibly impose dominance over “comfort women” characters, ostracising and orientalising them. In *Comfort Woman*, the author utilised literary devices such as the first-person narrative voice to allow Soon-Hyo to speak for herself. However, her voice is circulated as a soliloquy or a

monologue, and the author juxtaposes two narratives of the protagonists, Soon-Hyo (Akiko) and Beccah (Soon-Hyo's bi-racial daughter). She vividly depicts how horrendous Soon-Hyo's experience was as one of the victims of the "comfort system". Even though the readers can hear her thoughts, her narrative is somewhat limited.

Soon-Hyo is objectified and commodified by her American husband. After successfully escaping the comfort station, Soon-Hyo still had to fight hunger, fatigue, and pain. Moreover, no rest or peace is offered to her even when she is "saved" by an American missionary. She is once more enslaved by an American minister and husband, like the Japanese soldiers during the war, who sees and treats her like a sex toy. Her husband "dressed" her the way he wanted even if she "felt naked", and she has no choice but to wear "the uniform … as the minister's wife" (Keller, 1997: 107). By night, her husband expects her to perform the role of a promiscuous woman to satiate his sexual desires, and during the day, her subjectivity is stripped, and her voice is silenced (Keller, 1997: 107). If the Japanese Imperial Army used colonial power over the victim-survivors, the American husband who is a minister abuses and restricts Soon-Hyo by using religion: "Wife, be subject to your husband, as sayeth the Lord, for Christ is head of the church, the husband is the head of the wife and saviour of her body" (Keller, 1997: 112). When she is coerced to be baptised, she is roughly submerged into the water and then yanked by her hair. People who are there to witness the baptism only congratulate her and tells her: "You are born again […] As a Christian, as a wife, and as an American" (Keller, 1997: 104). Her identity as a Korean woman is seemingly eradicated and replaced by a 'new' religious and national identity. Furthermore, she is expected to be grateful though she feels the opposite of what her husband the minister and other Americans hope for her: "I felt empty, desolate, abandoned" (Keller, 1997: 103). Instead of feeling fulfilment, cherished, and saved, she only feels barren, sensing her doomed future with her chauvinistic American husband.

For Soon-Hyo, there never was peace in her life. Her name was stripped away from the moment she was forced into sexual slavery, and her voice was once again silenced when she married an American missionary, who forbade her from disclosing her experience as a "comfort woman". Through her marriage, she is silenced and muted, just as she was at the "comfort station". Her American minister husband physically and psychologically dominates her. She is coerced to dress in "a white blouse pinched in at the waist and a dark-blue skirt that clung to [her] hips and barely covered [her] knees" (Keller, 1997: 107), fully aware that she is being displayed for the satisfaction of her husband. She has no power over her body and is objectified and loses her agency, as she is 'reborn' as a "Christian, as a wife, and as an American" (Keller 1997: 104). Whenever she encounters a stranger or acquaintance from the Bradley family, they quickly identify Soon-Hyo as "a poor little orphan Jap" (Keller, 1997:109) or "Chinee" (Keller, 1997:111). Again, the novel presents images of Korean immigrants being discriminated against due to race and objectified by American white males and exhibits stereotypical portrayals of the Asian minority in the novel. Hence her life as a sexual slave continues with a different perpetrator. He calls her a "prostitute" and asks her to "protect [their] daughter, with [her] silence, from that shame", openly condemning her as disgraceful and silencing her voice (Keller, 1997: 196). According to their testimonies, real-life "comfort women" victims also experienced what Soon-Hyo goes through in the novel. Due to patriarchal social norms, in the postcolonial and post-war periods, unmarried women who had maintained their "chastity" were treated with respect, and those who had lost their virginity whether by choice or by force were considered impure (Koo, 2007: 394-95). These are some of the main reasons that silenced victim-survivors in real life, just as the prejudice that Soon-Hyo's husband harbours against her in the novel.

This recurrence of the re-enslavement of "comfort women" is a common theme in novels by Korean American authors. Apart from an idealised depiction of Americans and the

American military, while Sadamu disparages the Japanese army, Soon-ah from *A Gift of the Emperor* perceives Koreans as backward and barbaric. When she reaches the United States, she accepts a job offer to work at a pineapple plantation, where she discovers that most of the labourers are Korean. Korean boys roam about “shirtless”, grabbing snakes with their “bare hands” and fighting over their catch (Park, 1997: 190). Initially, the Korean community seems accepting and welcoming, but Soon-ah is at risk of getting raped by Korean men on the night of her arrival. These men fight over Soon-ah to take her as their bride, but their treatment and perception of Korean women is almost the same as how the Japanese military considered them. Though scholars have not discussed these scenes from Park’s novel, such a description may lead to misguided representations or stereotypes of Korean migrant workers. Just like Japanese soldiers who took part in the “comfort system”, these labourers talk about the “costs” of women as if they are products being shipped off from Korea to America: “You stupid bastard! Why worry? If you don’t make her yours someone else will take her. You know how much it costs to buy a woman from Korea, don’t you?” (Park, 1997: 192). When one of the men sounds hesitant to take Soon-ah by force, another man talks about selling her and her worth in money: “If you don’t want her, I’ll take her to Honolulu. As pretty as she is, I know I can get at least a thousand dollars for her” (Park, 1997: 192). The conversation between the men in the novel alludes to the practice of "picture brides”, women who came to the U.S. to marry Korean bachelors after exchanging photos and letters. Indeed there existed so-called “picture brides” who entered the U.S. after the first wave of Korean bachelors arrived in Hawaii between 1903 and 1905 (Kim, 2008: 41). The novel does not explicitly use the term "picture bride”, but it implies its relevance within the narrative. This scene sheds light on the harsh realities of the "picture bride" practice and how inhumane it is. The novel's portrayal of Korean men solely as aggressive and barbaric, treating the female protagonist as

a commodity, appears to oversimplify the intricate situation and origin of the "picture bride", notwithstanding its faults and flaws.

Similar to the dynamic in her marriage to a white American husband, a definite hierarchy also exists within the mother-daughter relationship. While both Soon-Hyo and Beccah share their stories in their allocated chapters, their narratives exist as separate monologues without any interaction between them: "Although their accounts are formally aligned, there is no instance where the perspectives of the two women intersect" (Yoneyama, 2003: 72). Moreover, the disconnectedness between the mother-daughter relationship stems from shame although it evolves into an affection after Soon-Hyo's death and discovery of her mother's tape. Beccah's hesitance in not knowing what to add to her mother's obituary proves that she lacked a connection with her mother:

> I have recorded so many deaths that the formula is in my brain: Name, age, date of death, survivors, and services. And yet, when it came time for me to write my own mother's obituary, as I held a copy of her death certificate in my hand, I found that I did not have the facts for even the most basic, skeletal obituary. And I found I did not know how to start imagining her life. (Keller, 1997: 26)

This passage illustrates Beccah's connection with her mother is notably limited, and her reflections of her are largely empty, symbolising a significant disconnection from her deceased mother. While her viewpoint shifts after uncovering her mother's history, her initial stance continues to be marked by lack of knowledge and emotional distance from her mother. Though scholars interpret Keller's depiction of the mother-daughter relationship as a solid female bond that heals and strengthens the victimised Soon-Hyo, there still are implications which seem to signify the void or disconnection between the mother and the daughter. She rekindles her affection for her mother by listening to a tape left by Soon-Hyo, but though she claims that she is conversing with her mother by listening to the tape, it is still one-sided: Beccah cannot access her mother's past except as traces, through her remains and the disembodied voice left on a cassette tape (Yoneyama, 2003: 72). Furthermore, she

characterizes her mother's voice on the recording as "senseless wails, a high-pitched keening relieved by the occasional gunshot of drums" (Keller, 1997: 191). Eventually, Beccah deciphers her mother's wails and discovers that Soon-Hyo was a "Battalion slave" (Keller, 1997: 193). Nevertheless, as Yoneyama contends, even this realisation is achieved only after her mother's death and after riffling through a dictionary to look up the meaning of "Chongshindae". She also cannot be certain if her mother really was a former "comfort woman" as Soon-Hyo is already dead: "Even while the readers know that Akiko was a survivor of a Japanese military comfort system, Beccah cannot confirm her mother's final truth in the latter's absence" (Yoneyama, 2003: 72).

Aside from the disconnection and reshaping of the fractured mother-daughter relationship between Soon-Hyo and Beccah, a disparity emerges in Soon-Hyo's self-presentation within her narrative and the perception of her by others and her daughter. Within her chapters, Soon-Hyo sounds eloquent, calm, and proficient in English. Her stories flow coherently and may even evoke sympathy from the readers. However, it is also noteworthy that she is inarticulate when communicating with her daughter and others around her in real life. She speaks in broken English and is often depicted as a "crazy lady" (Keller, 1997: 87-88). Although working as a spirit medium ensures financial security for her and her family, she is seen as a neglectful mother. Beccah intentionally ignores her mother out of shame when Soon-Hyo visits her school:

> I wanted to help my mother, shield her from the children's sharp-toothed barbs, and take her home. And yet I didn't want to. Because for the first time, as I watched and listened to the children taunting my mother, using their tongues to mangle what she said into what they heard, I saw and heard what they did. And I was ashamed. (Keller, 1997: 87-88)

Soon-Hyo comes to the school in her pyjamas with her messy hair. The stark difference between Soon-Hyo in her narrative and Beccah's accentuates her limitation as a reliable narrator. She cannot pronounce her daughter's name correctly, and this harsh utterance is

highlighted by hyphens, signifying the slow tempo of how she enunciates the words, “Roh-beccah Blad-u-ley” (Keller, 1997: 88).

In “Traveling Memories, Contagious Justice: Americanization of Japanese War Crimes at the End of the Post-Cold War”, Yoneyama explicates how transnationality in redressing “comfort women” in the U.S. contains both positive and negative aspects of understanding the Japanese military comfort station system during World War II. On one hand, she draws attention to the detrimental consequence of “Asian/American transnationality in redress” or the Americanization of post-war memory: “Here, a foreign national, who is not restricted by the past U.S. treaties, is today empowered by the U.S. constitution to work through its own contradictions by representing knowledge of Japanese war crimes in the U.S. public sphere” (Yoneyama, 2003: 78). This phenomenon distorts historical perspectives and contextualises the issue within a narrower framework, possibly overshadowing the experiences and perspectives of the victim nations. Beccah is explicitly presented as racially superior above her mother for she is not an Asian immigrant but ethnically white as well, who speaks fluent English. On the other hand, Soon-Hyo’s poor English is scrutinised and becomes a reason for discrimination and racism. Moreover, in Keller’s novel, the U.S. is presented as a place where “individual emancipation and political realisation are at least promised”, while “Asia” symbolises inertness and “undifferentiated realm of victimisation” (Yoneyama, 2003: 70). This is what Yoneyama warns about Americanisation of Asian history.

On the other hand, Yoneyama also underscores the constructive benefits of conducting this discourse within the U.S. context. Transnational activism has the potential to bring about changes and facilitate redress for victims, particularly those who have suffered injustices during the post-war period. She highlights how such ways can facilitate a collective recollection of Japanese militarism and colonialism, contributing to a more comprehensive

historical awareness. To strengthen her argument regarding the dual aspects of Americanizing the "comfort women" issue, Yoneyama discussed Nora Okja Keller's *Comfort Woman*. This discussion serves to strengthen her claim by examining how the topic is presented within American literary representation.

Though this novel has a sense of Americanized understanding of Korean historical facts, the author's efforts to "give" a voice to Soon-Hyo should not be disregarded. As mentioned earlier, Yoneyama claims that despite the disconnection of Beccah and Soon-Hyo, reparation can still be achieved beyond immediate survivors and descendants. A relationship like this, Korean mother and her Korean American daughter, suggests the possibility of collective identity that transcends the original time and place. The text might hint at a deep transformation of subjectivity beyond the literal bounds of Korean identity, connecting Beccah to her mother and the "comfort women" community: "This inference proposes that the collective entity to which those seeking reparation belong need not necessarily pre-exist prior to their active involvement in the pursuit of justice" (Yoneyama, 2003: 73). In Young-Oak Lee's interview with the author, Keller (2003) discussed the role of a writer: "[F]or me the role of a writer is to write the story as accurately and emotionally as possible, and hopefully, the result of that will build more empathy, will allow people to have empathy and insight for others that they might not necessarily have met or understood before" (Lee and Keller, 2003: 153). Though Soon-Hyo can sometimes feel unreachable, Keller aims for a "true emotional connection with the characters" (Lee and Keller, 2003: 153). Moreover, she believes that Beccah's discovery of her mother's past "parallels the world's discovery of the stories of comfort women" (Lee and Keller, 2003: 153). She believes that just like in her story, the stories of "comfort women" will continue to be remembered and "will not die unknown and unrecognised, lost in history" (Lee and Keller, 2003: 153). As Dana Hansen

stated, “Keller offers no easy answers or resolution to the comfort woman’s pain and suffering” (Hansen, 2007: 54).

7.2 Remedies and Resolutions: Can the “comfort women” speak?: an Interdependent Tie between “comfort women” and the Authors

Authors in literary platforms represent intellectuals that coexist with the subalterns, and the solidarity between the two groups (the authors and the “comfort women”) seems to reflect what Park has defined as an “interdependent relationship” (Park, 2005: 169). For the voices of “comfort women” to be heard, the involvement of intellectuals or people of a third party is inevitable, as feminist scholar Park So-yang states in her article on “comfort women”. Discussions on such subjects are often conducted by scholars who take an interest in the topic, aspiring to bring feminism into the “comfort women” discourse, but Park believes that one should not select only one idea and disregard other subjects. Gayatri Spivak’s essay, “Can the subaltern speak?” article garnered many hegemonic scholarly discussions on subaltern subjects, in which she analysed the conversation between Deleuze and Foucault to counterargue their claims. In her essay, she mentions how colonialism led to the codification of Indian culture and also created narratives which state that white men save Indian women, simplifying and expunging Indian tradition and culture. Similarly, colonial Korea or even post-war Korea is often politically and socially codified, effacing the suffering “comfort women”. It took five decades for the victims to come forward and divulge the atrocities that they experienced. Often, political, social, and historical scholars have appropriated the voice of “comfort women” and their experience to discuss nationalism and ethnocentrism. On the other hand, some feminists desired to discuss the “comfort women” issue specifically with notions of feminism, believing only female matters should be considered when approaching

the “comfort women” topic. Hence, the discussions about the victims have often been dichotomised.

In “comfort women” literature, though the presence of the authors may be hidden, their interventions are inevitable. Literary representations of “comfort women” are conducted by literary agents (the authors), and it is different from how voices of “comfort women” are delivered on other platforms. Korean and Korean American writers approached the issue with their authority as an author. Hence, the role of the authors becomes fundamental to reify the voices of “comfort women”. There are no limitations on a writer’s imagination, but some levels of historical and ethical responsibilities are required from the writers who represent “comfort women” in their historical fiction.

The Japanese government and the Japanese military refused to admit their involvement in establishing and managing the “comfort system”. On the other hand, the Korean government and society were not equipped to support these women. Post-war Korea heavily depended on aid from Japan and America to rebuild its nation and was not in a position to assert claims for redress or compensation on behalf of the war victims. In order to secure financial assistance from both countries, Korea had to put aside the issue of "comfort women." In the 1965 Japan and Korea Agreement signed in exchange for a loan from Japan to Korea, it was explicitly stated that “inquiries into the wartime past, and Japan’s responsibility for any damages caused to Korean people, were to be closed” (Park, 2005: 185). Consequently, the issue of "comfort women" became one of the wartime matters that Korea was coerced into keeping silent about. For diplomatic reasons, the Korean government imposed silence. At the same time, social norms also restricted “comfort women:” “As is the case in colonial gender politics, Korean nationalist ideas also inherit Confucian notions of womanhood as chaste, virtuous and maternal and are preoccupied with the Confucian polarisation between the ‘respectable’ and the ‘defiled’” (Ahn, 2020: 120). As a result,

women were expected to remain chaste, and since chastity was perceived as virtuous, the "comfort women" were compelled to remain silent.

Due to the complexities of “comfort women” discourse, they were sometimes interpreted in different ways to strengthen the political and historical narratives led by governments and historians. Scholars also used the stories of the victims to highlight colonial experience, and in the process they often obliterated the specificity of these women’s experiences as women. As stated earlier, the subaltern women had no choice but to stay as recluses.

Korean scholars have presented divided views on this issue sometimes with extreme nationalism or feminism to understand the subalterns. Ueno Chizuko and Park Yu-ha have tended to focus on feminism when analysing “comfort women”, while Kim Pu-ja attempted to merge gender issues with other socio-political issues to advocate for “transfeminism” to consider “comfort women” issues (Yi, 2020: 156). Pae Sang-mi rebuked Park Yu-ha for using a Japanese soldier’s anecdote to justify the “comfort system” and Ueno Chizuko for advocating that “feminism should transcend nationalism and can transcend it” (Pae, 2013: 279). However, as Ueno’s understanding of the "comfort women" issue centres more on the victimized women, she expresses concerns that the discourse surrounding "comfort women" tend to focuse more on nationalism, possibly diverting attention from the pains and sufferings experienced by these women.

In a similar vein, Kang Chŏng-suk, a researcher at Korea Ch'ongsindae’s Institute, claimed that Ueno disregards the circumstantial elements that complicate the discourse on the victims (Kang, 2000: 274), and seems to dichotomise her argument by centralising feminism while eradicating notions of nationalism. According to Kang, Ueno only focuses on the flaws of the patriarchal system and how it restricts the voices of the victims, which may lead to inciting negligence in exonerating the Japanese government from legal and ethical liabilities

(Kang, 2000: 277). Though Ueno may commit the folly of blurring the boundaries of imperialism, her discussion on "comfort women" with feminist notions is understandable though. Her censure of a patriarchal society that prevented the voices from being heard and shaming act that also placed the victims to refrain from coming out are valid arguments (So, 2000: 17). "Comfort women" issue complexities, as it encapsulates factors of imperialism, colonialism, ethnocentrism, and gender discrimination and violence, certainly requires a balanced and inclusive discourse.

The dynamics of feminism and nationalism in the "comfort women" discourse often yield more obstacles for the "comfort women" movement as the debate on the validity of either notion never seems to cease. Nationalists and postcolonial experts believe that the "comfort women" discourse should centralise on strengthening the voice as a colonised subject while feminists yearn to prioritise women's issues. The involvement of intellectuals that Park So-yang articulates in her article is to deconstruct the ideological and "silencing structure of society" that restricts the subalterns from speaking, and she also underlines how an intellectual should refrain from being a "detached, benevolent, all-knowing subject" (Park, 2005: 203).

This particular role seems to be fulfilled by 'intellectuals' or writers from the literary platform. Starting with Yun Chŏng-mo, Korean writers such as Pae Hong-chin and Kim Sum have approached the "comfort women" issue with an ethical mission. The authors have discussed their intentions in writing about "comfort women". There is no literary formula or norm that they followed, but each author has stressed the importance of telling the story of "comfort women", which is essentially the relationship between the victims and the literary representations. In the case of "comfort women" literature, the writers do not function as a missing agent or overpowering intellectual, but instead, they seem to work along with the subalterns to extend their discourses.

In Yun Chŏng-mo's *Emi Irŭmŭn*, the novel depicts a society that humiliates "comfort women". The character, Mun-ha symbolises the prejudiced or misogynistic Korean society and Japanese military that encouraged the silence of female victims of war. He sexually violates his old-time friend Ok-nim without remorse and justifies his actions. The novel begins and ends in the son's voice, but the mother narrates her pain from the start of chapter 4. She tells her clueless son, who accuses her of being unfaithful to his father, that she is a "comfort woman". Like countless "comfort women" who came forward, "comfort women" characters also stress the importance of telling their stories. Before she begins her story, Mun-ha's mother asks her son to remember and "engrave the incident in the corner of his heart with cold rationality" (Yun, 1997: 115).[90]

Indeed there is no norm or rule that an author has to abide by to render the stories of "comfort women". The first novel in English, composed by Nora Okja Keller, came out in 1997, and Bracht's novel was published in 2018. Though the novel still renders the message of "telling", Bracht's historical fiction also underscores the importance of "remembering". JinHee, a close friend of the protagonist, tells Emi not to detest tourists who wish to learn about them/haenyeos: "Their excitement for our work travels with them back to their home countries. […] If we are still spoken about, then we can never disappear" (Bracht, 2018: 60). This particular incident is not identical to the scene in Yun's novel; however, this scene seems to convey the message that the stories of "comfort women" must be told. Moreover, Bracht's novel seems to take a further step by highlighting how "memory" secures existence. Though JinHee is referring to their job as haenyeo in this scene, the author's intention to tell and remember the subalterns seems to be materialised through JinHee's statement. Just like Kim Sum and many other Korean writers, the author adds an "Author's Note", in which she provides some information about colonial Korea, the post-war period, Korean traditions, and

[90] "냉정한 이성으로 그런 일도 있었다는 것만 마음 한 귀퉁이에 새겨 두면 그만이다" (Yun, 1997: 115).

female victims of war. She also provides a timeline of important historical dates in Korea and ends her novel by giving a selected reading list that could assist her readers in learning more about Korea.

Pae Hong-chin's work is an amalgamation of his imagination with historical data he collected on Kang Tŏk-kyŏng, a former "comfort woman". The author himself appears in the novel and paints the narrative of Kang's past. He even adds a chapter that delivers a story from a Japanese soldier's viewpoint. Kang was long pursued by one particular Japanese soldier who first took her to a "comfort station" and became obsessed with Kang. The entire chapter is about how this soldier feels about Kang and what he does to stay with her. He is the perpetrator who entrapped Kang into a tragedy. One entire chapter is about Kobayashi Tateo, and at the end of the chapter, he adds a comment in a footnote, which says, "this is a fiction, derived from my imagination of Kobayashi" (Pae, 2008: 104).[91] He reveals his intention why he has depicted a humane side of Kobayashi: "Before seeing him as a Japanese soldier, it is not until we see him as a human being that enables us to strictly criticise him and reflect on a human's brutalities committed in the history" (Pae, 2008: 104).[92] His understanding of the history and use of his literary skills to fill in the missing narrative seems to embody the interdependent relationship between the intellectual and the subalterns. In her testimonial novels, Kim Sum also captures a similar view: "Not all soldiers were bad. Soldiers were no different from Chosŏn women when departing their parents and siblings. Some soldiers would tell me to take a break and leave after sitting around. Some would offer me tobacco. There also were savage ones who would punch me if the slightest thing bothers

[91] "이 글은 픽션으로 고바야시에 대한 나의 상상에서 나온 것이다" (Pae, 2008: 104).
[92] "그를 일본 군인이기 전에 우리와 다를 바 없는 똑같은 인간으로 생각할 때 그때야 비로소 우리는 그를 준엄히 비판하고 역사 속에서 벌어진 인간의 잔악한 행동들에 대해 반성할 수 있을 것이다" (Pae, 2008: 104)

them" (Kim, 2018: 85).[93] These two authors, Pae and Kim, seem to present, not instil, the atrocities and the past. While maintaining their distances as observers and recorders, they carefully craft the narratives of these victims, adhering to their beliefs in their responsibilities as authors.

In Kim Sum's works, she also attempts to offer a different aspect of Japanese soldiers. As a collective, the Japanese military is generally depicted as abominable and merciless beings. As an individual, Japanese soldiers show emotions just as any human being. In *Hŭrŭnŭn P'yŏnji*, Japanese soldiers who visit the protagonist ask her to pray for them. The protagonist evinces mixed sentiments towards the soldiers. She feels sympathy for the soldiers who are "entrapped in fear" as they anticipate the war (Kim, 2018a: 29). The Japanese soldiers are depicted as multi-faceted characters, and sometimes they seem as vulnerable as "comfort women" victims themselves. The protagonist in *Hŭrŭnŭn P'yŏnji*, out of human compassion, prays for the soldiers though their violence to "comfort women" cannot be forgiven: "I prayed for their safe return. I prayed that they return alive, though I did not know their names or hometowns……. They asked me to" (Kim, 2018a: 61). These portrayals seem to reflect the author's perception of war and its impact on people. She does not show that Japanese soldiers are benevolent, yet she does not neglect how vulnerable the soldiers were at war. In a way, the author suggests that the nemesis is the war itself, affecting everyone most negatively. Most of the time, Japanese soldiers are depicted and described as emotionless beings. Kim Sum reveals the vulnerability of Japanese soldiers, yet she does not justify the violence inflicted on the women, providing more diverse ways of understanding the situation that history books cannot offer. The soldiers in her novel do not appear as benevolent or romantic beings. Their weakness is presented, but the appearance of such

[93] "군인이라고 다 나쁘지는 않았어. 부모 형제 떠나온 건 군인들이나 조선 여자들이나 마찬가지였어. 어떤 군인은 쉬라며 그냥 앉아 있다 갔어. 어떤 군인은 담배를 주고 가고. 조금만 맘에 안 들어도 주먹질을 하는 사나운 군인도 있었어" (Kim, 2018c: 85).

character is to reveal tragic aspects of the war. The author's intention seems to echo Pae's articulation about the Japanese soldier Kobayashi Tateo.

Similarly, Mary Lynn Bracht's *White Chrysanthemum* attempts to depict history like Pae's *Kŭrim sok* did. In *White Chrysanthemum*, a Japanese soldier obsesses one particular Korean woman. The victims gave accounts that specific Japanese soldiers obsessed over "comfort women;" hence her fiction constructs plausible structure as historical fiction. In her novel, Bracht creates a Japanese character, Morimoto, who forms an odd obsession with her main protagonist, Hana. This character is quite similar to Kobayashi Tateo, who haunted Kang in reality.

Pae's creation involves facts he gathered about this Japanese soldier. On the other hand, Bracht's story is purely fictional. She even adds a happy ending for her "comfort woman" character by having her live with a Mongolian man who cares for her. Hana does not return to Korea but settles in Mongolia, which seems fictional and idealistic. However, many did not survive after the war, and some failed to return to their homelands. In her "author's notes", the author explains why she has an imaginary happy ending for Hana: "In the writing of this book, I fell in love with Hana, who for me came to represent all the women and girls who suffered her fate. I couldn't leave her dead in the Mongolian dirt by a soldier's hand; though the chances of the real-life Hanas reaching freedom are slim, my ending is what I wish could have happened to Hana and others like her" (Bracht, 2018: 301). Bracht also explains why she has the Statue of Peace sculpted in the image of Hana. The plotline has to stay that way for her character Emi to discover and assume what must have happened to her sister Hana. However, Bracht also explains that the statue "was not sculpted in the image of a particular lost 'comfort woman,' but she chose to construct the narrative by having the statue resemble Hana since "it makes for a good story" (Bracht, 2018: 301). Her comments show the power of an author. This can be seen as an exercise of the author's authority. Unlike

intellectuals like historians, the writer has the power to create and represent "comfort women" in ways that the author finds fit. Indeed, this practice may pertain to perils. If an author decides to fabricate the history, the image of subalterns that appear in such novels can be projected differently from the subalterns in real life.

On the other hand, Kalliope Lee's representation of "comfort women" endangers the relationship between the intellectuals and the subalterns. Verbal self-representation via first-person narrative may empower Sibyl to present the story about Jang-Mee and herself. Readers are exposed to Jang-Mee through Sibyl's depiction of her. They do not hear Jang-Mee's voice, a reified being of a "comfort woman" illusion. Sibyl intentionally places herself in dangerous situations to experience what Jang-Mee went through. Though she physically abuses herself to access Jang-Mee's visions, it is already a vision that no longer belongs to the victim at the "comfort station". Ultimately, the protagonist cries for Jang-Mee, herself, and her mother, amalgamating everyone as an unconvincing collective while her mother has no connection to "comfort women". Plus, the novel does not reveal whether Jang-Mee is dead or not. Then there is a sudden confession by Sibyl that Jang-Mee, herself, and Dr Noh share the same wounds (Lee, 2013: 324). For Sibyl, going through the masochistic intercourses with a handful of random men of her choice differentiates her from the "comfort women" victims, and this is portrayed as if she owns agency by exercising her freedom in sexual life. There seems to be a breach between the author and the subalterns due to misleading imagery projected in Sibyl.

Except for historical facts on "comfort women", Mary Lynn Bracht's novel consists of the author's imagination. However, Bracht attempts to convey her desire to represent "comfort women" and even provide justice for the victims in the literary platform. Her main characters are female divers called "haenyeos", the most self-reliant women in Korea. Since the *haenyeos* provide for their families purely with their skills as divers, they may not even be

deemed, subalterns. Hana, when taken by the Japanese military, shows her confidence in her work, which manifests in how she perceives herself as a member of an independent and unified group: "My mother and I are haenyeo. We owe no man a debt. Only the sea can claim a debt from us" (Bracht, 2018: 31). Hana's sister chooses to become *haenyeo* and reprimands her daughter, who does not wish to be like her: "We dive in the sea like our mothers and grandmothers, and great-grandmothers have for hundreds of years. This gift is our pride, for we answer to no one, not our fathers, husbands, older brothers, or even Japanese soldiers, during the war. We catch our food, make our own money, and survive with the harvest given to us from the sea" (Bracht, 2018: 86). Again, the author highlights how women as "haenyeos" are in charge of the families' sustenance and are unbound by any males whether they are Korean or Japanese.

As a mouthpiece for the victims, Kim Sum adds a paragraph which seems to be targeted at the scholars who question the authenticity of "comfort women" testimonies:

> I heard of people attacking us because they found the stories improbable and lacking consistency. Their blame targeted those who gave accounts of what happened inside the comfort stations. They could not articulate at what age they were taken, who took them, and where they were taken. They disregarded that majority of these girls were not even familiar with place names of their hometowns and could not write their own names since they could not attend schools. Several decades of time have passed, memories were chopped and shuffled, leaving them in chunks and disarray. (Kim, 2016: 150)[94]

The sorrowful monologue reflects criticisms made by historians and scholars who question the testimonies of "comfort women" survivors. Some of the disparagements involve the belatedness of their reveal. This passage is significant because it is not purely Kim Sum's speculation and imagination. After all, supporting evidence exists in historical documents. Chung Chin-sung, the head of the research lab dedicated to "comfort women" studies and

[94] 신빙성이 없다고, 앞뒤가 맞지 않는다고 비난하는 이들이 있다고 들었다. 위안소에서 있었던 일들을 알리고 다니는 이들을 향해서. 몇 살 때 끌려갔는지, 누구한테 끌려갔는지, 어디로 끌려갔는지 분명히 대지를 못하니까. 고향 지명조차 제대로 모르는 데다, 학교에 다니지를 못해 자기 이름 석 자도 쓸 줄 모르던 소녀들이 대부분이었다는 걸 고려도 않고. 수십 년이 흘러 기억들이 토막 나고 뒤죽박죽 뒤섞여버렸다는 걸 모르고. (Kim, 2016: 150)

former co-director of the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan, provides four reasons why it took five decades "comfort women" victims to testify. Firstly, "Japanese government and the military took part in the cover-up" of military records on its involvement with "comfort women" system and there are military records which state that there were orders on the disposal of documents on "comfort women" (Chung, 2004: 100).[95] Secondly, Korea and other Asian victim nations were "suffering economically and politically as well as unready for social movements", meaning they could not stand up to demand an apology from Japan (Chung, 2004: 100). Unlike Korea and other Asian countries, as the Netherlands was a stronger nation than other countries, "the Netherlands government was able to prosecute nine Japanese soldiers who were charged with forcibly drafting Dutch women to serve as Japanese military 'comfort women'" (Chung, 2004: 100). However, above all, Chung highlights that "patriarchal society" silenced the victims out of "guilt and shame", especially since the "patriarchal society stigmatised the victims instead of condemning violence by the perpetrators" (Chung, 2004: 101). Lastly, "studies on women were stagnant at the time" (Chung, 2004: 101). As Chung explicates in detail, there are reasons women could not come out in public, especially when society was not ready to accept them. As Chung incessantly states in her work, shaming the victims was common. In both testimonial fictions composed by Kim Sum, the aforementioned social issues are conveyed: "People say that they are ashamed of me. […] No one looked for me. No one. […] I was also ashamed of myself" (Kim, 2018b: 59-60).[96] The shaming process by society further led these victims to blame other victims. Concerning Kim Hak-sun, the first "comfort woman" who gave public testimony, Kil Won-ok comments, "I was ashamed of her. I felt bitter and thought her as pathetic. What is there to brag about [being a "comfort woman"] to appear on television"

[95] "그것은 무엇보다도 일본정부와 군의 자료은폐 때문이었다. […] 종전 직후 담당군인들에게 자료폐기의 명령을 내렸다는 사실이 군 문서에서 발견되고 있다" (Chung, 2004: 100).
[96] "나를 창피해하는 사람들. 나를. 내가 창피하대. […] 아무도 나를 안 찾았어. 아무도. […] 나도 내가 창피했어" (Kim, 2018b: 59-60).

(Kim, 2018b: 74).[97] Kim Bok-dong also mentions how her narratives were denied: "When I first told my mom, she said that I am lying. A person cannot live after such experience. That incident, the one that I experienced" (Kim, 2018b: 44). In the novel, Kim is again prevented from giving her testimony due to shaming carried out by her other family members: "When I decided to find myself, my eldest sister stopped me. She told me to stay silent for the sake of my nephews. Still I wanted to search for myself. […] After I registered [to the centre for "comfort women"], the eldest severed her ties with me. My father, and even my nephews who did jesa [memorial service] for my mom [broke off their relationship with me]" (Kim, 2018b: 136). Kim's two testimonial novels are based on her interviews with actual victims, and the two novels' monologue-like narrations reflect the stigmatisation that society enforced on them. This is one of the many reasons why the intellectuals' relationship with the victims is essential.

The subaltern that Spivak mentioned in her essay lacks political and social agency for which she may require a signifier, and the dilemma begins when the intellectual imposes ideological structure on the subalterns to concur. As with the case of "comfort women", the victims are subalterns who suffered from effacement by society and men yet took a stand and voiced their pains and trauma. Initially, they also had no choice but to stay as a recluse, yearning to own a voice. However, as one woman began to testify, others followed. In the literary field, authors picked up their pens to fight for women with their literary works. Park Soyang believes that "comfort women" are "the subaltern women [who] gradually turned out to be collaborators with the intellectual women in the project of rewriting history, and of making a new history" (Park, 2005: 188). This change is overt in the political or social platform. The subalterns are now acknowledged as activists rather than mere victims. However, they did not have a chance to compose their own stories from the start. In the

[97] "그 여자가 창피했어. 원망스럽고 한심했어. 그게 무슨 자랑이라고 티브이까지 나와 그 이야기를 하나 싶었어" (Kim, 2018b: 74).

literary field, authors approached this topic, and as this is a historical issue, many conducted thorough research, while others did not.

The ethical liabilities that authors feel indebted to “comfort women” do not seem to consolidate their nationalistic sentiments, but they seem to encourage them to tell, remember and collaborate with the “comfort women”. Historical fiction serves as a unique avenue for conveying these narratives beyond political or historical discussions. Historical novel negotiates the boundary between historical facts and fiction. While it incorporates real historical events, figures, and contexts, it also allows for creative interpretation and contextualises historical events, making them seem more relatable and understandable to readers. Authors use this blend to convey a sense of historical authenticity while offering narrative flexibility. Moreover, historical fiction can elicit strong emotional responses by creating characters and situations that readers can emotionally connect with. This emotional engagement helps readers feel a personal connection to the historical events being portrayed, allowing them to "re-live" the experiences of the “comfort women” figures in the novels, as mentioned earlier. Historical fiction can also address gaps or silences in official historical accounts. It can provide details about the personal lives, emotions, and interactions of “comfort women” as the experiences of these women might not have been thoroughly documented.

In summary, historical fiction plays a unique role in negotiating, blending, and utilizing the categories of history and fiction. It bridges the gap between documented history and imaginative storytelling, providing a platform for conveying historical events while providing a more nuanced understanding of the past. All in all, “intellectuals” or writers in literary field address the "comfort women" issue and their narratives in a way that traditional political or historical discourses might struggle to achieve.

Chapter 8. Conclusion

Japanese officials apologised to "comfort women" victims for many years, starting with then Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi in 1995. The 2015 Japan and Korea "comfort women" agreement was considered a final reconciliation for both nations. In the article "Reconciliation Means Having to Say You're Sorry", Lily Gardner Feldman acknowledges previous apologies made by Japanese officials. Although they may be deemed as a good start, they still "stand as islands in a sea of denial, not as markers in a consistent effort to face the past. None was followed by robust, concrete action" (Feldman, 2014). Murayama emphasised the necessity of history education; however, the Abe administration attempted to retract previous apologies made by Kono and Murayama and revise history by asserting that no coercion was involved when recruiting "comfort women" and that the Japanese military's wartime behaviour was far from being aggressive (Feldman, 2014). Abe also organised a task force to expunge the records of the past. The attempts to rescind the history of "comfort women" extended over to the United States when the Japanese government contacted McGraw-Hill (a world history textbook publisher in the U.S.) to remove mention of "comfort women" in the textbook (Adelman et al., 2015a).[98] Following the agreement, Prime Minister Abe announced that since Japan has shown remorse and apologised, there is no need for future Japanese generations to concern themselves over the issue (Kim and Park, 2015). In addition, current Prime Minister and former foreign minister Kishida Fumio also told the *Japan Times* after the 2015 Agreement that "comfort women" were not sex slaves (*Japan Times*, 2016). These public comments made by the two Japanese political leaders contradict what the two governments agreed on in 2015. Even though tension still

[98] The dispute between American and Japanese historians carried on through their articles in this journal from March till December 2015. After the fifth article, the journal released a formal announcement in the footnote, stating: "We are no longer accepting comments on this page. AHA members who wish to discuss this important historical issue may do so at the Member Forum" (Aoyagi et al., 2015).

exists between the two nations on the issue, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea affirmed in 2022 that the 2015 Agreement remains as it is.[99]

As the diplomatic platform is setting limitations on discourses on "comfort women", the other route to discuss the matter seems to be through cultural productions. In this research, I aimed to explore how Korean and Korean American novels have dealt with the "comfort women" issue. The two cohorts were inspired to deliver the matter in their novels for different reasons, but a shared goal was to remember and recontextualise the "comfort women" narratives.

Korean novels reproduced specific details from historical records. They focused on the collective identity and memory of the victims. Novels by Yun Chŏng-mo, Pae Hong-chin, and Kim Sum referenced words from testimonies made by real-life survivors to retain historical accuracy and underscore the importance of history. Post-memory of the "comfort women" issue is essential, to rebuild the connection with the wartime victims.[100] To achieve a balance of history and memory within historical fiction works such as *Emi Irŭm, Kŭrim sok, Hanmyŏng, Hŭrŭnŭn P'yŏnji*, *Kunini ch'ŏnsa*, and *Sunggoham* all incorporate anecdotes or testimonies by real-life historical figures.

On the other hand, Korean American works, while including some historical facts, are stylistically different from the ones by Korean writers as they tend to incorporate more reimagined history that reflect the authors' imagination. The first and second chapters of this thesis were written to construct the framework of "comfort women" studies which led to literary representations of the subject. Chapters 3 and 4 each dealt with Korean and Korean American novels that recontextualise the "comfort women" narratives using memory and historical data as their primary sources. In the remaining chapters, I looked at how Korean and Korean American novels centralised on ideologies such as diaspora and nationalism.

[99] See Chapter 1.
[100] See Chapter 2.

Korean American fictions focus on diasporic Korean American characters and reflect the positionalities of the Korean diasporas in the United States. Korean Americans were marginalised even within Asian American society in the early nineties. Hence, *Comfort Woman, A Gift of the Emperor, A Gesture Life,* and *Sunday Girl* all contain Korean American protagonists concerned over their identity while simultaneously attempting to bring justice to "comfort women" victims. Novels by Chang-rae Lee and Kalliope Lee focus more on Korean American figures and position "comfort women" characters in the periphery as voiceless ghosts. Korean American characters such as Jiro Hata from *A Gesture Life* and Sibyl from *Sunday Girl* are depicted as justice providers. Yet, none of these protagonists from the two historical fiction succeeds in providing a convincing reconnection with the "comfort women" figures as these characters are keener to restore their Korean American identity.

In Korean novels, the intellectual and subaltern positionalities are distinct. The fictional representations of "comfort women" in these novels suggest a new definition of nationalism. I borrow a new concept of the relationship between the subaltern and the intellectual that Park So-yang offered. My interpretation of the Korean "comfort women" literature is that the subalterns could not represent themselves through the survivors who later became active participants in the redress movement, but their stories were told through the 'intellectuals', in this case, the authors of the novels. In Korean works, the relationship between the intellectual and the subaltern is balanced. The subalterns are not silenced, and the victims are brought to the centre in these novels.

The primary goal underlying the creation of "comfort women" novels is based on the pursuit of rectifying the historical injustices suffered by survivors and those who died within the confines of the "comfort stations" during World War II. Korean novels contained nationalistic features by focusing on building credibility and authenticity, mirroring scenes and characters borrowed from historical facts and figures. On the other hand, Korean

American novels addressing the “comfort women” issue also contained historical facts while delving into other socio-political issues such as diaspora and marginalised Korean Americans as social minorities in the U.S. The inclination of Korean novels to focus more on historical accuracy seems to stem from concerns of the reception by Korean readership including “comfort women” victim-survivors. Similarly, Korean American authors are also aware and conscious of their target readers, the North American readers, who may be encountering this sensitive historical subject for the first time through reading these literary works. Setting up binary views on these works is not the primary or essential goal of this research as there exist similarities as well as differences between the two cohorts. Plus, this observation is not based on any moral or ethical judgments. The central goal of this project is to discern and observe the differences and similarities of the approaches to the “comfort women” issue undertaken by Korean and Korean American writers and the outcomes.

The consequence of reading these literary works empowers the readers to both apprehend the brutality of the “comfort system” and experience the horrendous trauma endured by these women through recontextualised narratives. By delving into the innermost thoughts of both victims and perpetrators, these literary works offer readers an opportunity to confront the atrociousness of war and its capacity to transform and corrupt human values.

Ultimately, this study aimed to explore how Korean and Korean American novels reveal similar and different features in their literary representations of “comfort women”. Essentially, these novels collectively aim to remember, incite awareness, and redress the victims. Even if the political discourse around the “comfort women” issue contains many setbacks and restrictions, literary creations such as novels allow the re-contextualisation of the “comfort women” narratives and a continuation of reconciliation between the victims and the perpetrators.

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