

**BEHIND CLOSED DOORS:  
Modern Korean State and Its Exploitation of Sexuality**

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*For my parents and sister*

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## Abstract

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Supported by focused ethnographies, interviews, and newspaper publications regarding the experiences of the women involved in sex labor, this project examines the oppressive environment established by the Korean state. The study presents a linear transformation of the Korean state and its exploitations of female sexuality, following its actions from the 1930s onward through the three major periods of modern Korean history: the colonial, developmental, and neoliberal periods.

The goal of this project is to link the sexuality exploitation in all three periods together to demonstrate the three main vested interests of the state:

- (1) national security via American occupation
- (2) stimulate foreign investment by regulating sex tourism industries
- (3) nurture international diplomacy

This project contributes to the understanding of the nation-state and its relationship to the sex industry, a critical yet hidden market fueled by the labor of marginalized and unprotected groups over time and highlights the importance of international politics and shifting global markets in this relationship.

Keywords: nation-state, gender politics, sexuality

## Preface

My first semester of freshman year, I took Intro to Korean Culture and History with Dr. Oppenheim. About midway through the course, we reached the section on Japanese colonialization. I knew nothing about Korean history (or anything for that matter), let alone colonization but what shocked me the most was the systematic sex trafficking of Korean women during the Second World War. This was my first glimpse into the study of gendered exploitation in any field. I couldn't let go of the horrors the women must have faced, and each semester I tried to incorporate what I knew into course projects. Later, during my sophomore year, I took Dr. Oh's course, Political Economy of Development in Post-War Korea. It was in this course that I had *the* moment. The moment when I realized that I had something to say, something to meticulously research, write on, argue about. Over the course of that semester and through the long, pandemic summer, I read voraciously on military sex slavery, on gender relations in Korea, on the experiences of sex workers and human trafficking victims. All of this led me to my topic and later, this thesis.

For a long while, my passion for writing a thesis on this topic stagnated. Even though I had read just about all academic literature on military sex slavery and camptowns, I found myself asking "Hasn't everything already been said? What could I add?" What I found was that while it was true that much of the groundwork on these topics had already been done, what no one had done was connect them to each other *and* the South Korean state. This was a fact I believed to be incredibly obvious and thus it was disregarded for many months. So, all this to say that this thesis, while not nearly as far-reaching as I think it could be, is important to me because it created a space for me to explore these topics, fill in the gaps, and define the connections that I have been mulling over for the past 3 years.

## Introduction

Since the Japanese Occupation of the Korean peninsula (1910-1945), female bodies have been used by the state as capital and collateral, especially in the development of the sex industry. With the emergence of camptowns around US military bases during and after the Korean War (1950-1953), prostitution brought shame to female sex workers despite their labor being deemed necessary to maintain US-Korean, and later, Japan-Korean relations. The relationship between shame and economic necessity in the sex work industry continued throughout Korea's modernization and neoliberal periods. Presently, the sex industry is both a major source of domestic and foreign revenue. Yet public attitudes about sex work have become further entangled with racialized misogyny, with an increasing percent of the sex worker population being labor migrants from Southeast and Central Asia. In my thesis, I argue that the Korean state has maintained a pattern of exploitation produced by historical sexual violence that commodifies female sexuality for the benefit of state security, foreign capital growth, and international diplomacy.

While there is extensive English and Korean literature covering all the topics and periods presented in my thesis, there is a lack of academic literature discussing the chronic exploitative relationship between sex work and the Korean state. While the Japanese state is often written as an oppressive power over Korean sexuality, and while the Korean state is often depicted as a silent, willing bystander to such oppression, there is little written of the active role of the Korean state in commodifying female sexuality for domestic and international gain. There are also few texts implying sexuality exploitation as a bilateral state process, let alone a multilateral state process. My thesis will clarify the paramount role of the Korean state in the transmutations of

female sexuality over time as well as the equally imperative roles of the Japanese and U.S. states in these processes.

Chapter One covers the Colonial Era (1910-1945). This chapter highlights the historical background of sex work in Korea and its effects on women and the nation-state. This chapter is divided into two periods. The first covers the first half of the Colonial Era up until 1930. This section addresses the beginnings of Japanese state-administrated sex work in Korea, as well as shifts in attitudes towards sexuality amongst Koreans. The second section focuses on the latter half of the colonial period. A large portion of this section is dedicated to explaining the mass sexual violence experienced by military sex slaves during World War II, including logistics of military brothels, testimonies of military sex slaves, and participation of local governments in the facilitation of human trafficking.

Chapter Two covers the Developmental Era (1945-1990). This chapter is not addressed chronologically but instead, it is organized into subjects. The first section covers the creation of the proliferation of US military base camptowns and prostitution within these communities immediately following the end of the Colonial Era. The second section focuses on Japanese sex tourism in the 1970s. The third, and final, section looks at the development of nationalism in the 1980s. This section analyzes the relationship between the gendered state and hypermasculine nationalism as seen during the advent of the Wednesday Protest movement as well as the proliferation of sex-negativity despite a rapidly expanding sex industry.

Chapter Three covers the Neoliberal Era (1990-Present). In this chapter, I argue that the neoliberal Korean state reinforces exploitive attitudes established during the Developmental Era by perpetuating such attitudes towards migrant sex workers to maintain foreign capital flow and the rigid patriarchal hierarchy. The first section of this chapter looks at demographic shifts in



the sex industry workforce. This section focuses on the relationship between the modernizing South Korean state and the large population of migrant sex workers that begin working in US camptown brothels during this period. The second section examines the peak of the Wednesday Protest movement (1990-1996) and its effects on Korea-Japan relations and Korean sexual identity. The third section explores more modern female sexual experiences and makes projections for the effects of such experiences on female sexuality in Korea.

There is key terminology presented throughout the thesis that requires precursory explanation. “Military sex slave” or “military sex slavery victim” are used here to refer to women who were conscripted and trafficked to work in Japanese military brothels during the Second World War. The common term in most literature is “comfort women” (in Korean 위안부, *ui-anbu*), a term I adamantly reject for its euphemistic qualities. The term erases how institutionalized and coercive the process of kidnapping and keeping these women was. Lee Yong-soo, a military sex slave victim, describes the critiques of the term perfectly:

Why am I a comfort woman? Do you know what ‘comfort woman’ means? It means we went on our own. We went voluntary to console Japan and the Japanese Army. That’s how Japan defines it.<sup>1</sup>

I use several terms to describe women who work in camptowns, communities that surround American military bases. I alternate between the terms “sex worker”, “camptown women”, “entertainer”, and “prostitute”. While I tried to avoid referencing these women as “prostitutes” outside of a context in which I was describing how the state or Korean society sees them, I use the other terms more frequently when describing the experiences of the women. Finally, just as a note, the term “girl” is *only* used to describe females in the

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<sup>1</sup> Subtitled quote from original Korean from video *The story of Lee Yong-soo, victim of Japanese wartime sexual enslavement*.

following situations when it is an accurate measure of age. On principal, I am highly against referencing adult women in such contexts as “girls” and so it is avoided when describing camptown sex workers, though surely some may be underage. As a rule, I have only used the term in sections discussing military sex slavery, as most victims were underage.

My thesis will be supported primarily by archival research accessed by databases. The content of my research will focus on ethnographic studies of sex workers in Korea and qualitative analyses on the sex industry in Korea. Additionally, I will also focus my research on the sex work industry (in its historical and modern contexts) and how it has been critical to foreign relations, local economies, and tourism industries. I will analyze ethnographies detailing the experiences in the sex work industry, such as in Sealing Cheng’s *On the Move for Love* (2010) and Katharine Moon’s *Sex Among Allies* (1997). I will also discuss and expand upon the connection of modern misogyny in Korea to the historical oppression of Korean women, such as discussed in Elaine H. Kim and Chungmoo Choi’s *Dangerous Women* (1998) and link this historical misogyny to modern attitudes towards female migrant labor as addressed in Hae Yeon Choo’s *Decentering Citizenship* (2016). Moreover, when needed I will use interviews with military sex slavery victims and camptown sex workers.

Although not the only limitation, the time allotted for this project impacted the scope and depth of issues addressed. There were major limitations regarding literature and primary sourcing. On the part of military sex slavery, there were not many victims who chose to come forward, and even fewer did so publicly. The interviews in this thesis only account for only a slim set of experiences. Moreover, only interviews with Korean military sex slavery survivors have been included, though it should be noted that there is documentation recounting the experiences of Chinese, Japanese, Dutch, and Southeast Asian victims. These were not central to

the focus of this thesis so they were not included but they should be mentioned. Similarly, I did not include primary accounts by camptown sex workers, neither Korean nor Filipina. The primary reason for this is that the experiences of these women are highly diverse so I felt that including interviews with a select few would not accurately represent the experience of a camptown worker as a whole- I could not hope to represent this well in a project of this scope. Instead, I elected to use the ethnographies referenced throughout the text as a reference point for empirical data regarding the experiences of camptown women.

Several topics were unable to be addressed in this thesis that would be included upon further research. The first would be a comparison of the relationship between foreign sex workers and Korean sex workers during the neoliberal era. I would like to have been able to include a section on Eastern European sex workers and how their position of being foreign but white compared to the position of Filipina sex workers. The second would be to connect other forms of quasi-trafficking, such as marriage migration from China to South Korea or North Korea to China, to the interests of the state presented in my project. Finally, I would be very excited to have conducted and presented research on how the topics presented in this project impact the average Korean woman.

## **Chapter One: The Colonial Era**

The Colonial Era (1910-1945) saw the systemic incorporation of Korea and its people into the Japanese Empire through various means. During the first twenty years of the Japanese occupation, the ruling Japanese officials equipped legislative control over the Korean population, with a complete overhaul of Korean laws and implementation of Japanese laws that held the Koreans as objects to be controlled. All aspects of life in Korea were molded to fit a Japanese model. Colonial citizens were required to legally change their names to Japanese names, attend Japanese schools, follow Japanese religious practices, wear Japanese clothes, and were prohibited from speaking Korean. The Japanese occupation was not limited to cultural assimilation, however. The colonial government implemented policies and procedures that mirrored those in Japan and affected all manners of business.

Unsurprisingly then, sex work was not exempt from Japanese policy. In pre-occupied Korea, sex work followed an unregulated model that was similar to other pre-modern cultures. Sex workers were divided into two classes: elite, refined consorts that were trained in the arts and low-income sex workers that worked in local brothels with other workers under the control of a pimp or madam. It wasn't until the decade just before colonization that Japanese models for organizing prostitution were introduced to Korea, being enforced immediately after the occupation began. The top-down Japanese model structured brothel management and ownership, who could and could not be a sex worker and where, as well as regulating the sexual health of sex workers. Most importantly, this model positioned military police as enforcers of legislation that specifically regulated medical checks of sex workers (Hicks 27). The implications of this regulation would not be felt fully until Japan's entrance to World War II in 1940.

The latter half of the occupation went through a series of changes that related to Japan's ongoing expansion and its relationships to a broadening global theater. Through the Convention of Kanagawa in 1854, Japan opened itself to the world and rapidly modernized. By the late 19th century, Japan had claimed its title as a world power and began expanding its reach, starting with Taiwan in 1895. By the mid-1930s, Japan had begun to lay claim on parts of northern China immediately below the state's Manchurian borders. Following the Nanjing Massacre in 1937, where hundreds of thousands of Chinese civilians were killed and thousands of Chinese women were raped before being killed, the Japanese state began to recognize its need to provide sexual services to its troops. While military brothels were in place prior to the brutality at Nanjing, they were primarily staffed by professional Japanese sex workers. Realizing the scope of sexual outlets was lacking for the troops, the Japanese state created a more intensive system of military brothels to be staffed by non-Japanese women.

Official records and memory diverge significantly. While there is little official documentation to support the claims of women who were conscripted into military sex slavery, their personal accounts speak of grand human rights abuses. Following the Nanjing Massacre, the systematic process of creating a military sex slavery complex began. Records indicate the first military brothels were built in northern China to accommodate the troops that were stationed most remotely (Soh 1227). Initially, these brothels were staffed by local Chinese women and were managed by local brothel owners. However, by the end of 1938, the Japanese military shifted away from private contracting and began to run the stations internally. It was also at this time that Japanese soldiers were prohibited from engaging with civilian prostitutes or other non-military sexual partners (Soh 1227-8).

As Japan expanded its empire and moved towards war on a larger scale with the involvement of the US in 1941, its sex slavery complex also expanded. Japan's expansion into "Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and the Philippines" and the anticipation of war in Manchuria with the USSR drove the military into recruiting thousands of women to staff these remote military brothels (Chung 224). The following year saw exponential growth of the military sex complex, with the plans to "...put 100 military brothels in north China, 140 in central China, 40 in south China, 100 in South Asia, 10 in the South Sea Islands, and 10 in Sakhalin, for a total of 400 military brothels," (Chung 224). Records indicate that as early as 1938, Korean women and brothel-owners were being mobilized to staff remote military brothels, the volume of women being trafficked increasing as the war advanced and more brothels were built in newly occupied territories. While the estimates vary, it is believed that there were about "70,000 to 200,000 [military sex slaves], about 80% of whom were Korean" (Soh 1227). Mobilized women were officially required to be at least seventeen years old to be eligible to work in a military brothel. However, girls were as young as eleven with the majority being "between fourteen and nineteen years old" (Chung 228).

Acquiring Korean women to work in these brothels was paramount to the military for several reasons. Korean women were an advantageous commodity in the military sex industry, and as colonial citizens, they were wholly at the disposal of the military. Korean women were generally easier to mobilize than colonial subjects in other territories for four main reasons. The first is that Korean girls and women were misled by agents of the Japanese military, who took advantage of the poverty experienced by the women. In most cases, young women and girls were approached by "policemen, local officials, and other officials," as well as older women with job offers (Chung 225). Of the jobs offered, many were factory or domestic labor positions with

claims that they would also provide the girls with high wages, formal or trade education, and balanced meals. For the girls, these offers were irresistible. Before 1960, “three out of four” Koreans lived in rural communities and came from poor families with little or no economic or social mobility (Seth 307). Their positions were exacerbated by the power inequities of the colonial regime which placed Koreans in positions of local law enforcement or as landlords to create division and mistrust amongst fellow Koreans (Cummings 178, 182).

To explain the economic situation of these girl further, we must consider the economic shifts caused by Japanese colonization. In the first eight years of the Colonial Era, land surveys were conducted, and land was confiscated from those who could not provide official documentation of ownership and redistributed to those who could or who could buy the land outright. This, of course, meant that many poor and uneducated farmers lost their land and thus their means of production. By 1930 “the colonial government owned 40 percent of all land,” while “2.5 percent of [Korean] families owned 64 percent of farmland,” (Seth 308-309).

So therefore, as very little land was owned by Koreans, most farmers became tenants on the land of wealthy Koreans, with as much as 80 percent of farmland in some areas being tenant farmed. This process of dispossession and tenancy led to Korean families falling into debt to pay for rent (sometimes for more than one plot of land to accommodate sustenance farming as well as cash crop farming), renovation and land development projects, and crop supplies. So, rural Korean women inhabited a precarious environment in which job offers were not readily declined. The second reason is that women living in the rural Southern regions of Joella, South Gyeongsang, and Jeju Island were particularly vulnerable due to their proximity to the coast closest to Japan, so more Japanese inhabited these areas, and were easier to traffic through Japanese controlled ports.

The third reason was that as colonial subjects, Koreans, as well as other groups under the Japanese Occupation, were unlikely to refuse service to Japanese officials who asked something of them or of Korean workers who were assumed to be trustworthy. The girls, then, readily accepted positions in remote locations that would allow them to earn an income and send money back to their families. The fourth reason centralizes on the deceit of recruiters and the power dynamics at play. Beginning as late as 1932, the Voluntary Service Corps (VSC), by which the Korean term is *chongshindae*, was established to expand access to Korean labor (Soh, 1227). However, the VSC was less voluntary than its name implies. The *chongshindae* was an important source of labor-capital for the Japanese colonial government. As the war progressed, the state increased pressure on Korean citizens to enlist in the *chongshindae*, with voluntary service becoming an implied obligation.

It was through *chongshindae* that the Japanese military was able to recruit many young girls and women. Once recruited, these women would remain unaware of what their service would involve but were unable to reject the voluntary conscription without drawing attention to their families and any undrafted male family members. So, while the *chongshindae* was officially a *volunteer* corps, the power dynamic between colonizing officials and colonized subjects created an environment without choice or autonomy regarding service to the Japanese Empire. More women still were kidnapped from their homes, markets, farms, or footpaths. This often happened to women whose families refused voluntary service or were under threat of violence. Even so, a portion of these women was kidnapped before their families were executed. These women were being stolen from empty homes and would return upon the conclusion of the Pacific War to a greater emptiness.



In addition to being easy to mobilize, Korean women were preferred by the Japanese state and soldiers alike. Korean cultural norms valued chastity and purity for women. Unwed Korean women were assumed to be virgins and so were believed to be free of venereal diseases- something that had been plaguing troops. Virgins were also an object of superstition- popular belief among soldiers was “superstition that deflowering a virgin before combat would act as a charm against injury or death,” (Hicks 70). Additionally, Japanese sex workers were less common, as they were encouraged by the Japanese State “to marry young and bear many children” to support and populate the expanding Empire (Soh 1228).

No matter the means for recruitment, the women would be shipped to Manchuria, the Philippines, Indonesia, and other colonized territories. The women were delivered to bases and, so called “comfort stations”, military brothels (Chung 225). These buildings contained a main lobby or courtyard where a brothel manager would organize and collect service fees from soldiers. The interior of the building would mainly consist of a hallway with rows of small rooms on each side. Each military sex slave would be assigned a room from which she would only leave for weekly doctor’s examinations and perhaps meals. These rooms were only big enough for a bed pallet, a washbasin, and two people. These rooms were often windowless or on a second story to prevent escape and were typically locked when the brothel was not in service hours (Hicks 45, 50, 112, 116).

During the women’s stay for the remainder of the war, the women would serve anywhere from 10 to 50 soldiers a day (Hicks 113). The men would pay for either half an hour, though “the hours of use depended on ranks, fees, [and] medical checkups,” while “during the peak time, 20 to 30 soldiers waited in line outside the door,” (womenandwar). Fees, then, were decided based on the rank of the soldier, location of the camp, and the ethnicity of the military sex slave (Hicks

48). The enslaved women would work six days a week with “one half-day [off] when medical examinations were held” (Hicks 76). These medical visits were largely for managing and preventing venereal diseases and testing for pregnancy. If a woman was found to be pregnant, the pregnancy was terminated. Afterward, the woman was typically expected to resume her services with little or no time off. Accordingly, the mental and emotional trauma these women endured matched if not exceeded their physical trauma. Many women received lasting damage to their reproductive organs from venereal disease or physical trauma such that they could never have children, or their emotional trauma prevented them from ever desiring children- or husbands.

The damages accrued by military sex slaves was not limited to the physical and emotional. Korean women did not actually earn money during their enslavement, despite soldiers paying for their services. Enslaved women could not hold their wages, even what was left after deductions for meals and medical services. The brothel madam would collect all earnings at the door from soldiers. Often, the women were told that their earnings were being held in local Japanese-run bank accounts and would be available to them after their release. However, unsurprisingly these women would never gain access to these funds. After the war ended, women would search for their accounts only to find that either the bank as an institution had collapsed and withdrawn from the territory (meaning that the account was now being managed in Japan), the account was inaccessible because the bank had been barred from allowing withdrawals by the Japanese state to prevent the imminent economic crash, or that the account had never existed at all, with the brothel management or Japanese government assuming all earnings throughout the woman’s imprisonment (Hicks 92, 171). In other cases, “women received no money, being told that they would be paid when Japan won the war,” (Hicks 248).

The violence the women experienced did not end with the war. Traditional Korean culture placed an emphasis on Confucian values that placed women as chaste daughters until they became loyal wives and good mothers. For the women who left as virgins and returned as traumatized rape victims, they stood as deviants in a sex-negative culture, unmarriageable and a shameful burden to their families- if they had families at all. Many of these women were either forced into silence or abandoned by their families. Those who chose to withhold what had happened to them lived on with internal guilt and anger, with “many of these women prov[ing] sterile, crippled by a variety of diseases, the brutality of their experiences, the drugs they were sometimes forced to consume to abort unwanted pregnancies or to prevent or cure diseases. Sometimes they had been sterilised by the operations done on them to eliminate menstruation, keeping them always available,” (Hicks 165). Moreover, women who were not abandoned by their families faced the dilemma of processing the trauma while also bearing the social responsibility of marrying and having children.

There are many discrepancies in the organization and management of these military brothels. While the Japanese state continues to deny its role in the abduction and imprisonment of women who were in these camps and forced to work in the brothels. The defense presented often follows a narrative that claims the women who worked in these brothels mobilized willingly and were paid directly for their services. This is problematic for many reasons. First, it fails to recognize the manipulation and lack of transparency the women faced during recruitment. These women may have willingly accepted a job posting from a recruiter, but they were often blatantly lied to about the job description, many being told they would be working in factories. Moreover, while it is also true that Japanese soldiers paid for the services being provided, many women never had access to the service fees and even if they had, they lacked the autonomous

mobility to be able to spend or transfer the earnings. Moreover, as stated previously, even upon release, very few women were ever able to gain access to the accounts holding their wages.

Secondly, the Japanese state also relies heavily on the rhetoric used in wartime legislation to deflect accountability. In particular, the term “voluntary,” as in the term *chongshindae*, is used as a strategic deflection of responsibility to the individual woman, despite the legalization of an (officially) non-compulsory female draft in 1942 (Soh 1228). However, as previously stated, women volunteered under false pretenses, making the Japanese state’s argument tenuous at best.

The Colonial Era is one of the most traumatic periods in Korea’s history; it was an attack on Korean identity, values, and agency. As colonial subjects, Korean stood as second-class citizens in their own country and watched as they were stripped of their language, culture, and even their names. What is painfully clear in this sequence of events is the violent result of the hierarchy that was established during the Colonial Era. While Japanese men are indubitably the highest in rank, Japanese women outweigh even Korean men, who then find themselves only above Korean women. Even the Japanese state as an entity reduced Korean women to objects- a material military cost of the empire’s expansion and war. Korean women then were demonstrated to be less than human, a resource that could be taken freely to satisfy the needs of Japan’s troops and thus its aspirations.

There is no doubt that all Koreans were oppressed under the colonial regime, there were those who higher on the rungs of the social ladder than others. Korean elite existed under the Japanese with certain privileges, despite also being subjugated to discriminatory practices and assimilation policies. While there is no documentation describing the extent to which Korean elite participated in the systems of Japanese oppression, it should be noted that those who flourished under the colonial regime did not disappear and neither did their sympathies. The role

of Korean elite in the new Korean government is not separate from the systems maintained by the colonial government. Chapter Two will discuss the events immediately following the end of the Colonial Era and will examine how the Korean government did not hesitate to continue using systems first implemented by the Japanese to further exploit its women.

## Chapter Two: The Developmental Era

### Advent of American Military Prostitution

Immediately following World War II, Japanese colonialization was replaced by U.S. occupation. By September of 1945, the United States began occupying the southern half of the Korean peninsula. While the US officially ended its military government rule in 1948 with the establishment of the Republic of Korea, the Korean War established long-term occupation plans, leading to an American influence in South Korea that has remained consistent ever since. While the total number of troops stationed in South Korea has varied over time, there has never been less than 35,000 US soldiers stationed at the over 150 military facilities across the country, making U.S. presence in South Korea higher than any other nation (Lee, J 125).

Most American military bases were built in rural communities, which over time came to be called camptowns, or *gijicheon*. The economies that grew in camptowns became dependent on American business, exclusively catering to the tastes of American GIs. While some of this commerce was focused on “day-to-day services [for] the occupying military,” the foundation of any camptown’s economy was entertainment (Lee, J 145). Social hubs like clubs and brothels became pivotal to South Korea's economy, with the presence of US troops having contributed up to 25% of South Korea's GNP and as much as half of any camptown’s economy (Lee, N 454). In the 1960s, as South Korea was rebuilding after the war and pursued modernization, foreign capital, especially American capital, was sought after at any cost. As in many other states, this cost became the livelihoods and bodies of its marginalized people. America has played God in other regions in the Asian Pacific such as Okinawa and Hawai’i, offering occupation in the guise of aid and development in return for favors of the flesh. While South Korea’s relationship with the United States is certainly similar, the active role of the Korean state in the process of creating

foreign sex tourism spaces for its own interests makes the Korean case an equally unique and horrific one.

In 1948, the South Korean Interim Legislative Assembly (SKILA) passed the Abolishment of Public Prostitution Law, which abolished licensed prostitution. This followed years of fervent efforts by Christian women's groups advocating for the total abolishment of prostitution and sex trafficking. As the name of the law implies, publicly regulated prostitution was criminalized, but private prostitution was still allowed (Lee, N 466). The passing of this law coincided with the beginnings of the Korean war, a coincidence that led to a skyrocketing number of sex workers. As tensions between North and South Korea progressed and the war began, financially and socially destitute women began turning to prostitution to support their families or themselves. The toll of the war on the Korean population meant that even previously well-off families might have daughters turn to sex work.

Moreover, Koreans who had been mobilized outside of the peninsula during the Japanese Colonial Era returned in the late 1940s and early 1950s and the war pushed millions of Koreans to opposite sides of the border. In short, massive population migration created a work shortage that was severely exacerbated by the economic burdens of war. The U.S. military and SKILA moved to reestablish control over prostitution by means of “‘rehabilitation’ [for] former prostitutes including health treatment...and welfare provided by the Welfare Department of the City of Seoul,” (Lee, N 467). With the intent to aid the transition from sex work back to the proper Korean society, this protocol largely failed due to the refusal to supply funding to provincial welfare centers. At the forefront of this failure was the belief of policymakers that it would be “‘inadvisable to establish a special rehabilitation program’,” because it would “‘maintain the identity of these women as former prostitutes’,” and that instead, they should

“receive the same treatment as any other citizen needing assistance,” (Lee, N 467-8). Receiving the same assistance as any other citizen meant, of course, that provincial programs received nothing- there was little to no foundational social welfare provided for any citizen.

Unsurprisingly, at being left with no other options, many women returned to prostitution.

To stimulate the growing foreign capital markets that were camptown brothels, the Korean state worked to further the divide between Korea and Korean camptowns. That is, a deliberate effort was made by the state to promote sex work in camptowns and in camptowns only. As discussed in the previous chapter, Korea valued chastity and loyalty for its women, and at least officially, the state would continue to protect such values. To accommodate this, the state created a system that could establish a space of exception for camptowns and a moral framework for the rest of the Korean population. Throughout the 1960s and 70s, the Korean state enacted major legal changes which prohibited prostitution whilst still promoting it. In particular, the Prostitution Prevention Law made prostitution illegal except for camptown prostitution while “the Tourism Promotion Law designated... camp towns as special tourism districts,” (Lee, J 126). These laws would frame the experiences of camptown sex workers, hidden from the rest of the nation while being constantly on display for foreigners.

With over 30,000 licensed sex workers in camptowns by the 1960s, another issue at hand was local regulation (Lee, N 454). The U.S. military’s interests were focused on the proper maintenance of brothels and the sexual health of sex workers. Beginning immediately upon occupation of the peninsula, the American military voiced its concerns about venereal diseases amongst Korea’s sex workforce. The military government established the Bureau of Public Health and Welfare in 1945 which spurred the creation of municipal branches throughout the provinces. While the May Act of 1941, a Department of Defense Policy, explicitly prohibits the



solicitation, aiding, or abetting of prostitution in occupied regions, the practical view of military leaders was that, given the ever-increasing reach of the U.S. military, there was an inevitable relationship between soldiers, sex, and foreign women (Lee, N 462). So, rather than enforce a policy that was believed to harm a soldier's work ethic, the U.S. military repositioned their concerns to sexually transmitted diseases.

Both governments began working towards a thorough sexual health policy. A system was created in which brothels and clubs were inspected for cleanliness and more importantly, sex workers were regularly tested for STDs. While soldiers were also tested, and units reported infection rates monthly, unsurprisingly most of both states' focus was on sex workers. In 1947, "the U.S. military established the VD Control Section under the Department of Public Health and Welfare" which was responsible for examining any female entertainer in camptowns. Women who passed their highly invasive and frequent health exams were provided with certificates proving such. While these exams were not mandatory, they were coerced on threat of delicensing (Lee, N 463). The focus on sex workers lays in stark contrast to that on soldiers. Sex workers bore most of the responsibility for the sexual health of the entire sex economy in camptowns, demonstrating yet another way in which the Korean and American states penalized sex workers for their labor.

While the U.S. military provided most of the sexual health infrastructure, it was publicly supported by the Korean state. Newspapers correlated the high STD infection rates amongst sex workers as a hindrance to Korea's advancement into the modern world, thus implying that the sex industry was preventing Korea's growth (Lee, N 465). These public attitudes would have been more critical to the Korean state and how it proceeded if the rigid separation between camptowns and the rest of Korea had not yet been established. In fact, the public crisis over

STDs solidified the protection of camptown spaces; if prostitutes were considered morally inept and diseased, their mobility was reduced further, thus creating a consistent supply of sex workers for the U.S. sex market. There would be no diffusion of prostitution into or out of camptowns.

While both the Korean and American powers greatly marginalized sex workers throughout the early developmental era, it is not enough to say that they acted together. It is true that both were invested in the protection of camptowns and the industry within them, but it would be untrue to say that both states worked with the same contexts and motives. The U.S. military acted with its own neo-colonial agenda. The process of occupying a depressed region, supporting democratic and capitalist efforts, moving to structure the growth, and encouraging profitable policies in said region is not novel in the western practice of martial colonialism. The Korean state, however, acted in the interests of its national security and economy. By protecting the U.S. military's sex supply chain, the Korean state was able to turn a profit off its own national protection.

In pursuing an active role in the exploitation of one of its most vulnerable populations, the Korean state didn't just allow "successive military regimes," it encouraged them (Lee, N 456). This is emphasized by the systemic parallels between the Japanese and American prostitution systems. The councils tasked with regulating prostitution that were established during the period immediately following Korean independence were formed jointly by the American military government *and* the interim Korean government. It was these two bodies that dictated that sex work regulation follow a Japanese model with an added American focus on the control of STDs (Lee, N 467). It is through the historical context of military prostitution during the Japanese Colonial Era and willing participation by Korean elites after liberation that

“facilitated military instrumentalization of Korean women’s bodies for foreign soldiers,” (Lee, N 465).

### **Japanese Sex Tourism**

Beginning in the 1960s, Japan and South Korea initiated a trade relationship that would only increase in volume over time. While trade would initially only involve part-product circulation, with Japan exporting parts to Korean factories which would produce and export goods back to Japan, it would soon encompass the sale of entertainment. Specifically, the 1970s would see the advent of a hyper-focused Japanese sex tourism demand that would be absolved by Korean sex workers. This section focuses on the immediate reasons for a predominantly Japanese sex tourism clientele base and the roles of both the Japanese and Korean states in this phenomenon.

With the end of Japan-Taiwan trade relations in 1969 due to Japan’s recognition of China, South Korea became the primary target of Japanese imports and exports. South Korea, which was looking to expand its capacity for trade and grow its foreign investment, was eager to work with Japan. This was despite Japan’s brutal history of systemic violence towards Korea, a thought I will touch on again later. Due to Korea’s overall economic weakness compared to Japan, the trade cycles they entered together were entirely in the interest of Japan and its needs, with Korean workers assuming the brunt of the inequities. That is not to say that the Korean state’s relative weakness absolves it from its culpability. The Korean state was equally invested in gaining *any* foreign capital at any cost, as was demonstrated in its relationship with the U.S. military in camptowns.

However, the point is that despite Korea’s agency in this relationship, Japan’s relative power was used to ensure that every aspect of trade with Korea was beneficial to Japan. Any

benefit for Korea was of little to no concern to Japan. However, it was this imbalance that led to the promotion of sex tourism in Korea. To gain an advantage over other trade partners of Japan, Korea began encouraging sex tourism. This process was systematic and thorough, as Korean companies would solicit the personal preferences of Japanese tourists, including “whether or not the would-be visitor likes women, is a Christian, and so on,” so that a personal and entirely customized experience for the tourist could be fabricated. Japanese men, who had already been acclimated to such corporate entertainment experiences, were eager to take advantage of a “population of women who were racially subordinate to them, in addition to being sexually subordinate” (Norma 407).

The harms of this system lay in the historical complexities of sex work in Japan and Korea. Japan instituted regulated prostitution in Korea during the Colonial Era which was then transformed into the military sex slave system during the Second World War. Both systems preyed upon Korean girls and women who were subject to severe inequities considering the power held by Japanese men during the era. As feminist theory points out, prostitution clients gravitate towards sex workers that are “exotic” and that hold a position lower than the client; a social inequity is not simply appreciated but required (Farley #). Moreover, the military prostitution reiterated by the U.S. in the years following the Korean war emphasized to the Korean state that sex does, in fact, sell, especially when the buyer is a foreigner. Despite some prostitution being focused on an elite Korean consumer base, in the 1970s, most Korean sex workers had non-Korean clients.

Marketing the sex industry to Japanese tourists was highly successful for the Korean state. The “large disparity in the exchange rate between South Korea and Japan at [the] time,” and the high volume at which Japanese tourists participated in the sex economy led to

prostitution producing “roughly 40 percent,” of the 269 million dollars earned for tourism in 1973 (Norma 410).

Sex tourism became a matter of survival of the fittest among Koreans. Korean companies and businesses, no matter how big or small, were encouraged to provide prostitution services to potential clients- not including such services would surely halt any further relations between companies. Korean men, then, were encouraged to allow Korean women to be the price for economic success, a notion that was emphasized by a supportive Korean state. This was furthered by the weakened status of women as laborers under the Park Chung Hee regime. During the 70s, there was no labor regulation, such that girls as young as 12 might be working 14 hours a day, 29 days a month for as little as 50 USD per month (Norma 413). Financial vulnerability and the high buying power of the Japanese yen created a chasm in which Korean girls and women were coerced into prostitution to achieve financial stability and social mobility. However, money earned by tourism prostitutes was hardly stable. Sex workers would not receive money from agencies that they were affiliated with, and tips given by the customer were divided amongst “travel companies, party venues, and other intermediaries so that [the sex worker] would continue to receive bookings,” with as much as 70% of the worker’s tips being distributed elsewhere (Norma 413-4).

Japanese sex tourism in Korea was critical to its economic expansion. Both states bear responsibility for the exploitation of Korean sex workers. The Japanese state took advantage of a country that desperately needed foreign capital and economic stimuli, and as it did its white-collar men were subdued from unrest by exerting their relative power over vulnerable Korean women. The Korean state not only facilitated this dynamic but actively encouraged it by

allowing Korean companies to compete via their prostitution buying power and by establishing prostitution policies for special economic situations, as discussed in the previous section.

### **US-Korea Relations**

As Cynthia Enloe has stated, nationalism is often “sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope,” that is, from its conception, nationalism is male-centered (Enloe 93). Both as a precursor to and result of masculine nationalism, “women are subsumed symbolically into the national body politic as its boundary and metaphorical limit,” with women being held as “the symbolic bearers of the nation” (McClintock 62). This is especially true for imperialist relationships between a military power and an opposing state. In these relationships, the lesser, weaker body is often feminized while the stronger power is masculinized (Moon 141). While the relationship between South Korea and the U.S., as well as between South Korea and Japan, has been described as following this model, the argument here will be that in both relationships, the Korean nation-state allows a feminine projection for its own interests all the while maintaining a rigidly masculine self-view. While Japan and the U.S. are depicted as masculine entities, Korea depicts itself as feminine to outline its own interests and depicts itself as masculine to achieve said interests.

Following the argument in previous sections, the Korean state during the 1950s and 60s was not subservient in its relationship with the U.S., especially regarding camptown regulation. While the Korean state was motivated to allow prostitution, it was not moved by the desires of the U.S. military to better the quality of life in camptowns. Despite Korea’s weaker position in their relationship, American military powers were unable to force their agenda onto the Korean state, especially regarding the control of venereal diseases (Moon 148).

This laissez-faire attitude towards camptown residents by the Korean state changed as global dynamics shifted with the movement of Cold War politics to other regions and as Korea moved forwards in its journey towards modernization. The camptown prostitutes who were once viewed as “‘making a living however they can’,” during the immediate aftermath of the war were becoming increasingly viewed as morally deficient in a society that was increasing in economic power. This was furthered by the Korean state’s loss in resistance power after its “‘troop contribution of 50,000 to aid the U.S. war effort in Vietnam,” was resolved after the end of the war (Moon 150). The disengagement of U.S. troops throughout the rest of Asia implied heavier security needs for Korea which allowed the U.S. military to demand more for their presence on the peninsula.

The push by U.S. powers to improve camptown spaces for its troops in tandem with the removal of 20,000 troops following the advent of the Nixon Doctrine led to panic amongst Korea’s elite and general population alike. The Park Chung Hee regime which was in power at the time found that the happiness of stationed troops was critical to reengaging the U.S. military in Korea’s interests, so his administration began enacting policies that would reinforce camptown practices that focused on the behaviors of sex workers, rather than tangible infrastructure improvements. For the Park regime, American departure was directly linked to how camptown sex workers were presenting themselves; as American troops’ only view into Korea, sex workers must be providing a frame of reference for Korea that is equally attractive and repellent. Like in previous periods, the focus of the state’s 1970s camptown policies was the containment of venereal diseases. Similarly, the targets of examinations were sex workers, with American Military health officials doing little on their end to curtail the troop’s participation in camptown epidemics other than public, indiscrete contact tracing. Another measure taken by the

Korean state can be described as “attitude training”, where prostitutes were educated on how to present themselves and their country to their GI clients. Disturbingly, these girls were asked to reflect upon how Japan was able to overcome poverty and enter the modern era through prostitute-soldier relations, being told that:

The Japanese prostitute, when she finished with the GI, did not get up to go get the next GI (for more money) but knelt before him and pleaded with him to help rebuild Japan. The spirit of the Japanese prostitute spread to the rest of the society to develop Japan (Moon 154).

The aforementioned is deserving of many critiques, but the two that I focus on are (1) the Korean state attempted to link patriotism with military prostitution, subverting the negative moral views applied to sex workers by the rest of the Korean population and (2) in order link patriotism and military prostitution in this way, the state reinforced sexualized military ties to Japan, establishing a model to be followed and appreciated. This attitude education tactic implicates the harmful role of the Korean state in the feminization of its population. In overriding societal stigmas to promote patriotic relationships with American soldiers, the state further alienates camptown sex workers from the Korean population by explicitly outlining their role in society as separate but not equal. The state clearly advises these women that their duty to the nation is to remain amongst foreigners and convince them that Korea is indeed worthy of their aid. This alienation is only furthered by the strategic analogy to Japanese sex workers.

Despite the generational trauma experienced at the hands of the Japanese state and subsequent nationalist tensions, Korean women are expected to overlook this *and* overlook the tensions between themselves and American troops to protect the engagement of Americans in Korean interests. The most harmful aspect of the Korean state’s propaganda towards camptown workers, however, is how noncritical the quality of camptown relations were to the U.S. and its occupation. Given how invested the U.S. was in Cold War politics and the status of the



Democratic People's Republic of Korea, "the U.S. would not have exited Korea, even if there had been no women to buy sex from," implying that more than anything, the Korean state was only ever interested in appeasing American concerns about camptown safety on the surface (Moon 167). This is supported by the self-view of camptown sex workers, who claim they did not feel as if their work was patriotic or critical to national security, but rather felt disappointed with their government and national peers for doing nothing to better their quality of life. It was not lost on sex workers that while the U.S. was the physical antagonist, the Korean nation-state was a willing participant in their continued exploitation (Moon 166). The next chapter will investigate how the cultural and political attitudes towards female sexuality culminated in a broader trauma for women and will also discuss how state control of camptowns evolved to fit into a shifting global market.

## Chapter Three: The Contemporary Era

### Exposing Military Sex Slavery

The 1980s saw much political strife throughout South Korea. Most political demonstrations promoted democracy and rejected the authoritarian stronghold of the previous two decades. In 1987 with the election of Roh Tae-woo, a new era of democracy began in Korea. Without the threat of military police brutality, advocacy groups were able to freely protest and demand government action for the issues they represented. Despite this, it wasn't until 1990 that women's advocacy groups in Korea began representing the victims of Japanese military sex slavery, and it wasn't until 1992 that formal public protests began. This section will discuss the reasons for late response by advocacy groups and the Korean and Japanese states and will argue that such delays were directly related to deliberate silence by the Korean and Japanese governments as well as pervasive victim shaming.

There were several factors that impacted the length of public silence on military sex slavery. The first, and largest, was the absolution of the Japanese state by the Korean government. The Treaty on Basic Relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea of 1965 outlined how South Korea and Japan would build economic and political relations as well as how Japan would "provide compensation for the damages caused by Japan's colonization" (Min 48). It was in this treaty that the Korean government absolved Japan's responsibility for various war crimes, including military sex slavery. This part of the treaty went largely unnoticed until the late 1980s when the public became more engrossed in the victimization of 200,000 Korean women.

The Japanese state had its pride to protect, and the Korean state had its own international relations in mind when both states agreed to mutually forget the crimes committed during the Japanese occupation and for nearly two decades, these crimes *were* forgotten. In 1987, Dr. Yun

Chung-ok came forward to the Korean Christian Women United (KCWU), a women's advocacy group, presenting her findings on institutionalized military sex slavery. While she had presented her findings earlier in the decade, the KCWU's involvement in other interests, including factory worker rights, Japanese sex tourism, and police interrogatory sex abuse, prevented its investment in Yun's findings. However, with the end of such movements and the newly democratic government in place, the KCWU began funding Yun's investigation. For three years, this investigation would remain largely private, as the KCWU and its daughter organization, the Korean Research Institute (KRI), would slowly build its case against the Japanese and Korean governments (Min 61).

In 1990, both organizations made demands for redress on behalf of military sex slavery victims, following the publication of an interaction between two Japanese politicians. In a September 1990 conversation regarding the victims, the Director-General of Employment Security Bureau, Shimizu Tsutao was quoted as saying "that draft procedure [of the Volunteer Service Corps] had been carried out under the terms of the General National Mobilization Law, and that the [institution of military sex slavery] had been carried out by private entrepreneurs not required to follow the terms of the mobilization law," (Min 61). This interaction heavily implicated the Japanese government in what it had previously disregarded as completely voluntary service.

By October, both the KCWU and KRI had drafted a list of demands for the Japanese state that highlighted accountability for the state's actions, public apology, reparation to, and memorialization of victims, as well dissemination of the history of military sex slavery in Japan. From the South Korean government, both organizations asked that the state support the groups' demands by putting pressure on the Japanese government. These demands were not met by either

state for similar reasons. Japanese officials would continuously claim, like Shimizu Tsutao, that no one was forced to join the *chongshindae* according to laws regarding service recruitment. Moreover, while Japanese officials cited the Treaty on Basic Relations as an overall pardon for anything that *might* have happened, Korean officials used the document as a reason to not incite any conflicts with their new Japanese allies.

After the first victim, Kim Hak-sun, publicly broadcasted her story in the summer of 1991, other victims began coming forward. Despite having victims providing testimony, the Japanese state still denied its involvement in the systemic kidnapping and rape of hundreds of thousands of women. At this point, the central argument in the defense of the Japanese government was that there were “no government document[s supporting] the Japanese government’s involvement in the ‘comfort system’ and...therefore the Japanese government cannot handle the issue of compensation” (Min 66).<sup>2</sup> This point was discredited in the following year when “the *Asahi Shinbun* published an article introducing six key confidential documents by the War Ministry that proved the Japanese government’s responsibility for military sex slavery” (Min 67-8).

In total, only about 400 Korean military sex slavery victims (accounts for both South and North Korean women) came forward, though much less shared their stories, with only about 65 coming forward publicly (Min 68). I briefly addressed the impacts felt by military sex slavery victims that were able to return home to Korea in Chapter One. However, I will spend some time here emphasizing the specific difficulties experienced by these women. While the broader implications of the experiences upon returning home and eventual testimonies of these women will be discussed at length in the next section, I emphasize here that their silences were caused

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<sup>2</sup> Original passage in Korean, translated passage quoted in Min 66. For original source in Korean, see: Lee Hyun-Sook. *Hanguk Gyohoe Yeoseong Yeonhaphoe 25 Nyeonsa*. Seoul, Korean Church Women United, 1992.

by cultural norms surrounding sexual assault and perpetuated by the denial of accountability by the Japanese state and the malignant neglect by the Korean state.

In the following are the accounts of three victims.

- Kim Bok-Dong was taken from her home in Yangsan at the age of 14 under the illusion of being sent to work at a military uniform factory in Guangdong Province, China. After being stationed at several military brothels, the war ended while Kim was in Singapore. After being enslaved for 8 years, she was allowed home. Now 21 and of age to marry, she adamantly refused. Eventually she told her mother what had happened to her during her time away from home and explained that was why she didn't want to get married. She had permanent scars from sexual abuse and suicide attempts. Despite getting married, she never told her husband about her experience and was unable to have a child, likely due to the physical trauma caused by her time as a military sex slave. After her husband's death she, at the age of 60, came public with her story.
- Lee Yong-soo grew up in Daegu and at the age of 15 was taken in the night from her home. She was stationed in Taiwan and returned home after 3 years in 1946. She never told anyone about her experience and never married. It wasn't until seeing Kim Hak-soon's testimony that Lee came forward.
- Kim Soon-Deok was 16 when she was lied to about a factory job opening in Japan. She was stationed in both Shanghai and Nanking. She was released in 1940. She went on to have three children, all of which begged her not to go public when she told them about her experiences, following Kim Hak-sun's testimony (Min 67).

These women, as well as all the others, lived with the shame of being a victim of sexual assault and human trafficking for nearly 45 years, never telling anyone about their trauma. As discussed in Chapter One, traditional Korean culture placed the blame of sexual assault on the victim. A woman was expected to choose death over rape and if a woman was raped, she was expected to commit suicide or go to the grave with her trauma, lest she burden those around her, nullify her marriage prospects, or be considered an unloyal wife. Of the military sex slaves that survived, few went on to marry or have children, both due to emotional and physical traumas. Those that did, like Kim Soon-Deok, were hesitant to come forward due to concerns about their children's reputations.

The next section discusses how the trauma assumed by female bodies is steamrolled by both state needs and male interests.

### **Nationalism and Female Bodies**

While the emergence of the Japanese military sex slavery issue was not the impetus for heightened anti-Japanese nationalism in Korea, it was certainly used strategically to further Korean nationalism. The section focuses on the shared history of modern Korean nationalism and the military sex slavery complex and the subsequent intersection in the early 1990s. It will argue that the modern nationalist movement is highly gendered and further exploits traumatized female bodies for its own interests and concludes that such exploitation also meets the interests of the Korean state.

Anti-colonial nationalism was at the forefront of the developmental period following the Korean war. Nationalism installed by the state created the infrastructure that would intertwine Korean identity with economic growth and bodily sacrifice. For men, this meant mandatory military conscription and for women, it meant unregulated labor in factories. In examining state

nationalism, a model can be found in which bodies can be transformed in the collective consciousness such that they are no longer bodies but rather a concept or symbol. For example, during state population planning in the late developmental period, wives were asked to have no more than two children to regulate the food supply chain. Such top-down social influencing does two things. The first is that the bodies of women and the various traumas of having children are disregarded as being tangible. A space is created in which the physical body becomes a theoretical slogan of the nation-state. The second is that the social view on women is molded to the state's expectations and isolates those who do not meet this expectation- a woman should be a mother, and if she isn't then perhaps, she is not truly one of us. In other words, the nation-state has the power to engineer nationalism for its own benefit. Similarly, this model is also used to extra-nationally define what is Korean and what is not, and in particular, "unified Korean national identity was constructed to a great degree through its opposition to colonizing Others, including Japan" (Yang 129).

The "othering" narrative used in Korean nationalist rhetoric is problematic in its Japan-Korean dichotomy as well as its gender politics. As the Military Sex Slavery issue and subsequent protests gained public traction, anti-Japanese sentiment grew to include the issue. For the first time, gendered sexuality was moved to the forefront of public awareness as victims offered their testimonies. This was, in fact, an issue of the exploitation of gendered sexuality. However, the problematic aspects of public awareness lay in how it was used to promote an agenda that erased female victims from the conversation. Male Korean nationalists began speaking of the atrocity of military sex slavery as an attack on all Koreans, rather than poor, rural Korean women. This view was largely supported by the "othering" nationalism that did not allow for nuance within the scope of Korean identity- you are *this*, a Korean, or you are not; you

live *this* way if you are Korean. While this homogenization of Korean identity was created as a defense mechanism and trauma response to Japanese colonization and Western imperialism, it dismantled the voices of those who do not fit into the ideal Korean model. In this case, it was women.

There were two primary issues that came from the intersection of military sex slavery and homogenous-centric nationalism. The first is related to the silencing of women. In letters submitted to the *Dong-a Ilbo*, a Korean newspaper, men spoke with passion that reflected personal injury. One writer equated military sex slavery with throwing a “dirty sperm bucket into our Korean people's face[s]” and outlined his own demands from the Japanese state (Yang 130). Another writer asks “Why should we forgive the Japanese people, who abused the dignity of Korean women? Korean women regard chastity, and the shame caused by violation of it, as more important than life itself” (Yang 130). What both demonstrate is the belief that trauma does not belong solely to the victims but rather belongs to all Koreans, including Korean men. Female trauma is objectified as men assume something that belongs to them has been injured. By making his own demands, the first writer is taking the issue away from victims and objectifying it, using it as collateral in a nationalist debate. The second writer objectifies the victims by presenting a presumed desire to forgive and by generalizing the trauma to include all Korean women.

There is also something to be said here of the political use of chastity. The second writer speaks of how chastity is viewed by Korean women. This aspect can be deconstructed several ways. The first is in the assumption that all Korean women view chastity this way. The second is in the writer’s objectification of female sexuality and thought to further his own narrative. The third is in the referencing of traditional Confucian belief that outlines an expectation that a woman should regard her loyalty to her husband (or future husband) above her own life.



All three of the deconstructions outlined above contribute to the critique of such a comment, but the third is especially pertinent to the second primary issue that comes from the intersection of military sex slavery and homogenous-centric nationalism which is the creation of a gendered state. In the military sex slavery discourse presented by men, Korea and Japan are gendered. In perpetuating the systems of military sex slavery, Japan has sex trafficked the whole of Korea. Using this analysis, Korean men have every right to feel personally attacked and speak over the actual victims. Korean men are also allowed the belief that they have stakes in this trauma. Under a Confucian system, an unwed woman must remain chaste for the benefit of her future husband. In the systematic rape of thousands of Korean girls and women, Japan took something away from Korean men; the matter of consequence was not female trauma but rather the bruising of male pride.

This position certainly reaffirms the silence of victims which ultimately benefits the Korean state. In speaking *for*, rather than supporting, female victims, male nationalist discourse muddies the waters of the issue which allows for the state to continue to avoid the issue. While male nationalists exploit military sex slavery survivors by objectifying their experiences to forward an anti-Japanese narrative, the Korean state can avoid the female voice entirely all while reinforcing a traditional patriarchal system. If the state can overlook female trauma, it will be able to continuously exploit female sexuality for its own interests. The next section will look at an example of how exactly the state does this.

### **Neoliberalization**

While the victims of military sex slavery were coming forward with their testimonies, the South Korean economy underwent massive restructuring that loosened growth-inhibiting policies and increased access to and from foreign markets, following a neoliberal model. The neoliberal

economy impacted all sectors, not excluding the sex industry. This section argues that the Korean state has benefited immensely from access to cheap foreign labor. In particular, the state has had its foreign capital and national security needs met through the exploitation of Southeast Asian women.

As discussed in Chapter Two, camptowns made up a large part of the post-war economy and sex work was a large portion of camptown economies. This had not changed by the 1990s. Camptowns were considered a crucial aspect to American military occupation and were thus the foundation of national security. However, the market for Korean sex workers began to shrink in the 1980s. With labor law reforms and more job opportunities and social welfare services for disadvantaged youths, less young women found themselves needing to depend on sex work for income. Moreover, as the value of the Korean Won began to rise and as American troops' salaries began to stagnate, much of the existing Korean sex labor force shifted to focus on a Korean clientele. This was an issue both caused and solved by the neoliberal market. It created a space in which Koreans could earn more- income that could then be spent on Korean sex work. It also created the infrastructure to import foreign labor.

Most foreign sex workers in Korea are Filipina women. Given that prostitution is officially illegal, a separate system of foreign labor import had to be created to regulate sex work immigration. Following in the footsteps of the industrial trainee program, Filipina women who are interested in working abroad can apply to agencies that will act as brokers in their immigration process (Cheng 57). Many of these women are not interested in sex work. However, "respectable" jobs such as cleaning or childcare are only brokered by agencies that require hefty upfront fees, fees that increase for brokerage to Western countries such as the U.S. or Canada. Entertainment agencies, which offer jobs where "serving drinks and talking to customers," are

the primary duties become attractive because they can offer brokerage packages with no upfront fees (Cheng 84). Instead, women are allowed to assume the fees to be paid off upon successful employment at an entertainment club in military base camptowns. That is, they assume a debt that is unlikely to be paid off even upon employment.

The agencies are not typically transparent about the conditions of the women's employment, with the quality of pay, living conditions, and duties being highly exaggerated. Women who are accepted by agencies are offered a one year special "entertainer" visa that is dependent on compliance with a participating club's contract and are provided transportation to Korea, a cost that is typically fronted by the clubs the women are being delivered to but is eventually assumed by the women themselves. Upon arrival in Korea, the Filipina women are transported directly to the clubs they are contracted to. These clubs are always owned and operated by native Koreans.

By design, the Filipina "entertainers" are immediately in a precarious situation. Besides being in a space in which a new language is used, and new culture practiced, the women are inserted into a nested hierarchal system in which they are on the bottom. On the outer layer of this nested hierarchy is the Korean system in which family unit is central in both micro and macro organizations. This is best seen in relationships that are formed between entertainers and the Korean club owners. Entertainers are taught to consider the workers in their assigned clubs as family; they are to call club owners "mama" or "papa" and their coworkers *eonni*, "older sister" (Cheng 107-8). The use of kinship terms and creation of a "family" unit have one primary purpose: control. In establishing owners as parents and workers as daughters, there is a linguistic establishment of authority in which owners are allowed to control and punish the entertainers accordingly, as a parent can scold a child. Moreover, this creates an environment where a woman

is expected to uphold her familial duties. That is, like a daughter is expected to respect the orders of her parents, women working in the clubs are expected to meet the demands of club owners.

The internal layer of the nested hierarchy is that of camptowns. At the very top of this hierarchy is the Korean state, which controls and regulates labor migration and entertainment work. Below that is the American military and more specifically, G.I.s, who are the primary source of income for camptown laborers, with club owners below them. Finally, at the very bottom of the hierarchy are the migrant entertainers.

Filipina entertainers' income, mobility, and bodies are under constant scrutiny by club owners. To begin, the income of a Filipina entertainer will never outweigh her debt. Despite an entertainment visa only lasting a year, an entertainer is debt-bound to her club until her debt is paid off and considered the profitability of exploited immigrant labor, club owners have incentive to keep an entertainer for as long as they can. As previously mentioned, an entertainer assumes a debt as soon as she is assigned to a club. She will incur fees monthly for housing expenses (housing was promised, but not for free) such as utilities, fees for food, uniforms, salon visits, makeup, and anything "extra" she might want or need such as coffee (Cheng 109-11). These fees are slightly offset by the money she earns working. Typically, clubs offer a flat monthly salary plus commission on drinks sold to customers. This may be further scrutinized, as some clubs have a monthly drink quota that each girl must meet.

To illustrate, consider the income and fees of women at the Winner Club in Dongducheon, a camptown near the DMZ. At this club, each entertainer is expected to meet an \$800/month earnings quota (using a 2022 conversion rate of 1200KOR:1USD). Drinks coast \$12 each, and she receives a commission of \$2 on each drink. When she meets this quota, she receives a \$120 bonus. If she just meets her quota, she will make about \$800 for selling over 400

drinks which brings her monthly salary to \$920- this is before fees and does not include tips. Now consider the income of the club itself. If this club is earning the other \$10 for every drink it will make \$4,860 from drinks alone from one entertainer. Now if this club has 20 workers, the raw profit stands at just over \$95,000 per month (Cheng 112). The numbers here speak to incredible economic exploitation that perpetuates a cycle of debt that is never truly broken.

As entertainers, the bodies of the Filipina workers are also exploited. Physically, the women are expected to adhere to a strict schedule that requires them to work evenings until late morning, complete household chores, take care of cosmetic needs, and sleep. This is used as a method of control by club owners, who do not want the women to provide club services on their own time and for free to GI boyfriends. Additionally, there are other physical demands that the club jobs may unofficially require. Legally, club owners cannot officially require entertainers to provide sex work, but many expect a percentage of their employees to offer them. These services, referred to as “bar fines”, have varying rates but are largely dependent on the amount of time an employee is pulled away from the club floor for (Cheng 18). Regardless of conventional sex work requirements, sexuality is what is being sold, so employees are always required to wear revealing outfits such as shorts or bikini sets. Moreover, women may be required to dance, sing, sit on the laps of customers, kiss other employees, or other perform provocative actions.

While the experiences of entertainers demonstrate exploitation by club owners and entertainment agencies, there is still much to be said for the context of such exploitations. As in previous analyses of camptowns, the Korean state has a vested interest in the success of camptown staffed by foreign laborers. The positioning of the state is that camptowns are an important resource for military bases and their soldiers, and since American bases are seen as the foundation for diplomacy with the U.S. and thus also national security, the state continues to

carve out spaces for these camptowns. The sex industry continues to be a critical yet hidden national market. In spaces such as camptowns, foreign capital is all that is accumulated, meaning that sex worker is a large supplier of this capital. This is compounded by a neoliberal economy that actively undervalues immigrant labor for larger profits.

The developmental era created a foundation for an exploitative sex industry in camptowns. During the 1960s and 70s, prostitution was made illegal in all areas except camptowns, marking them as special economic zones. Moreover, as a response to the demands of the U.S. military, the sexual health of sex workers in camptowns was monitored strictly. The neoliberal market reforms in the 1990s built upon this foundation, taking advantage of derestricted labor flow from Southeast Asian countries and by the early 2000s, this model had been perfected to maximize profit, all at the cost of immigrant female bodies.

## Conclusion

The exploitation of sex workers and the exploitation of sexuality often go hand in hand. Korea is not unique in how it has orchestrated this within its own borders; all states participate in the marginalization of women and all cultures have sub-cultures regarding sexuality. This project did not discuss a new act of sexual exploitation performed by the state- everything discussed here has been studied at length, implicating state actors where relevant. However, this thesis has presented and defended the argument that the Korean state follows a pattern of sexual exploitation that furthers its interests and that while all the cases of exploitation have been discussed within the field, none have been linked historically in connection with the additional roles of both the U.S. and Japan.

This thesis covered three periods of modern Korean history. First, the Japanese colonial regime (1910-1945) established a model for sexual exploitation. By creating a system of land dispossession and tenancy, the Japanese government was able to create land and resource inequity that limited the autonomy of Koreans. This power imbalance provided the Japanese military access to hundreds of thousands of young girls, whose lives were ruined by the military sex slavery system. Girls who returned home after the end of the war and Japanese occupation were forced into silence by cultural attitudes about female sexuality.

Second, the developmental period (1945-1988) saw the advent of camptowns and sex tourism. Camptown sex workers were marginalized, having to undergo frequent, invasive medical checkups. They had few rights or protections and were belittled and abused by soldiers and shunned from the rest of Korean society. Meanwhile, entertainment agencies began offering tourism packages to Japanese businessmen. Korean companies would hire sex workers from these agencies for Japanese clients, to persuade a favorable business deal. Camptowns and

entertainment agencies, then, acted as peripheral spaces- away from the rest of society- where sex work was normalized.

Third, the 1990s and early 2000s, camptowns were transformed while military sex slavery victims came forward. Korea's economy was shifting and required cheaper labor at a higher volume to continue growing. Camptowns began outsourcing for its sex workforce, with legislation allowing migrant laborers being provided by the state. The Filipina women who work in camptown clubs hold an extremely precarious position. As foreigners, they are exploited by the state. As women, they are exploited by the male patrons. As sex workers, they are exploited by club managers. Moreover, when Kim Hak-soon came forward in 1991 with her experience as a military sex slave victim, two things happened. It caused other victims to come forward, bringing the issue to the forefront of Korean politics. It also reignited Korean nationalism. Male nationalist began speaking over the female victims, furthering the silence they had already endured for 36 years.

This thesis has argued that the South Korean state has exploited female sexuality since its establishment following the Second World War. The state is motivated to do so because of three central interests. First, the Korean state had an immediate concern for national security following the division of Korean peninsula. The U.S. began occupying the South and established over 100 military bases. Camptowns, the recreation-oriented communities surrounding U.S. military bases, were filled with brothels in the guise of clubs. The sex workers who staffed these establishments were critical to the satisfaction and performance of soldiers and thus were critical to national security.

Second, with national development in mind, the state realized its need for increased access to capital, both domestic and foreign. To stimulate economic growth and rapid



modernization the state established a regulated sex industry that catered to American troops. Camptowns became special economic zones in which prostitution was permitted and regulated by the Korean state. These spaces brought in thousands of U.S. dollars while further marginalizing sex workers from the rest of the Korean populace. Similarly, beginning in the 1970s, a second regulated sex industry was established. With the intention of creating an extensive trade network with Japan, Korean companies began offering “entertainment services” to prospective clients. These services provided Japanese white-collar workers with access to Korean sex workers. Later this industry would become a staple in Korean work culture. Both sub-industries would come to strengthen the relationship between the Korean economy with sex work while deepening the marginalization of sex workers, furthering the interests of the Korean state.

Finally, the Korean state was interested in building diplomatic relationships with nations that could help the country achieve the two previous interests. The two countries discussed in this project, the United States and Japan, were of particular interest to Korea. Japan had a local, established economy and a historic relationship with Korea and the U.S. was the strongest, wealthiest nation in the world and had established military bases across the southern part of the peninsula. This thesis argued that the Korean state invested heavily in the sex industry in the interest of maintaining economic and social diplomatic relations with both Japan and the U.S. Additionally. In the 1990s, when the Japanese military sex slavery system became a public issue, the Korean state was motivated to silence the movement for reparations so that diplomatic relations with Japan could be preserved. Even nationalist movements that spawned because of the military sex slave movement furthered the Korean state’s interests, as the gendered rhetoric used by male nationalists detracted attention from the victims and the victims’ demands. In

essence, all the topics discussed throughout this thesis were in some way important to the state's interest in diplomacy.

The critical finding of this project is the multilateral cooperation that supported historical patterns of sexual exploitation. While I have indicated the strong role of the Korean state in the exploitation of female sexuality, it is vital that the role of the United States and Japan be recognized as well. Japan's abuses during the Colonial Era set the foundations for sexual exploitation, even after its removal from the peninsula. It was continuously able to take advantage of the unequal power dynamic between itself and Korea during the developmental period and was able to double-down on this in the modern era to avoid being held accountable for military sex slavery.

Even though Japan ended its colonial rule over Korea in 1945, the relationship between the two states remained unequal and tense. The U.S. began occupying Korea in 1945 as a Cold War precaution and never left. Korea is home to the most foreign military bases in the world despite having the 10<sup>th</sup> largest economy. While both states are comfortable with the arrangement, the U.S. has repeatedly allowed for the relationships fostered between camptown women and its soldiers go unchecked. Soldiers are not held accountable for their violence off base and are encouraged to patronize an industry that does not protect its workers. South Korea, Japan, and the U.S. are all party to the sexual abuse of women discussed in this thesis. They have all contributed to nearly a century of top-down exploitation and they have all done so together.

In conclusion, the thesis shines a light on patterns of oppression by the Korean since the 1950s. While the study covered the period up to the early 2000s, further examination would likely find that the state's interests continue to be intertwined with sex work. It is the hope that

this project can be expanded to further investigate the relationship between female sexuality and the state.

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