

# How Can Historical Harm Be Reconciled?



Citation: Digital Museum-The comfort women issue and the Asian Women's Fund: Korean Comfort Women who survived and were protected in Lameng, Yunnan, September 3, 1945. Citation: Photo by Charles H. Hatfield, US 164th Signal Photo Company, 1945. Photo can be found in the National Archives Catalog.

## Supporting Questions

1. How can historical, social, and legal recognition of past transgressions lead to reconciliation?
2. What role do voices play in understanding harm, and whose voices should be heard?

**US-Korea Global Strategy Foundation High School Inquiry**

How can historical harm be reconciled?	
<b>C3 Framework Indicators</b>	<p><b>D2.His.5.9-12.</b> Analyze how historical contexts shaped and continue to shape people’s perspectives.</p> <p><b>D2.His.15.9-12.</b> Distinguish between long-term causes and triggering events in developing a historical argument.</p>
<b>Staging the Compelling Question</b>	Consider the experiences of women impacted by sexual slavery during World War II by viewing the first filmed evidence from the National Archives documenting the existence of “comfort women.”

Supporting Question 1
How can historical, social, and legal recognition of past transgressions lead to reconciliation?
Formative Performance Task
Create an evidence-based concept map to organize ideas and demonstrate how recognition of historical, social, and legal transgressions can lead to reconciliation.
Featured Sources
<p><b>Source A:</b> Article about the significance of filmed evidence related to sexual slavery and the “comfort women” issue.</p> <p><b>Source B:</b> Guide to understanding sexual slavery and the “comfort women” issue.</p> <p><b>Source C:</b> Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Kono’s statement about the “comfort women” issue.</p> <p><b>Source D:</b> Timeline of key events on the “comfort women” issue.</p>

Supporting Question 2
What role do voices play in understanding harm, and whose voices should be heard?
Formative Performance Task
To prepare for a restorative circle, create a list of four questions about whose voices should be heard in understanding harm.
Featured Sources
<p><b>Source A:</b> Article discussing the denial of the “comfort woman” issue.</p> <p><b>Source B:</b> Oral history interview of a former “comfort woman.”</p> <p><b>Source C:</b> Poem based on oral history testimony of a former “comfort woman.”</p> <p><b>Source D:</b> Art created by former “comfort women.”</p>

<b>Summative Performance Task</b>	<b>ARGUMENT:</b> Construct an argument (e.g., reflective historical journal or reflective essay) that responds to the compelling question— “How can historical harm be reconciled”—using specific claims and relevant evidence from the sources provided and one other source, while acknowledging competing views.
	<b>EXTENSION</b> Using the argument as a foundation, evaluate how historical, social, and legal reconciliation of past wartime transgressions may help to mitigate future ones.
<b>Taking Informed Action</b>	<p><b>UNDERSTAND</b> Discuss the plight of those impacted by contemporary sexual slavery and human trafficking.</p> <p><b>ASSESS</b> Consider how international governments, non-governmental organizations, the United Nations, and NATO can further enforce legal statutes against sexual violence during times of conflict and war.</p> <p><b>ACT</b> Design and implement an action plan to promote awareness and create meaningful change about a human rights or social justice issue in your community.</p>

## Overview

### Inquiry Description

This inquiry leads students through an investigation of how historical harm can be reconciled through historical truth and reconciliation. By investigating the compelling question “How can historical harm be reconciled?” students attempt to contextualize the importance of reconciliation. The formative performance tasks help students build knowledge and skills through the course of the inquiry as they examine the experiences of sexual slaves, or “comfort women” during the war, the importance of acknowledging past transgressions and the role voices play in understanding harm. Students create an evidence-based concept map about how acknowledgement of historical, social, and legal transgressions can lead to reconciliation. Students then write questions about the role voices play in understanding harm, and whose voices should be heard in understanding harm to prepare for a restorative circle.

Note: This inquiry is expected to take three or four 50-minute class periods. The inquiry time frame could expand if teachers think their students need additional instructional experiences (e.g., supporting questions, formative performance tasks, featured sources, writing). Teachers are encouraged to adapt the inquiry to meet the needs and interests of their students. This inquiry lends itself to differentiation and modeling of historical thinking skills while assisting students in reading the variety of sources.

### Structure of the Inquiry

In addressing the compelling question “How can historical harm be reconciled?” students work through a series of supporting questions, formative performance tasks, and featured sources in order to construct an argument supported by evidence while acknowledging competing perspectives.

## Staging the Compelling Question

In staging the compelling question, “How can historical harm be reconciled?” teachers may prompt students with the video clip depicting the first filmed evidence documenting the existence of sexual slavery, or “comfort women” during World War II.

## Supporting Question 1

The first supporting question—“How can historical, social, and legal recognition of past transgressions lead to reconciliation?” encourages students to examine how acknowledgement of past transgressions can lead to reconciliation using primary and secondary sources. The formative performance task asks students to create a detailed evidence-based concept map to organize ideas and demonstrate recognition of how historical, social, and legal transgressions can lead to reconciliation.

The featured sources for this question are a collection of primary and secondary sources analyzing the “comfort women” issue through a historical lens.

## Supporting Question 2

The second supporting question— “What role do voices play in understanding historical harm, and whose voices should be heard?” encourages students to examine what role voices play in understanding harm and whose voices should be heard using primary and secondary sources. The formative performance task asks students to create questions to prepare for a restorative circle.

The featured sources for this question are a collection of primary and secondary sources focusing on the voices of former sexual slaves, or “comfort women” and a competing voice denying the existence of sexual slavery during WWII.

## Summative Performance Task

At this point in the inquiry, students have explored how historical harm can be reconciled. Students should be able to demonstrate the breadth of their understanding and their ability to use evidence from multiple sources to support their claims. In this task, students construct an evidence-based argument using multiple sources to answer the compelling question, “How can historical harm be reconciled?” Students’ arguments may take a variety of forms, including a reflective historical journal or a reflective essay.

Students’ arguments will vary, but could include any of the following:

- Truth and reconciliation are necessary components in order for survivors to heal from past transgressions.
- The voices of survivors should be heard in the reconciliation process.

To *extend* students’ arguments, teachers may have students evaluate how historical, social, and legal reconciliation of past wartime transgressions may help to mitigate future ones.

Students have the opportunity to **Take Informed Action** by drawing on their understandings about how recognition of historical, social, and legal transgressions can lead to reconciliation, and what role voices play in understanding harm, and whose voices should be heard. To *understand*, students will discuss the plight of those impacted by contemporary sexual slavery and human trafficking. To *assess* the issue, students will consider how international governments, the United Nations, and NATO can further enforce legal statutes against sexual violence during times of conflict and war. To *act*, students will design and implement an action plan to promote awareness and create meaningful change about a human rights or social justice issue in their community.

## Staging the Compelling Question

**Featured Source:**

Source: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, first filmed evidence of the existence of sexual slaves, or “comfort women” during WWII (**begin viewing at 8 minutes 23 seconds**); accessible at <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/23471>.

Source: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, 1944.



## Supporting Question 1

### Featured Source A

Source A: China Daily article written by Lia Zhu about the significance of the first filmed evidence of sexual slavery, or “comfort women during WWII;” accessible at [https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2017-07/12/content\\_30078518.htm](https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2017-07/12/content_30078518.htm).

Source: China Daily Hong Kong, Lisa Zhu, Wednesday, July 12, 2017.



Footage from 1944 shows "comfort women" in Songshan, Yunnan province, after its liberation from Japanese troops. (Screen Shot Of Video / US National Archives And Records Administration)

Newly uncovered footage of a group of "comfort women" provides filmed evidence of the Imperial Japanese Army's sexual enslavement of women from Asian countries during the World War II era.

The black-and-white footage shot in 1944 by a US Army private in Yunnan province shows the women standing outside a brick house. They were barefoot and looked nervous. After a two-year search through US archives, researchers from Seoul University uncovered the footage at the US National Archives and Records Administration.

The women were filmed after they were liberated by Chinese and United States allied forces as the troops reclaimed Songshan, in Yunnan, from the Japanese.

The Japanese military kept an estimated 200,000 women as sex slaves before and during World War II. The researchers identified the women as Korean by matching their clothes and facial appearance with existing historical photos - a set of photos taken by a private in the US Army Signal Corps' 164th Photographic Unit and rediscovered in 2000.

"The film clearly shows the fear and anxiety on the women's faces and body movements. As a woman, I can clearly identify with these women as they stood barefoot, so helpless and scared," said Lillian Sing, co-chair of the San Francisco-based Comfort Women Justice Coalition.

Calling the footage "the most powerful and persuasive evidence", Sing, a retired Superior Court judge in San Francisco, said, "In a court of law, this film is considered the best evidence and a smoking gun showing what happened in 1944."

Before the film clip surfaced, the only visual images had been still photographs and accounts from survivors. "This is vivid, moving, proactive, and almost alive film, and what it showed cannot be denied," Sing said.

The discovery of the footage is significant as it refutes convincingly Japan's claim that there is no evidence of "comfort women", said Peipei Qiu, professor of Chinese and Japanese at Vassar College and author of the award-winning book *Chinese Comfort Women: Testimonies from Imperial Japan's Sex Slaves*.

"This footage tied in with wartime records. The area of Tengchong, Songshan and Longling in Yunnan province was an important fortress on the vital wartime supply line in China," said Qiu. Her book also records this history.

According to the West Yunnan NGO Research Association for the Unresolved Issues of the Anti-Japanese War, the Imperial Japanese Army occupied Longling county in 1942, and within two weeks set up a military comfort station there.

Fighting among the soldiers took place frequently for the opportunity to use the station, so the Japanese Army transported about 100 "comfort women" from Taiwan and set up two more comfort stations at a temple and a church, said Qiu.

The Japanese soldiers also raped the captured local women and then detained them, setting up more comfort stations. Besides local women, local people also saw Japanese and Korean women confined in the comfort stations.

"What happened to the 'comfort women' in this station when the Japanese forces withdrew remains unknown, although there have been reports that, in nearby Lameng township and Tengchong county, Japanese troops forced Korean 'comfort women' to take mercuric chloride, while they shot and killed Chinese comfort women," Qiu said. Mercuric chloride is a poisonous substance found in some antiseptics and batteries.

"We have only 22 'comfort women' alive in China and 37 alive in South Korea. Justice cannot be delayed any longer," Sing said.

## Supporting Question 1

### Featured Source B

Source B: U.S. Institute of Peace article written by Alexis Dudden about understanding the history of the “comfort women” issue; accessible at <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/09/guide-understanding-history-comfort-women-issue>.

Source: U.S. Institute of Peace, Alexis Dudden, September 16, 2022.



### A Guide to Understanding the History of the ‘Comfort Women’ Issue

To help Seoul and Tokyo mend ties, U.S. policymakers first need to learn the nuances of an important ‘memory battle.’

Friday, September 16, 2022 / By: Alexis Dudden

*Alexis Dudden is a professor of history at the University of Connecticut.*

Even before assuming office in May 2022, South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol made clear his desire for smoother formal relations between Seoul and Tokyo. Locked in a number of interwoven and protracted disputes, South Korea and Japan have been at a diplomatic standstill since well before COVID-19 restrictions shut down everything. Recent peacebuilding efforts are encouraging, with Japan and the United States publicly welcoming South Korea’s overtures as pivotal to plans for regional alignment in the face of North Korea’s provocations and China’s aggressive behavior.

Nonetheless, significant difficulties remain. Washington’s desire for calmer trilateral waters runs directly into an unfortunate approach to what are collectively referred to as the “history problems.” Today, 80 to 100 years removed from the events involved, these rancorous disagreements are better understood as “memory battles.” Among them, one of the most fraught issues remains the history from the 1930s and 1940s commonly known by its cruel euphemism: the “comfort women.” U.S. policymakers must understand three key aspects of the comfort women issue if the United States is to play a helpful role in resolving bilateral tensions between Japan and South Korea.

#### Background

Beginning in 1932 and lasting until 1945, the Japanese government’s notorious systematized sex trafficking scheme involved women, girls and boys from throughout the Japanese empire.

Scholars believe the system ensnared 200,000 victims, although estimates vary from 20,000 to nearly 500,000. However, it is not the numbers that continue to teach us.

The history happened, and we learn from the ways in which Japanese state apparatuses functioned, often in conjunction with one another, to organize the system. The best current research is being done in China through collaborative efforts with scholars there working with colleagues in Japan (such as Etsuro Totsuka and the Tokyo-based Women’s Active Museum on War and Peace’s Mina Watanabe), South Korea, Taiwan, Australia, Germany, the United States and beyond. In short, an international effort to understand and analyze this past has been at work since the early 1990s, and it is important to recognize up front this issue as a global history and phenomenon.

The truth of the “comfort women” history is not the issue at hand. Nevertheless, Holocaust-like denialism continues to attack this history and labels victims “liars” or “money grabbers” and whitewashes most evidence as “fake” despite abundant academic and juridical peer-reviewed material as well as governmentally published documentation that verifies the litany of horrors during this shameful episode. Additionally, there are significant multinational, multiethnic survivor testimonies, and the few living survivors are still sufficiently strong and tell their stories as well as their ongoing struggles. In the mix, a vicious cycle of blame and recrimination remains on all sides, which, in turn, continues to harm the few survivors of a history that ranks at the top of the 20th century’s instances of wartime state-sponsored militarized sex trafficking.

For those new to the issue of South Korea-Japan tensions — and especially those working on policies to improve regional relations — it is important to understand that Washington has been, and continues to be, very much in the middle of multiple attempts to unravel disputes between Tokyo and Seoul. To be clear: This does not mean that the United States is responsible for creating the histories involved. Yet, Washington policymakers and practitioners continue to play a central role, which is why deniers and advocates alike want Washington to take clearer positions for their position’s respective gain. As a result, it has never been more important for U.S. government practitioners to understand three key, yet often obfuscated, pieces of the “comfort women” history in particular.

### ‘Comfort Women’ Versus ‘Sexual Slavery’

---

First, words matter. Avoidance of the term “sexual slavery,” which has already been ascribed to this history by the United Nations and the Obama administration, amounts to allowing the Japanese government to shirk state responsibility for state sponsorship of what is defined as a war crime and crime against humanity.

In the summer of 2012, then-U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton remarked that the U.S. government understood this matter as “sexual slavery” according to global norms. The backlash among some Japanese nationalists began then with a vengeance and has not let up.

Deniers brand as “anti-Japanese” or “pro-Korean” anyone who researches or publishes about this sordid history — as Russian officials now do in an attempt to defame those investigating what is taking place in Ukraine.

Imperial Japan’s state sponsorship in the 1930s and 1940s of human trafficking of minor children and women for the purposes of sex from Japan and its overseas territories and war zones remains among the 20th century’s largest

examples of the horrendous practice of state-sponsored militarized sexual slavery. Today, the United Nations is examining similar instances of Russian soldiers allegedly committing sexual violence in Ukraine and labeling the cases accordingly, and this is why words matter.

### **The Transnational Nature of Imperial Japan’s Sexual Slavery**

Second, although Japan’s historical state sponsorship of militarized sexual slavery is frequently and unproductively portrayed as an issue between South Korea and Japan, with parties in both countries bearing responsibility for this problem, the issue is much broader. The historical sexual slavery system that operated in the 1930s and 1940s occurred throughout the entirety of the Japanese empire, beginning in Japan and extending to its colonies and war zones as the battles expanded until Japan’s defeat in 1945. Recruiters for the Japanese government worked in countries including but not limited to Korea (there was no South or North at the time), China, Taiwan, Japan proper, East Timor, Vietnam, the Micronesian islands (including Guam, where U.S. citizens were ensnared), the Philippines, Indonesia, Myanmar and Cambodia.

Most frequently forgotten in the politicization of this issue is that the first known “comfort women” were Japanese. In 2006, Totsuka, one of Japan’s preeminent international legal theorists and historians, analyzed the well-documented 1932 trafficking case of 15 Japanese women by Japanese men through Nagasaki to one of the first known “comfort stations” established in Shanghai by the Imperial Navy. Totsuka maintains that this evidence should encourage further research to understand why the Japanese penal codes against abduction and kidnapping that were applied in that case “[were] not effectively enforced in Japanese colonies, particularly in Korea” since “the pattern of recruitment [in Japan] (was) strikingly similar to the many Korean cases of the abduction of women.” Moreover, Totsuka’s efforts, together with the efforts of many others, underscore that understanding past state-sponsored atrocities can help prevent ongoing occurrences of similar violence in the present. This is one reason why and how the international community is able to respond in real time to reports of sexual violence committed by Russian soldiers in Ukraine.

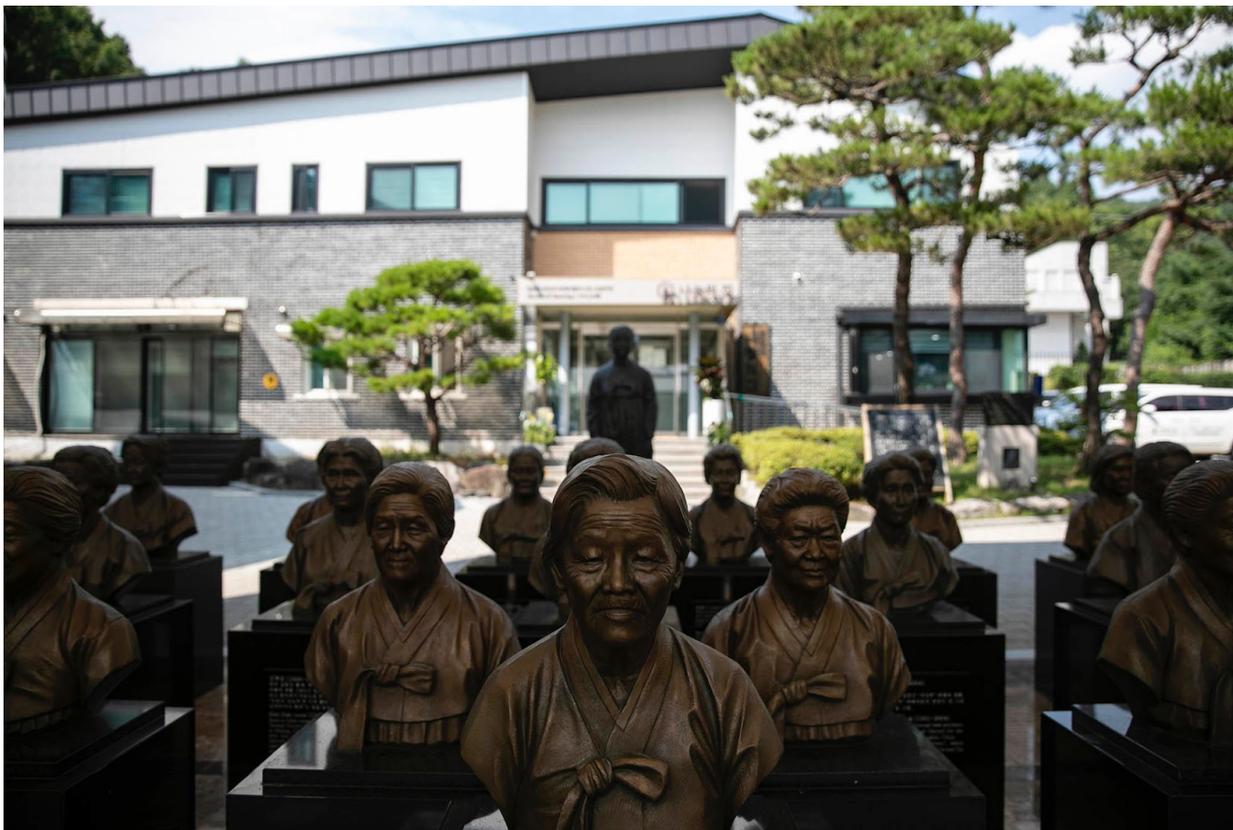
### **Comfort Women Statues**

Finally, U.S. policymakers should examine why Tokyo is contesting comfort women statues in several countries. Since the December 2011 unveiling of the first statue directly across from the Japanese Embassy in Seoul — a benign likeness of a seated girl that invokes the victims’ lost childhoods — these statues have been the gathering touchstone for South Korean and other survivors. A South Korean civic group sponsored the first one to mark the 1,000th consecutive weekly demonstration that victims and their supporters have held, and continue to hold, since 1992. Japanese diplomats made their discomfort with the statue known as soon as it appeared.

Hundreds of demonstrations later, the peaceful girl statue is elemental to how many people commemorate and educate this history’s trauma. Over 40 similar statues exist throughout the world in South Korea, the United States, China, Australia, Germany and Canada. One in Shanghai includes a Chinese victim seated next to a Korean girl. Another in San Francisco depicts a Filipina holding hands with Korean and Chinese girls. Survivors embrace the statues, and supporters wrap them in scarves in the winter and decorate them with garlands of flowers in the summer. Three successive South Korean administrations have refused Japan’s request that the statue be torn down in Seoul, making all the more alarming Tokyo’s ongoing efforts to make the statue disappear.

Today, it is commonplace for groups around the world to demand the removal of statues of historical figures deemed to

be perpetrators of criminal acts. Only Japan is seeking the removal of statues representing victims of its past crimes. Japan’s efforts are additionally unusual because the country is seeking to redefine its security posture to allow its troops to engage militarily abroad for the first time since 1945. How do we understand Tokyo’s desire to enhance its military’s legitimacy and capabilities when its leaders seek to eradicate statues that symbolize the imperial military’s shameful history? Neither the Japanese nor the South Korean government should intervene with the statues. The survivors and their supporters should decide where they belong and what they reflect, and those managing any agreement about this history must listen to them for the agreement to work.



Bronze busts of former sex slaves, or “comfort women,” for Japanese troops in World War II, at the House of Sharing shelter in Gwangju, South Korea. July 3, 2022. (Woohae Cho/The New York Times)

## Supporting Question 1

### Featured Source C

Source C: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, the Kono statement stating the acknowledgement of sexual slavery and “comfort women” during WWII in Japanese occupied territories; accessible at <https://www.legal-tools.org/doc/cb4732/pdf/>.

Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan: Statement by the Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono on the result of the study on the issue of "comfort women," August 4, 1993.

The Government of Japan has been conducting a study on the issue of wartime "comfort women" since December 1991.

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

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

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

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

We shall face squarely the historical facts as described above instead of evading them, and take them to heart as lessons of history. We hereby reiterate our firm determination never to repeat the same mistake by forever engraving such issues in our memories through the study and teaching of history.

As actions have been brought to court in Japan and interests have been shown in this issue outside Japan, the Government of Japan shall continue to pay full attention to this matter, including private researched related thereto.

## Supporting Question 1

### Featured Source D

Source D: Excerpts and timeline from: Victim Silencing, Sexual Violence Culture, Social Healing: Inherited Collective Trauma of World War II South Korean Military "Comfort Women" about attempts at reconciliation on the "comfort women" issue; accessible at <https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1000&context=pkp>.

Source: Victim Silencing, Sexual Violence Culture, Social Healing: Inherited Collective Trauma of World War II South Korean Military "Comfort Women". MiJin Cho, Depts. of Psychology and English, with Prof. Mary Boyes, Virginia Commonwealth University Honors College (2020).

Excerpts:

World War II Japanese military “comfort women” refer to an estimated 200,000 women who were coercively recruited by the Japanese imperial army during WWII under the banner of Chongsindae (“Voluntary” Labor Service Corps) – 80% of whom were Korean women. From the end of WWII to 2019, the South Korean Government has not reached a final consensus for the reconciliation of former South Korean comfort women.

The last indicative action regarding the issue of comfort women was in 2018, when Minister of Foreign Affairs Kang Kyung-wha announced the South Korean government’s formal rejection of the Korean-Japanese 2015 bilateral deal as a “true” resolution of the issue of Japanese wartime sexual slavery. Kang expressed the Korean government’s call for new efforts that restores the “honor and dignity of victims and heals the wounds in their hearts,” suggesting that the trauma of former comfort women has yet to be healed and requires present action.

Reconciliation efforts on behalf of the “comfort women” have repeatedly left out victim voice, as seen in the 1965 Treaty of Basic Relations and 2015 Agreement. Without a reconciliation of the collective trauma, a compulsion and need for social healing will continue to play a part in contemporary affairs.

**Timeline**

<b>1940's-1950's</b> The newly-liberated Korea is divided into North (Soviet Union) and South (U.S.).
<b>1965</b> Korea settles WWII conscript labor in the Treaty of Basic Relations.
<b>1991</b> Kim Hak-sun, a first public former comfort woman, files a lawsuit against the Japanese government.
<b>1992</b> Professor Yoshimi Yoshiaki discovered incriminating documentation for Japanese army involvement.
<b>1993</b> The Kono Statement acknowledges Japanese military involvement in establishment and management of comfort stations.
<b>1994</b> The Japanese government created the Asian Women's Fund (AWF). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contained \$40 million from the Government of Japan and \$5 million in private donations</li> <li>• Faced heavy criticism from both countries: Japanese conservative party objected to compensation and South Korea claimed there was no mention of redress and a lack of sincerity in AWF’s use of private funding.</li> <li>• Only seven South Korean women accepted, and the AWF was dissolved in 2007.</li> </ul>
<b>2001</b> A Japanese court overturns ruling ordering compensation for former Korean comfort women.
<b>2007</b> Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe states that there is no evidence of sex slaves, only willing prostitutes. South Korea demands an apology.
<b>2015</b>

Japan agrees to pay \$8.3 million to support victims in exchange for an end to the issue.

**2019**

South Korea government rejects 2015 Agreement; does not seek further negotiation with Japan. Minister of Foreign Affairs Kang Kyung-wha announced the South Korean government's formal rejection of the Korean-Japanese 2015 bilateral deal as a "true" resolution of the issue of Japanese wartime sexual slavery.

## Supporting Question 2

### Featured Source A

Source A: Asia Pacific Journal, an article about Japanese Prime Minister Abe's denial of sexual slavery during WWII; accessible at <https://apjif.org/-K-MIZOGUCHI--Alexis-Dudden/2368/article.pdf>.

Source: Asia Pacific Journal | Japan Focus | Volume 5 | Issue 3 | Article ID 2368 | March 1, 2007

### Japan's Prime Minister Denies World War II Sex Slaves

TOKYO - Japan's nationalist prime minister denied on March 1 that the country's military forced women into sexual slavery during World War II, casting doubt on a past government apology and jeopardizing a fragile detente with his Asian neighbors.

The comments by Abe Shinzo, a member of a group of lawmakers pushing to roll back a 1993 apology to the sex slaves, were his clearest statement as prime minister on military brothels known in Japan as "comfort stations."

Historians say some 200,000 women - mostly from Korea and China - served in the Japanese military brothels throughout Asia in the 1930s and 1940s. Many victims say they were kidnapped and forced into sexual slavery by Japanese troops.

But Abe, who since taking office in September has promoted patriotism in Japan's schools and a more assertive foreign policy, told reporters there was no proof the women were forced into prostitution.

"The fact is, there is no evidence to prove there was coercion," Abe said.

His remarks contradicted evidence in Japanese documents unearthed in 1992 that historians said showed military authorities had a direct role in working with contractors to forcibly procure women for the brothels.

The documents, which are backed up by accounts from soldiers and victims, said Japanese authorities set up the brothels in response to uncontrolled rape sprees by invading Japanese soldiers in East Asia.

In 1993, then-Chief Cabinet Secretary Kono Yohei apologized to the victims of sex slavery, though the statement did not meet demands by former "comfort women" that it be approved by parliament. Two years later, the government set up a compensation fund for victims, but it was based on private donations - not government money - and has been criticized as a way for the government to avoid owning up to the abuse. The mandate for the fund is to expire March 31.

Abe's comments were certain to rile South Korea and China, which accuse Tokyo of failing to fully atone for wartime atrocities. Abe's government has been recently working to repair relations with Seoul and Beijing.



Former comfort women in 2005 demonstration in Seoul

The statement came just hours after South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun marked a national holiday honoring the anniversary of a 1919 uprising against Japanese colonial rule by urging Tokyo to come clean about its past.

Roh also referred to hearings held by the U.S. House of Representatives last month on a resolution urging Japan to “apologize for and acknowledge” the imperial army’s use of sex slaves during the war.

“The testimony reiterated a message that no matter how hard the Japanese try to cover the whole sky with their hand, there is no way that the international community would condone the atrocities committed during Japanese colonial rule,” Roh said.

Roh’s office said late Thursday it did not immediately have a direct response to the Japanese leader’s remarks. In Beijing, calls to the Chinese Foreign Ministry seeking comment on the remarks were not immediately returned.

State Department spokesman Sean McCormack would not comment on Abe’s statement. “I’ll let the Japanese political system deal with that,” he said.

The sex slave question has been a cause celebre for nationalist politicians and scholars in Japan who claim the women were professional prostitutes and were not coerced into servitude by the military.

Before Abe spoke Thursday, a group of ruling Liberal Democratic Party lawmakers discussed their plans to push for an official revision of Kono’s 1993 apology.

Nakayama Nariaki, chairman of the group of about 120 lawmakers, sought to play down the government’s involvement in the brothels by saying it was similar to a school that hires a company to run its cafeteria.

“Some say it is useful to compare the brothels to college cafeterias run by private companies, who recruit their own staff, procure foodstuffs, and set prices,” he said.

"Where there's demand, businesses crop up ... but to say women were forced by the Japanese military into service is off the mark," he said. "This issue must be reconsidered, based on truth ... for the sake of Japanese honor."

Sex slave victims, however, say they still suffer wounds - physical and psychological - from the war.

Lee Yong-soo, 78, a South Korean who was interviewed during a recent trip to Tokyo, said she was 14 when Japanese soldiers took her from her home in 1944 to work as a sex slave in Taiwan.



Lee Yong-soo

"The Japanese government must not run from its responsibilities," said Lee, who has long campaigned for Japanese compensation. "I want them to apologize. To admit that they took me away, when I was a little girl, to be a sex slave. To admit that history."

*AP writer Burt Herman contributed to this report from Seoul, South Korea.*

*Kozo Mizoguchi wrote this article for the Associated Press on March 1, 2007*

Appendix, [Appeal Concerning Japan's military "comfort women"](#)  
By Center for Research and Documentation on Japan's War Responsibility

## Supporting Question 2

### Featured Source B

Source B: Asian Boss, video of oral history interview with former sex slave, or “comfort woman” Kin Bok-Dang, in which she discusses her experience and her wish for truth and reconciliation; accessible at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qsT97ax\\_Xb0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qsT97ax_Xb0).

Source: Asian Boss: South Korea, October 27, 2018.



## Supporting Question 2

### Featured Source C

Source C: Poem from *A CRUELTY TO OUR SPECIES*, a book of poetry written by Emily Jungmin Yoon. This poem by Yoon is based on oral history testimony of a former sex slave, or “comfort woman.”

Source: *A CRUELTY SPECIAL TO OUR SPECIES*, by Emily Jungmin Yoon, Harper Collins Publishers, NY, 2018. *Please do not reproduce this poem without permission from the author Emily Jungmin Yoon.*

### Hwang Keum-ju

a draft notice for girls, who was going to go? Everybody  
 crying. I went. I dressed nicely and went  
 train windows covered with tar paper  
 None of the girls knew  
 Japanese soldiers on horses vast Manchurian field  
 It was now much too cold to sleep  
 thanks to our body warmth, the sun rose  
 I waited for them to send me to a factory  
 They could not possibly dump me here  
 I was called Nagaki Haruko  
 My long hair was still braided  
 An officer told me that there five orders to obey  
 If I missed any I would be less than dead  
 I hoped one of the orders was for me to work at a factory.  
 I looked at his jacket hung inside out to hide his name

I looked at my virgin's braid at his knife      He told me  
I was not going to any factory  
told me to take off my clothes    I told him  
I did not understand his order  
and his kind of factory      and he laughed  
Girls arrived    got sick    pregnant    injected  
with so many drugs      nameless animals  
exploded on top of us  
The day of liberation      Suddenly,  
no sound of horses      the last soldier  
stood in the kitchen      "Your country is liberated,  
and my country is sitting on a fire."  
So I left the barracks  
I walked  
I was alone and walked all the way to the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel  
American soldiers sprayed me with so much DDT  
all the lice fell off me  
It was December 2<sup>nd</sup>  
I lost my uterus  
I am now 73 years old.

## Supporting Question 2

Featured Source D

Source D: A collection of **sixteen** pieces of art created by former sex slaves, or “comfort women” compiled from the House of Sharing (The Museum of Sexual Slavery by Japanese Military, South Korea). Accessible through a shared google drive at <https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1Z1DgnOjKZkAjbCXX59Z-EMS5ZghKY8ub4qVeDtwXp40/edit?usp=sharing>.

Source: House of Sharing (The Museum of Sexual Slavery by the Japanese Military, South Korea).

### “The Day I Was Abducted”

Kim Sun-duk



### “Where Did My Youth Go”

Kim Bok-dong

