



Going Selective? British Media's Coverage of the Comfort Women

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Abstract

This study analyzes the perspectives of the British media on the comfort women issue. To this end, I review six daily newspapers and two weekly magazines covering the thirty years from 1990 to 2019. The perspectives of British media on the comfort women can be seen as multilateral and selective. The release of articles in the early 1990s began with articles about the sexual violence during the Yugoslav War and compensation issues surrounding British war prisoners in the Pacific War. The news features released in the 2000s and 2010s are characterized by level and cool-headed viewpoints of the third person. Accordingly, they criticize the antagonistic and nationalistic nature of Korea-Japan relations and take contrasting attitudes toward the comfort women issue as distinct from issues concerning their past mutual history. British media insist that Britain should contribute to universal human rights by criticizing the unblushing Japanese government for neglecting financial compensation to the comfort women. However, the attitudes of the British media seem to hesitate between that of guardian of human rights and bystander. An ethics embracing multidirectional memories, wherein selective viewpoints are excluded, is thus needed.

Keywords: comfort women, British media, women's human right, compensation, postcolonial boomerang, multidirectional memories

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Introduction

In this study I examine the perspectives of British media on issues associated with the comfort women in the Japanese army. With the emergence of the testimony of Kim Hak-sun in 1991, who was victimized as a comfort woman in the Imperial Japanese Army, issues associated with the comfort women began surfacing as the voices of the long-forgotten victims became public. Based on the voices of victimized women and research into their experiences, as well as on the activities of civil societies, issues associated with the comfort women in the Japanese army emerged as the primary hurdle to overcoming the past history of Japanese colonialism. Further, the comfort women issue took a central role in the process of restorative justice to correct the wartime human rights abuses inflicted upon women. Herein are the reasons the issue of comfort women in the Japanese army became irreducible to either compensation for damages or diplomatic issues between Japan and Korea.

However, the issues associated with the comfort women in the Japanese army have yet to reach a satisfactory conclusion that embraces both compensation and an official apology from the Japanese government. Indeed, the so-called Korea-Japan Agreement on Comfort Women concluded in 2015 between then South Korean President Park Geun-hye and Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo only aggravated the conflict between the two countries. In the international community, the compensation of women for the violation of their human rights and the transfer of the shame or stigma from the victim to the assailant had already been realized (Askin 2001, 5). This fact is also reflected in the British media's coverage of issues associated with the comfort women. However, Britain is not one of the interested parties. Therefore, what features can be observed in the British media coverage, which comes from the vantage point of a third party? If one considers that the concerns of British society are reflected in the country's news, we can discern the British public's concern with human rights and coming to terms with past history and the war crimes of World War II.

In this study I examine the ways in which news related to the comfort

women issue was reported in major mass media in Britain over the last thirty years—from 1990, when the voices of the comfort women themselves first came to be heard, up to 2019. For examination, I selected six British dailies, *The Times*, *The Guardian*, *Financial Times*, *The Independent*, *Daily Telegraph*, and *Daily Mail*, and two weekly British news magazines, *The Economist* and *The New Statesman*. To access these publications, I used the full-text services provided by the ProQuest Central (PQC) database. The sociopolitical leanings of the aforementioned British newspapers in terms of domestic issues may be distinguished as right-of-center (*The Times* and *Financial Times*), left-of-center (*The Guardian* and *The Independent*), conservative right (*Daily Telegraph*), and the tabloid *Daily Mail*. However, for reporting overseas issues, such differences in political positions do not always clearly emerge. There were 472 articles on the comfort women issue for the period 1990 to 2019 (*The Times*: 107, *The Guardian*: 55, *Financial Times*: 118, *The Independent*: 48, *Daily Telegraph*: 69, *Daily Mail*: 13, *The New Statesman*: 9, *The Economist*: 53). Quantitative and qualitative approaches will be employed for the analysis in this study.

Early 1990s: Emergence of the Comfort Women Issue and Compensation for Former POWs

News of the comfort women in the Japanese army appeared in the 1990s in connection with issues of sexual violence during the Yugoslav War. The disclosure on sexual violence in the Yugoslav War was spotlighted by the media, which initiated the rediscovery of issues associated with the comfort women in the Japanese army, in the context of sexual violence inflicted on women in wartime. On August 14, 1991, Kim Hak-sun appeared before the Korean Council for Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan (currently, Justice for the Comfort Women) and testified about her experiences, giving her real name as a way of protesting the official announcement of the Japanese government denying the compulsive mobilization of comfort women. This was significant in that it was the first testimony by a Korean comfort woman victimized by the Japanese army;

however, this testimony was not covered by the mass media in Britain. Later, when the comfort women movement began to be propagated internationally, this initial testimony of Kim Hak-sun from 1991 was examined retrospectively by the British media for its historical significance (*The Guardian*, October 19, 2012; *Daily Telegraph*, December 29, 2015).

Barbara Hewson, a barrister specializing in human rights, contributed an article to *The Times* on September 8, 1992, wherein she detailed how her perceptions of comfort women and general sexual violence in wartime began with the Yugoslav War. Hewson begins her piece by presenting the reality of the collective and repetitive rapes of women in wartime. She quotes one woman who testified that several men told her she “would have an Ustashi child”¹ before raping her. Hewson also quotes Susan Brownmiller, author of *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape*, who said, “rape in wartime is ‘a familiar act with a familiar excuse,’” and pointed out the long history of sexual violence in wartime and the prostitution in concentration camps in Asia and Germany in World War II. Hewson also mentions the January 1992 demonstration by comfort women seeking compensation from the Japanese government. Barbara Hewson reminds readers that sexual violence was prohibited by the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide, and emphasizes that sexual violence in the Yugoslav War was an unpardonable crime, while mentioning that Asian comfort women were also the victims of the sexual violence of past conflicts.

The rediscovery of sexual violence through the frame of the Yugoslav War became a moment of public awakening toward the issue of the comfort women. In this context, the British media appraised the so-called Kono Statement issued by Kono Yohei, chief cabinet secretary of the Japanese government in 1993, which recognized the Japanese military's involvement in the compulsive mobilization of comfort women, as a significant step forward. The British media also clarified that the demands for official apology and active demonstrations in Korea in the 1990s were presented against the backdrop of the Kono Statement. The fact that the Japanese army

1. Barbara Hewson, “Rape Is a War Crime Too: Bosnia-Herzegovina, Modern Times,” *The Times*, September 8, 1992. The Ustashi was a militant Croatian fascist organization.

mobilized approximately 100,000 to 200,000 women, among them Koreans, Chinese, Indonesians, Taiwanese, and Filipinos, as comfort women, remains one of the darkest secrets of the Pacific War. The Japanese government's continual denial of this has provoked huge public outrage in Asian countries. The sudden expression of apology by the Japanese government in the form of the Kono Statement was thus appraised by the British media in the context of "Tokyo's effort to find an international political role to match its economic status."² That is, the Kono Statement was understood as an attempt to protect the dignity of Japan in the international community, as well as a response to the demands of former comfort women.

The initiation of requests for compensation by former British war prisoners in the Pacific War associated with news of the comfort women were the most significant news features appearing in British media during the period 1992 to 1995. In contrast to the issue of sexual violence in the Yugoslav War, which the British media approached as a third party and understood as requiring international cooperation to protect women's human rights, the issue of British war prisoners was covered more emotionally as involving the sufferings of compatriots. In the media organs covered here, thirty-one news articles related to the comfort women issue appeared in 1995, the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II, the third highest annual number for the period under examination.

Britain and Japan were two of the combatant countries in the Pacific War. The aggression of the Japanese army on the Malay Peninsula resulted in the defeat of the British, Australian, and Indian armies; hence Singapore and Malaysia fell into the hands of the Japanese army, to which about 100,000 Allied soldiers surrendered. The British people will never forget the construction of the famous bridge on the River Kwai and the *death railway* connecting Thailand to Burma, during the construction of which 6,904 British soldiers perished through the barbarity of the Japanese army. The attitudes of Japanese politicians, who were commonly reluctant to admit the barbaric behavior of their army inflicted upon the war prisoners, left dark

2. Joanna Pitman, "Japan Confesses It Forced Women into Wartime Brothels," *The Times*, August 5, 1993.

clouds over the relationship between Britain and Japan, and delayed the full reconciliation between two countries. Thus, the relationship between Japan and Britain, after the end of World War II, encountered an uneasy moment of readjustment due to unresolved issues surrounding war prisoners (Nish and Kibata 2000, 196).

The terrible conditions faced by British prisoners of war, as well as the inhumane behavior of the Japanese army, were propagated to the public through news stories, reminiscences, and art displays depicting the war. In this context, news of the comfort women, presented in the early 1990s as representative of Japanese war crimes, were arranged in the British media as a foundation for the validation of British requests for Japan's compensation of former POWs. The stubborn attitude of Japan, reluctant to apologize to or compensate the comfort women or former British POWs, were arranged in apposition. For instance, *The Guardian* reported on August 25, 1993, that survivors of the Japanese POW camps had initiated legal action against Japanese multinational enterprises, such as Mitsubishi and Nissan. The Japanese Labour Camp Survivors Association (JLCSA)³ was designated as responsible for the lawsuit, by which approximately £100,000 of compensatory payment per soldier was claimed against Japanese enterprises in Britain. Consecutively, the article also reported: "Asian comfort women, mainly consisting of Korean women, requested the official apology of the Japanese government."⁴ The situation wherein the Japanese government inevitably responded to the continuous voices of the comfort women was regarded as a precedent to inspire former British POWs to seek compensation.

Another article reported news of the association of the JLCSA with the comfort women in the Japanese army. The report said a well-orchestrated publicity campaign, embracing the comfort women in Korea, historians, and former British soldiers of the Pacific War, was launched upon completion of a press conference and commemoration ceremony (*The Guardian*, January

3. The JLCSA was founded in 1989, and in the 2000s had approximately 6,500 members.

4. Sally Weale, "Ex-PoWs Set to Sue Firms, Sally Weale Reports on How Victims of Japanese Atrocities Are Hoping to Gain Reparation for Wartime Suffering," *The Guardian*, August 25, 1993.

29, 1995). However, follow-up news stories, detailing the actual activities of the meeting or the association of activists for former British soldiers with activists for the comfort women, were not found.

The tone of newspapers, wherein claims for compensations by former British soldiers and the comfort women issue were placed in apposition, can be observed in other articles. Joan Bakewell, a journalist and currently a peeress of the Labour Party, covered the legal action for compensation by the JLCSA in her article for *The Guardian*, in which she wrote that the mistreatment of war prisoners by the Japanese army constituted an organized crime beyond the deviations of individual soldiers. Bakewell pointed out that Japan needed to compensate former Allied war prisoners and comfort women if it was to attain an international position consistent with its economic one. Further, she threw doubts on the temporal and spatial extent of historical responsibility by posing the following questions: “Will Latin America lodge a claim against Spain for the damage done by conquistadores? Are Napoleon and Alexander the Great to be charged as war criminals?”⁵ She insisted that moral debts and compensation therefore needed to be clearly distinguished, and that compensation should be limited to the extent granted by apparent evidential verification.

The seriousness of the issue of compensation of ex-POWs can also be discerned from the unprecedented exploitation of the mass media by the Japanese prime minister. On the issue of compensation for harm inflicted upon war prisoners, the official position of the Japanese government adhered strictly to the San Francisco Peace Treaty of 1951, wherein one may find the provisions of a package settlement. But the former war prisoners had been compensated for their treatment with a mere £76 each. Japanese Prime Minister Hashimoto Ryutaro contributed an article to a popular British tabloid, *The Sun*, on January 14, 1998, expressing Japan’s remorse. The sudden apology to the war prisoners was actually a political gesture in preparation for the official visit of Emperor Akihito scheduled for May 27,

5. Joan Bakewell, “Paying for Our Crimes: Prisoners of War Are Demanding Compensation, and Africa Wants Recompense for Centuries of Grotesque Exploitation. But, Asks Joan Bakewell, How Far Should We Take the Desire for Reparations?” *The Guardian*, March 21, 1994.

1998, in order to foster an amicable atmosphere (Nish and Kibata 2000, 196). However, the political strategy of the Japanese prime minister did not work as planned, because Akihito encountered protests by activists for the war prisoners and their descendants in every place he stayed. The associations of the victims sacrificed for the Japanese army, such as the Association of British Civilian Internees-Far East Region (ABCIFER)⁶ and the Burma Campaign Fellowship Group (BCFG),⁷ planned and launched demonstrations according to the visit schedule of Akihito (Cunningham 2004, 562).

British mass media reported on the official visit of Akihito, while also providing detailed coverage of stories of former POWs and their family members simultaneously with stories on the comfort women. *The Guardian* reported on the experiences of Barbara Sowerby, who was detained in Manila in the Philippines, and her father, who was tortured and eventually killed by the Japanese army. According to the story, Sowerby made the drive from Wiltshire to the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, where a banquet celebrating Emperor Akihito's visit was being held, and demonstrated alone in front of the museum wearing a white sash with the words, "Japanese War Prisoner during 1941-1945." In addition, *The Guardian* reported on approximately 25,000 participants in a demonstration seeking compensation and an official apology from the Japanese government, and followed every move of Akihito's official visit, including to Buckingham Palace and Hotel Grosvenor at Park Lane. The article contains a single paragraph, broaching the issue of comfort women, mentioning how "the historical judgment (the Shimonoseki Judgment) made last month shed a light of hope over the three Korean comfort women." The article ends by quoting Arthur Tindall, a former war prisoner, "Japan will make the

6. ABCIFER was founded in 1994, and represents 2,400 survivors among the 18,300 British civilians who were captured by the Japanese army. Currently, approximately 750 members remain.

7. The BCFG, founded in 1991, included over 100 members who had fought against the Japanese army in Burma or were arrested in Singapore. Over 50 members of the BCFG were present at these protests.

judgment of payment for the compensation after we are all dead.”⁸ On this basis, the paper criticizes the Japanese government, of consistently ignoring the voices of victims of the Japanese army until they have passed away, and equates the damages of victimized soldiers who participated in the war with those of the comfort women.

An article in the *Financial Times* reporting on the reactions of the Japanese people to the official visit of Akihito to Britain, and British claims for compensation for damages to former prisoners of war, is also interesting. One article by a Japanese reporter describes how Akihito’s visit was caught up in the turmoil of protest in Britain, though such issues were all buried silently in Japan. The reportage of the NHK, the Japanese public broadcasting company, on elderly British veterans and their descendants protesting before Buckingham Palace against the “Tenno” (the Japanese emperor) was fairly minor relative to its coverage of Asahara Shoko, the suspect who committed the sarin attack in the Tokyo subway in 1995, three years before the visit of the Japanese emperor to Britain, and to the upcoming World Cup. One housewife interviewed by the reporter stated, “Compared to the question of compensating Korean wartime comfort women, the issue of UK prisoners of war seems very remote.”⁹ The article revealed the difference in viewpoints of ordinary Japanese people between the comfort women issue and compensation claims by British former POWs.

How do the British media understand the attitude of the Japanese government, which is reluctant to apologize for the past deeds of the Japanese army? The experience of the atomic bomb is indispensable to any analysis of the deep-seated tendency of the Japanese people to avoid responsibility for past war crimes. The status of being the only country to have suffered from a nuclear bomb has been exploited by the Japanese government to conceal its responsibilities for war crimes and to reposition itself from perpetrator to victim. In regard to this point of view, *The*

8. Luke Harding, “The Emperor’s Visit: War Survivors’ Last Stand Targets Both Emperor and ‘Nissan.’ Blair Veterans Vow to Dog Every Stop on Five-day State Visit in Pursuit of ‘Official Apology.’ Compensation of Pounds 14,000 a Man Sought,” *The Guardian*, May 27, 1998.

9. Michiyo Nakamoto, “Subdued Tokyo Media Prefer the World Cup,” *Financial Times*, May 27, 1998.

Guardian quoted Professor Yamaguchi Masao of Sapporo University in Japan, to introduce the unique consciousness of the Japanese people regarding culpability for war crimes. "There remains a feeling [among the Japanese] that the Allies were more responsible for the war than was Japan. Many also see the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as proof that we were victimized more than Germany was."¹⁰ The article revealed the attitude of the Japanese government toward its uncomfortable past, which is supported by the absence of social consensus and is grounded on the Japanese public's obscure and inverted consciousness of responsibility for the war, which is promoted simultaneously by Japanese politicians.

An article contributed to *The Guardian* by Martin Woollacott, a veteran foreign correspondent, is also worth reading. Reporting on the Kobe Earthquake that struck on January 17, 1995, Woollacott portrays the natural features of Japan encompassing tsunamis, earthquakes, and typhoons, and the unique sensibility of the Japanese people that embraces disaster, and then connects this sensibility to the attitude of the Japanese people toward the war and the atomic bomb. Most Japanese regard the experience of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as a manifestation of the natural disasters they have always experienced in order to activate the psychological defense mechanism to avoid reality. He goes on to say Japanese politicians take advantage of this collective mentality to avoid recognition of war crimes, including the comfort women. Historical events and the accompanying responsibilities for them are then transformed into a kind of natural disaster, which thereby reduces them to unavoidable incidences, reaching eventual rationalization. Westerners might take such an attitude by the Japanese of avoiding apologizing for war crimes, including the comfort women, as discomfiting or strange. However, the Japanese people regard themselves as victims sacrificed for the war rather than as violators in the war, which makes it even more difficult to accept the Japanese people as partners or friends.¹¹

10. Jonathan Watts, "Atrocity Victims Line up to Sue," *The Guardian*, November 27, 1998.

11. Martin Woollacott, "A Nation Not for Turning the West Offers Compassion for the Earthquake Yet Expects Contrition from Japan at a Time when Asian Nations are Rejecting Our Values," *The Guardian*, January 20, 1995.

To date, the Japanese government has not acknowledged the torture and forced labor of Allied prisoners of war in the Pacific War. There was an individual apology by an old Japanese soldier to an old British soldier (*Daily Telegraph*, June 22, 2015); however, the Japanese government has yet to offer an official apology or compensation.

In the 1990s, brief stories on comfort women appeared in British mass media, and most of these stories tended to be attached to pending issues in British society. The appearance of the news was triggered by the introduction of two incidents of sexual violence in the Yugoslav War and war crimes against British prisoners of war in the Pacific War. The news of the comfort women was summoned as a vehicle for reporting on these two former issues. Thereby, any efforts to communicate the actual voices of the comfort women to the British public were unfortunately absent in the news.

Late 1990s to 2000: Conflicting Relationship between Korea and Japan, Growing Concerns over the Japanese Shift Rightward

British news reports released during the period from the late 1990s to 2000 are characterized by an interest in the relationship between Korea and Japan and by growing concerns over Japan's rightward shift. In this period, views on the Korea-Japan relationship were commonly found in the British media, which commented on the growing nationalism of both countries that would have dire consequences for the Korean-Japan relationship. However, the general tone of these reports was the insistence that the Japanese government, reluctant to apologize for its uncomfortable past deeds, was most responsible for the deteriorating relationship.

Regarding growing nationalism in Korea, the British media covered controversies surrounding the demolition of a historical building of the former Japanese colonial government in Korea. They introduced the history of the building, which was built in 1926 in front of Gyeongbokgung Palace of the Joseon dynasty; the building was used as the headquarters of the US Army after the Korean War, then as a the South Korean capitol building, and then housed the National Museum of Korea. Also reported on were the

conflicting Korean opinions regarding the building's removal, with some insisting it should be removed to clear away a gloomy vestige of Japanese colonialism, with others asserting that the building should be conserved as a symbol of that past colonialism and as a lesson for future generations. Eventually, the building was removed through the strong determination of then President Kim Young-sam. In this, British media maintained the position of a composed and dispassionate observer, pointing out the ambivalent attitudes of a Korean people at once eager to clear away the past history of Japanese colonialism, trying to learn the Japanese language, and also economically dependent on Japan (*The Guardian*, May 8, 1995).

Richard Lloyd Parry, the Tokyo correspondent of *The Independent*, even criticized the chauvinistic aspects of Korean nationalism through a report on his visit to the Independence Hall of Korea, located in Cheonan City. In the report, Parry wrote how the Korean people seem to react with emotional xenophobia to the historical amnesia of the Japanese government toward its past. Parry commented on his impression of the Independence Hall as “a sad place, as well as a magnificent one, a shrine not to pride and achievement, but to victimhood, self-pity, and xenophobia.”¹²

British media paid special attention to the 2002 Korea-Japan World Cup jointly hosted by the two countries. A total of 14 news articles associated with the comfort women were published in 1996, most of which were followed by news related to the joint hosting of the 2002 World Cup and Korea-Japan summit talks. In general, British media viewed the prospect of the joint World Cup as having the potential to ameliorate the relationship between Korea, the former colony, and Japan, the former colonizer; however, they also saw that the comfort women issue might derail this amelioration in their relationship. Despite the growing and active interchanges between the Korean and Japanese private sectors, such as the removal of trade barriers on film and music upon the inauguration of Korean President Kim Young-sam, the comfort women issue remained the source of lingering grievances in the minds of the Korean people. Thus, British news outlets juxtaposed

12. Richard Lloyd Parry, “Loathing for Former Colonial Master Casts 50-year Shadows between Korea and Japan,” *The Independent*, February 1, 1997.

news of anti-Japanese protests in Korea and anti-Korean demonstrations in Japan, and reported that the relationship between the two countries was worsening.

The articles that reported on the *soccer summit* on the co-hosting of the 2002 World Cup pointed out that the Japanese government, reluctant to apologize for its past history, was responsible for the suspension of efforts at compromise between the two countries. British news reported how Japanese Prime Minister Hashimoto had said Japan and Korea share a common future dream; however, Hashimoto did not place any urgent issues, such as the fisheries agreement or security issues associated with North Korea, on the summit table, and even the comfort women issue was not dealt with. The British media further reported that the key to resolving the comfort women issue was compensation for the more than 300 surviving comfort women, for which the Japanese government proposed using the private Asian Women's Fund, something the associations of former comfort women rejected, demanding instead an official apology by the Japanese government (*Financial Times*, June 24, 1996; *The Independent*, June 24, 1996).

Among news items in British media around this time prior to the joint World Cup in 2002, there were positive stories of Korean-Japanese relations among everyday people, stories that contrasted with the aura of conflict at the national level. Among these, there was one article about a Korean student, Lee Soo-hyeon, then studying in Japan, who on January 26, 2001 saved the life of a Japanese who had accidentally fallen onto the subway tracks, only to be killed himself by an oncoming train. It was reported that Lee Sang-tae, the father of the so-called "hero of the subway," was surprised at news of a fund of approximately 50 million yen collected by grateful Japanese people (*The Independent*, March 4, 2001). One can sense the view in such stories that compromise and cooperation between the two countries that will help heal the scars of war crimes and colonialism is possible through the self-sacrificing humanism of everyday citizens.

The 1990s and early 2000s also saw the growth of international concerns and activism on behalf of women's human rights, and along with it stronger opposition to Japan's rightward shift. Meanwhile, the international community began to deal more decisively with the issue of sexual violence

in the Yugoslav civil war. In May 1993, the International Criminal Tribunal of Yugoslavia was installed in The Hague in accordance with a resolution by the United Nations Security Council, with trials commencing in 1996. The International Criminal Tribunal of Yugoslavia was terminated in 2017, over the course of 22 years convicting 83 of 168 suspects brought before it on war crimes charges. Of these, 33 were prosecuted for wartime rape for the first time in history. The judgment was regarded as a step toward the realization of restorative justice for women's human rights (Oh 2020, 186). As a story in *The Guardian* noted, news out of The Hague in 2001 of the punishment for rape in wartime provided a shimmer of hope to the surviving comfort women (*The Guardian*, February 23, 2001).

However, in March 2001, the so-called Shimonoseki Trial, in which several former comfort women and forced laborers sued the Japanese government, ended with the failure of the plaintiff's case. British media widely reported on the outcome of this trial, which had dragged on for more than decade (*The Guardian*, *Financial Times*, and *The Independent*, March 30, 2001). The media's oft-repeated reasoning for the unchanged position of the Japanese government on the comfort women issue was that the government had already issued a serious apology and expressed remorse over the issue with the Kono Statement of 1993. The official position of the Japanese government was also communicated to British society through a letter published in *The Independent* by Nishimiya Shinichi the Japanese ambassador to Great Britain (*The Independent*, April 2, 2000).

The rightward shift in Japanese society emerged from approximately 2000, when Japanese right-wing politicians began to deny past historical facts, including the Nanjing Massacre, the mobilization of women into sexual slavery, and the lethal human experimentations of Unit 731 of the Japanese army in Manchuria. A law also designated the "Hinomaru" and the "Kimigayo" as the national flag and national anthem of Japan, respectively, while the statement of former Minister of Defense Norota Hosei, that the people in Southeast Asian countries should express their gratitude to Japan for maintaining the independence of their countries, brought reproaches from the international community.

The rightward shift appeared most intensely in the domain of

educating the future generation, that is, history textbooks. Conflicts over the distorted narratives of Japanese history textbooks had happened in the 1960s and 1970s. But a third such controversy emerged in the early 2000s (Seo 2016, 243). The so-called Group for Preparing a New Textbook of History (GPNTH) acquired official government approval for its history textbook, which was then published by Husosha Press in April 2001. With the GPNTH textbook's appearance Japanese historical revisionism began again in earnest. The revisionists criticized the history education that had supported Japanese democracy since the end of World War II as a feeble or masochistic historical view, and insisted that Japan needed to become a country promoting the pride of the Japanese people and a state that could even say "no" to what it had heretofore been obliged to do. The majority of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in the Diet of Japan, including the minister of education, were reproached for their support of the GPNTH.

British media regularly reported on the strong Korean denunciations of the GPNTH textbook, which passed over any mention of war crimes and comfort women (*Financial Times*, April 4, 2001; *The Independent*, April 4 and April 10, 2001; *The Guardian*, April 10, 2001; *Daily Telegraph*, April 21 and May 9, 2001). In May 2005, the *Financial Times* published a special contribution by Ian Buruma in which he criticized the ultra-rightists in Japan, and disputed those rightists' claims that Japan had already sufficiently apologized for war crimes by the Japanese army. Buruma also expressed his concerns about the future of Japan when its young generation was learning history through revisionist textbooks (*Financial Times*, May 28, 2005).

The publication of the GPNTH history textbook by Husosha Press was also strongly condemned in China. Ironically, however, interest in the textbook exploded and it became a best seller. That said, the textbook was actually only used by 0.039 percent of Japanese educational institutions in 2001, and by 2005 that percentage had risen only to 0.39 percent. This may be regarded as the result of grass-roots efforts by Japanese civil society. Such organizations as the Country-wide Network 21 for Children and Textbooks was a key player in stopping educational institutions in Japan from selecting the textbook for use in its classrooms (Jeong 2008, 21). However, British media did not provide any deep analyses of the formation and activities of

civil society in Japan, but simply reported on the historical distortions as symbolic of the rightward shift in Japanese society and politics, and on the comfort women issue as the hottest dispute concerned with Japanese history textbooks.

As for the Korea-Japan relationship, British media observed how both sides remained steadfast in their opposition to the other. Emperor Akihito, on his visit to Saipan on June 29, 2005, paid his respects at the monument to the dead of Korea. *The Times* reported on this unexpected event as a gesture of compromise, but one that failed to evoke the warm sympathies of Koreans. The article noted how Cho Jun-gu, president of the Association of Koreans in Saipan, could not accept the gesture of the Japanese emperor as an apology for the death in Saipan and on the adjacent island of Tinian of 5,000 to 10,000 Korean laborers, who were forcefully mobilized to work the sugar plantations and in the construction of military structures or as comfort women for the Japanese army (*The Times*, June 29, 2005). Notable is the article's balanced coverage, including both the apologizing emperor and the victims of past war crimes of the Japanese army.

British media occasionally criticized the rightward shift in Japan in a circumlocution employing Japanese intellectuals, such as covering the letter of Professor Arai Yutaka, who criticized the thoughtless words of the granddaughter of Tojo Hideki, or with an interview with Nakazawa Kenji, author of *Barefoot Gen*.¹³

Professor Arai Yutaka of the University of Kent, an expert in international human rights law, penned a letter to the *Financial Times* on February 26, 2005, in which he criticized that newspaper for thoughtlessly quoting a statement by Tojo Yuko, who in the pages of the *Financial Times* of February 19, 2005, had denied the Nanjing Massacre. The Nanjing Massacre was one of history's worst acts of mass murder, wherein at least 20,000 Chinese residents of Nanjing were killed by the Japanese army; thus, the newspaper should not have thoughtlessly printed the arguments of people like Tojo Yuko, who stood at the center of the historical revisionism

13. The *Barefoot Gen* (*Hadashi no gen*) is a famous comic book for children published in 1972 and extending to over a thousand pages.

movement and insisted on a reappraisal of the Nanjing Massacre. Professor Arai pointed out that the banalization of genocide, as with the Nanjing Massacre, and of the sexual slavery of the comfort women was the aim of the ultra-rightists in Japan, and required the most serious and vigilant attention. However, Arai maintained the optimistic attitude that the Japanese public, who had been enjoying a peaceful and democratic constitutional system for the past sixty years, would not support ultra-rightists professing militarism and ultra-nationalism.¹⁴ In fact, a key strategy of the historical revisionists in Japan is the promotion of the *apology fatigue* of the Japanese public and labeling the consecutive requests by Koreans for an official apology as an endlessly moving goal post (Son 2018, 160).

In an interview with the *Daily Telegraph* in 2005, Nakazawa Kenji criticized the rightward shift and unreflecting attitude of the Japanese in strong terms: “We can see signs of militarism re-emerging... I wrote [*Barefoot*] Gen in anger, and I am still angry.”¹⁵ The article in the *Daily Telegraph* also carried news of Japanese history textbooks in 2005, the sixtieth anniversary of the end of World War II, that continue to repeat the supposition that Japan liberated Asian countries from various imperial powers, such as the British Empire.

In 2007, the number of articles related to comfort women reached 38, its peak during the entire period of our analysis. This surge was related to debates surrounding the United States House of Representative Resolution 121 on Comfort Women, proposed by congressman Michael Honda, which was then in the final stage of deliberation in the United States Congress. The Resolution was eventually adopted unanimously by Congress on July 31, 2007. Above all, British media focused on news of attempts to sway public opinion deployed before the vote on the resolution and the congressional testimonies of the comfort women, Lee Yong-Soo of Korea and Jan Ruff O’Herne of the Netherlands (*Daily Telegraph*, February 14, 2007 and May 3, 2007). The British press reported on the statement of then Japanese Prime

14. Yutaka Arai, “Revisionist Views on War Crimes by Japanese Military Prompt Fears for Nation’s Democracy,” *Financial Times*, February 26, 2005.

15. Colin Joyce, “Japanese Are Forgetting the Lessons of Hiroshima, Says the Man Who Was Barefoot Gen,” *Daily Telegraph*, August 4, 2005.

Minister Abe that there was no forced mobilization of comfort women, and thus no apologies were necessary, as well as the press conference of the comfort women in opposition to Abe's statement. This latter press conference included Lee Yong-Soo, who was kidnapped in Daegu when fourteen years old and suffered two years in a concentration camp for comfort women (*The Times*, May 3, 2007). The British media also criticized Abe's denials as showing poor political judgment and characterized the LDP as "one of the great zombies of the postwar period, an unstoppable, unkillable political monster, discreetly clad in a grey suit and dark tie,"¹⁶ saying that the dominance of the LDP and the rightward shift in Japan would continue unless internal innovation occurred.

British media articles released during the early 2000s are characterized by their objective and cool-headed criticism free from any overt side-taking in the Korea-Japan relationship. To British media, it seemed that Korean nationalism and the nationalism of Japanese ultra-rightists were opposing one another in a relationship of antagonistic coexistence, wherein the rhetoric of both concerns parties was growing more intense. In this situation, the criticism of a third party, pointing out that such an antagonistic relationship between Korea and Japan was pointless, is worth listening to carefully.

Post-2010: Korean and Japanese Memory Politics on the Comfort Women and the Postcolonial Boomerang

The dispute between Korea and Japan has cooled from the contentious period of the early 2000s, and a Korea-Japan Agreement on Comfort Women was suddenly concluded in 2015 between the two governments. However, the agreement, concluded on the national level, but lacking the support of surviving comfort women in Korea, faced strong opposition and eventually entered down the road toward final abrogation. News

16. Richard Lloyd Parry, "Why There is Life Yet in the Old Liberal Zombie," *The Times*, July 30, 2007.

items on comfort women in the British media after 2010 are characterized first by an increased interest in the 2015 agreement and detailed reports thereof, wherein the context behind the agreement and politics of memory surrounding the comfort women are presented. In 2015, there were 35 articles associated with issues of the comfort women, which is the second highest for the years examined. The boomerang of past history can be counted as a second characteristic of British news on the comfort women during this period. The statement of Osaka mayor Hashimoto Toru that the Allies also mobilized comfort women, stirred up great commotion in the press and raised the question: “Was the Japanese army the only one that mobilized comfort women?” In addition, with the British government’s compensation of some individuals for the violence committed at camps in colonial Kenya in accordance with the judgment of the so-called Mau Mau Trial, issues associated with compensation for past colonialism came again to the fore.

The first feature of the British media in the mid-2010s concerns the Agreement on Comfort Women concluded between Korea and Japan. In 2015, British media spotlighted the official apology and “permanent regret” of Japanese Prime Minister Abe over Americans who died in the Pacific War, expressed in his speech given to a joint session of the US Congress on April 29, while he was visiting the United States for the seventieth anniversary of the end of the Pacific War. Simultaneously, the British media also reported that the United States, as a military protector of Japan, did not want to see any angry outbursts by the Korean people but wished to sustain the friendly relationship between its allies Korea and Japan, where thousands of American troops were stationed. Thus, British media suggested Abe should make renewed efforts to avoid conflict with the Korean people. In fact, the British press reported on summit talks between Korea and Japan, which had been suspended since 2012, that began again in November 2015 (*The Guardian*, May 1, 2014; *The Times*, August 13, 2015; *Financial Times*, August 13 and November 3, 2015).

Upon release of the Korea-Japan Agreement on Comfort Women on December 28, 2015, *The Guardian* assessed the agreement as the result of continual pressure from Barack Obama and the US government, which

had changed the strong and steadfast position of Korea in order to affect reconciliation between Korea and Japan to better cope with the threats from North Korea and China (*The Guardian*, December 28, 2015).

The *Financial Times* headlined an article on the issue as “Cautious Welcome” and quoted statements by Kim Bok-dong, a comfort woman covered by *Yonhap News*, who said Abe did not apologize officially for what Japan had done (*Financial Times*, December 30, 2015). *The Times* reported that the decisions made for the sake of the agreement were not welcomed by either the Korean or Japanese people. In Seoul, people who gathered before the Statue of Peace (also known as Statue of a Girl) shouted that Abe should apologize on his knees, just as Willy Brandt had done in Warsaw. In Tokyo, approximately 180 ultra-rightists gathered in front of the official residence of Prime Minister Abe and demonstrated by waving placards that the comfort women were a lie fabricated by the Korean people, and thus any agreement on comfort women would be considered an unforgivable betrayal of the Japanese nation (*The Times*, December 30, 2015).

The next feature of British news coverage during this period is related to the *boomerang effect* of the past. New disputes on the issue of sexual violence in wartime were triggered by the provocative statements of Hashimoto, mayor of Osaka City, in 2013, and which raised embarrassing questions on whether sole responsibility for the mobilization of comfort women rested with the Japanese army. Hashimoto had stated that there were sexual slaves in both wartime Britain and United States. His statements triggered vocal opposition and criticism from British and American societies and the eventual withdrawal of his statements at a press conference. At this press conference, he apologized that his statements were made in the context of seeking to prevent sexual crimes by employing the legally authorized entertainment industry, as was done with the American military in Okinawa. In withdrawing his statements he remarked that they had been made without sufficient evidential support.

The Guardian, *The Times*, and the *Daily Mail* all offered detailed reporting on the Hashimoto and comfort women controversy in their May 28, 2013 issues. Though the three articles were similar to each other in their argumentative tone, the foci of their arguments differed slightly. *The Times*

and *Daily Mail* quoted statements of Hashimoto, “For soldiers who risked their lives in situations where bullets were flying around like rain and wind, if you want them to get some rest, a comfort women system was necessary. That’s clear to anyone.”¹⁷ In contrast, *The Guardian* looked at Hashimoto’s career and background, reminding its readers that Hashimoto was the joint-representative of the political party of rightists, the Japan Restoration Party (Nippon ishino kai), and that his past statements that the comfort women were necessary as a means for military regulation were in reference to private brothels rather than national mobilization.¹⁸ *The Times* mentioned briefly how the statements by Hashimoto humiliating the comfort women had triggered the ire of the surviving Korean comfort women, two of whom requested an interview with Hashimoto to express opposition to his statements. According to an article in the *Joong-Ang Ilbo*, a widely circulating Korean daily, the interview with Hashimoto was agreed upon but later canceled because by the former comfort women out of worries it might be exploited as a “political show” by Hashimoto, despite the presence of a predetermined schedule for the interview.¹⁹

British media did not inquire further into the issues of sexual violence in wartime. The target of the statements by Hashimoto is apparent. There were comfort women commonly in the United Kingdom, the United States, and even Korea, as well as in Japan. These were women mobilized for sexual purposes, and it would be absurd to ask Japan to take sole responsibility for comfort women. Hashimoto’s statements correspond to the argument of Hata Ikuhiko, a Japanese conservative scholar, that the comfort women were nothing more than the transfer of a state-regulated prostitution enterprise to the war zone, with the Japanese government free from any responsibility. Hata has argued that it would be unfair to place sole responsibility for the

17. Lucy Alexander, “British Soldiers also had Sex Slaves, claims Mayor,” *The Times*, May 28, 2013; “Britain and US also Kept Sex Slaves during World War Two, says Japanese Mayor who Claimed Use of comfort Women was Justified,” *Daily Mail*, May 28, 2013.

18. Justin McCurry, “Osaka Mayor Sorry for Saying US Troops Should Use Sex Workers,” *The Guardian*, May 28, 2013.

19. Seo Seung-wook, “Reasons behind the Silent Visit of Hashimoto, Who Said, ‘The Comfort Women Were Necessary,’” *JoongAng Ilbo*, July 2, 2018.

comfort women on the Japanese army, despite the presence of brothels in the armies of Britain, the United States, the USSR, among others, during World War II, together with many nurses who were expected to play sexual roles, which was similar to the operation of “comfort stations” (Hata 2018, 120, 210).

Countering the logic of Hashimoto and identifying prostitution in the Japanese army with the forced mobilization of sexual slaves is not difficult. However, the more essential issue, whether other countries are free from the guilt of sexual violence against women in wartime, remains unanswered. The statements of Hashimoto might have been used by the British media to reflect upon the past history of Britain, particularly in terms of the intrinsic issues of the violation of women’s human rights and wartime rape; however, I found no such follow-up reports or articles in the British press I examined.

The lack of further criticism of Hashimoto’s statements cannot be attributed to the British media alone. As was pointed out by Tessa Morris-Suzuki (2015), the operation of brothels in the military camps of the Allies is an open fact. The oral interviews and evidential pictures testify to the presence of brothels. However, no further studies have yet been found. Who were the women? How did they come to the brothels? Under what conditions did they work? And similar questions need to be answered through further studies.

About the issue of overcoming the uncomfortable history of colonialism, the position of Britain is two-faced. As already noted, Britain officially asked Japan for compensation for the claims of British war prisoners of the Japanese in World War II. However, in turn, Britain was also asked to make amends for its history of colonialism. The Mau Mau Trial is a representative case in point. In June 2013, the British government admitted to the torture and violence that occurred in its detention camps during the Mau Mau Uprising of colonial Kenya in the 1950s, and compensated 5,228 victims with £2,600 each. The Mau Mau Uprising was the armed independence struggle for the liberation of Kenya. For fifty years following the independence of Kenya in 1963, the British Empire was summoned to British courts through the testimonies and denunciations of four Kenyans. In that court, it was shown that during the crisis in Kenya from 1952 to

1960, the violence committed was part of a meditated and systematic plan by the British colonial government in Kenya, rather than merely cases of individual deviations. Another aspect of the trials was the contributions by historians. Historical studies on the Mau Mau movement were used to verify the arguments of the victims seeking individual compensation. The Mau Mau Trial was the first to agree upon individual compensation for tortures committed in the era of colonial government, by which the history of the British Empire had inevitably to be rewritten (Yeom 2015).

Some 974 articles on issues associated with the Mau Mau Trial appeared in British mass media during the decade from 2009 to 2019 (*The Times*: 369, *Daily Mail*: 170, *The Guardian*: 157, *Daily Telegraph*: 137, *The Independent*: 78, *Financial Times*: 42, *The New Statesman*: 11, *The Economist*: 10). However, no articles connecting the comfort women in the Japanese army with the issues of the Mau Mau Trial were found. Only in articles in *The East African* and *Los Angeles Times* were the issues associated with the comfort women juxtaposed with the issues of the Mau Mau Trial as a problem between Korea and Japan to be resolved according to the judgment of compensation made by the Supreme Court of Korea on the compulsory drafting of workers by the Japanese government (*The East African*, July 27, 2019; *Los Angeles Times*, August 18, 2019). In comparison with these articles, the British media seems to have avoided associating the general crimes of colonialism with the individual compensations of the Mau Mau Trial. This can be attributed to the reluctance of the British media to become a target of the criticisms they have leveled at the Japanese government, particularly concerning issues of colonialism that usually accompany the effects of the postcolonial boomerang.

Conclusion

When news of the comfort women in the Japanese army was first reported by the British mass media in the early 1990s, it was related to sexual violence in the Yugoslav civil war and to British war prisoners of Japan in the Pacific War. The issues of sexual violence in the war in Yugoslavia were taken

rather indirectly, whereas the issues of British war prisoners were directly associated with claims for compensation for damage inflicted upon its own nationals. Features of British news related to the comfort women issue in the 1990s can be summarized as the evocation of the comfort women issue in association with the issue of former British POWs. In the 2000s, British news took the position of a third party free from any direct interest in the Korea-Japan relationship, by which the unresolved issues in the Korea-Japan relationship were pointed out and reported on relatively objectively. The British media criticized as useless the state of antagonistic coexistence between Korean nationalism and the ultra-right nationalism of Japan. With the 2010s, the British media's interest in the comfort women issue grew with the Korea-Japan Agreement on Comfort Women concluded in 2015; however, the media largely turned its collective back on any association between this issue and Britain's own colonial past.

The perspectives of the British media on the comfort women issue can be summarized in terms of whether they are multilateral or selective. Along with a growing interest in the history of violence encompassing common experiences of humankind, such as those of World Wars I and II, the Holocaust, colonialism, and decolonization—issues impossible to resolve within the framework of a nation-state—the network of transnational memories crossing national borders is being constructed, and the concerns about multidirectional memories are growing (Rothberg 2009, 1–29). The British media are participating in the politics of transnational human rights and memories.

Simultaneously, the perspectives of the British media are selective. The selectivity of their perspectives is attributable to the past history of the British Empire with its subordinates of colonies. As a result, the British media criticize the unblushing Japanese government reluctant to apologize for what they did in their colonies and with the comfort women, insist on the contributions of the British government to universal human rights, and deploy a Japanism or Japanese identity discourse based on Orientalism. However, the criticisms remain within the domain of principles and divorced from demands for practical efforts. The reasons for this may be attributed to the history of the British Empire. As a consequence, the stance

of the British media seems to hesitate somewhere between that of guardian of human rights and bystander.

Thus, a great *chain of responsibility* for the sexual violence committed in wartime in the 20th century, wherein nobody would be free of responsibility, needs to be developed. The ethics of multidirectional memories that cannot consist in selective perspectives are needed for the development of this great chain of responsibility. And the Japanese government should realize their place in this great chain of responsibility rather than appealing to their sense of apology fatigue. And British media should also adopt multilateral and objective perspectives, rather than selective ones, on issues of sexual violence.

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