

## **IHRP- ALPHA Education (Daniel Ki-Won Moon)**

As this year's IHRP fellow, I engaged with the 'comfort women' issue in China, Korea, and Japan. There were two components to the fellowship: research and internship. My host institution, ALPHA Education, is an educational NGO specializing in the history of World War II in Asia, and as such, the purpose behind my research was to create educational material about the legal issues at stake in the 'comfort women' issue and the different reconciliation efforts in the three countries. Moreover, I had the opportunity to intern at the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan in Korea, where I obtained deeper insight into Korea's approach to reconciliation. The overarching theme of my fellowship was peace and reconciliation.

After two weeks of preparatory period in Toronto, I left for China on May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2018. During my two-week stay, I visited Shanghai, Nanjing, and Beijing. In Shanghai, I first visited Shanghai Normal University, where professor Su Zhiliang, one of the most prominent scholars of Chinese 'comfort women', was heading his research facility. I had the chance to visit the university's 'comfort women' museum, interview professor Su, and speak with his graduate students. After, I visited the first 'comfort station'—the Daiichi Saloon—and the Jewish Refugee Museum. Established in 1932, the Daiichi Saloon was the first 'comfort station' to be erected by the Japanese Imperial Army. The old saloon had been left untouched and inhabited by local residents at the time of my visit. At the refugee museum, I was exposed to a fragment of WW II history that I had been oblivious to. During the war, Jewish refugees who had been rejected entry into other countries were taken in by Dr. Ho, then the ambassador of China to Vienna. As a result, many Jewish refugees fled to Shanghai where they rebuilt their lives. The museum told stories of camaraderie and friendship between the locals, who were under the occupation of the Japanese Military, and Jewish refugees.

On May 20<sup>th</sup>, I traveled to Nanjing via China's famous bullet train. There, I visited the Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall, Nanjing 'comfort women' museum, and John Rabe International Safety Zone. The 'comfort women' museum in Nanjing was built in 2015, and it is the largest museum of its kind in China. It took me almost an entire day to conclude the tour. The geographic site of the museum, as well as some buildings, served as a real-life 'comfort station' during the war. Notably, room 19 of the facility was where Park Yong-Sim, the pregnant woman in one of the most well-known 'comfort women' photographs, was subject to sexual slavery by the Japanese military.

After a short stay in Nanjing, I then travelled to my last destination, Beijing. I had the fortunate opportunity to interview attorney Kang Jian, who conducted investigations on behalf of a group of Japanese lawyers who filed (Chinese 'comfort women') lawsuits against the Japanese government in the 90's. In addition, attorney Kang acted as a prosecutor at the 2000 International Women's Tribunal, convened in Tokyo. That concluded the first chapter of my fellowship.

My internship at the Korean Council began on May 30<sup>th</sup> in a rather dynamic fashion. I was invited to participate in the Wednesday Demonstration (weekly awareness campaign) on my first day. Hundreds of civilian activists and supporters had coalesced to protest against the Japanese Government's stance on the issue, and it was a drastic change from my serene trips to universities and museums in China.

The same day, I was introduced to the director of the Korean Council, Yoon Mi-Hyang, who invited me to meet halmoni (directly translated as "grandmother"—a term of respect used to address 'comfort women' victims in Korea) Gil Won-Ok and Kim Bok-Dong. It was a surreal experience to have met two of the most well-known halmonis.

As an intern at the council, I mainly translated documents, edited English advocacy materials, helped with daily tasks, and participated in Wednesday Demonstrations. One of my first assignments was to transcribe and summarize halmoni Kim Bok-Dong's oral testimony. I found this to be particularly rewarding because I was able to learn more about her experiences, beyond what I had been able to access through published testimonies. Furthermore, it struck me at a personal level that, behind all the protests and researches, there were the lived experiences of victims whose lives had been traumatized by what had happened.

Near the end of my internship, I was given the herculean task of cataloguing and archiving U.S. primary sources. Many of the documents were reports by U.S. interpreters stationed in Asia during the war. Through the process of scanning hundreds of documents and highlighting relevant texts, I was exposed to a large body of primary sources that attested to the systematic subjugation of women into sexual slavery by the Japanese Imperial Army. Lastly, a week prior to my departure, I also went to the House of Sharing, a care facility for halmonis in Korea, where I visited their museum and met 5 of the halmonis living at the facility.

After a month in Korea, I left for Tokyo on June 30<sup>th</sup>. Upon my arrival, I rushed to Rikkyo University, where I was invited by professor Kim Puja, the co-president of VAWW-RAC (Violence Against Women in War Research Action Center), to attend a conference on the 'comfort women' issue. At the university, I had the chance to meet some of the researchers at VAWW-RAC, including professor Yoshimi, whose research has been instrumental to redress movements in Asia. During my time in Tokyo, I also spoke in depth with professor Kim, professor Michiko of Waseda University, Mina Watanabe of WAM (Women's Active Museum on War and Peace), and professor Ha. They offered deeper insight into Japanese advocacy efforts and socio-political problems surrounding the issue in Japan. Moreover, VAWW-RAC was primarily responsible for organizing the Women's International Tribunal in 2000. By speaking with the aforementioned researchers, I was able to learn more about what animated the tribunal and the untold details of this historic event.

Another highlight of my trip to Japan was visiting Fukuoka. Apart from the scenic beauty of Japan's southern coast, I learned a great deal by speaking with professor Kimura (Seinan Gakuin University). His research was mainly on Indonesian 'comfort women', and he played an

instrumental role in adducing evidence on behalf of Indonesian ‘comfort women’ victims at the 2000 Women’s International Tribunal. After giving a short presentation on his research, professor Kimura and I had a long conversation about why the issue is so important. He emphasized that the ‘comfort women’ issue is, at its core, a human rights issue, regardless of how much it is politicized by governments and the media. This strongly resonated with me.

Days before my departure, I made my final stop to the Yasakuni Shrine— a source of many controversies in Asia. It currently enshrines war criminal convicted by the Tokyo Trial, and its war museum, Yasukun, displays the Japanese Government’s narrative of World War II history. Walking through the museum, I witnessed palpable differences between the Japanese Government’s memorialisation of the war and that of Korea and China. For example, whereas China had dedicated an entire museum to memorialize the Nanjing Massacre, there was no mention of the brutality that befell on Nanjing at Yasukun. The Nanjing Incident, as it was called at Yasukun, was described as a military effort to extinguish aggression in China.

### **Final Thoughts:**

The ‘comfort women’ issue remains an obstacle to healthy Korean-Japanese and Sino-Japanese relationships today. The issue is extremely complicated, and I came back with more questions than answers. Given the Supreme Court of Japan’s dismissal of all ‘comfort women’ lawsuits, a legal avenue does not seem feasible. The 2000 International Tribunal is perceived by many as a symbol of victory, but it was a civil society tribunal without the power to bind Japan. Hence, the power to resolve the issue likely lies in the political realm.

Today, there are only 27 surviving victims left in Korea, and the prospects of the issue being resolved in a timely manner are slim. None of the interviewees claimed to know a sharp solution to this predicament, but all agreed that research and education are our best weapons in what will likely be a long and arduous battle.

In that regard, I believe that Canadians have a role to play. As professor Kimura emphasized, the issue is fundamentally about human rights. Canada’s moral and legal obligations to human rights calls us to now direct our attention to the issue and educate. The executive director of ALPHA Education, Flora Chong, often said that the history of World War II in Asia is neglected in Western societies. Ignoring a problem is rarely a good solution.

To conclude, it is my hope that through continued research and education, the global community can produce the impetus to deliver overdue justice. Hostility toward Japan, on the other hand, cannot be the correct direction in this journey. It is antithetical to reconciliation. If the issue is to be resolved, I believe that stakeholders must engage in constructive dialogues that are based on robust research and sensitivity to the victims’ experiences.



At the Wednesday Demonstration (featuring the Statue of Peace)



The Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan / Foundation for Justice and Remembrance for the issue of Military Sexual Slavery by Japan





The House of Sharing



With Professor Su at Shanghai Normal University





'Comfort women' museum in Nanjing





Yasukuni Shrine



Women's Active Museum on War and Peace