

Asia's global memory wars and solidarity across borders: diaspora activism on the "comfort women" issue in the United States

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Abstract: *Calls for reparations and apologies for crimes committed during the 1930s/40s war in Asia have been major points of contention in East Asia's public memory since at least the 1980s. In recent years, a "history/memory war" over the "comfort women" issue has intensified. At the same time, the battleground has also shifted to the terrain of "heritage" and has increasingly taken on a global dimension. This paper considers an increasingly significant arena for East Asian memory wars, involving diaspora communities in Western countries. Its particular focus is the coordinated "comfort women" activism of Korean American and other Asian American diaspora groups in certain regions of the United States. While their decades-long activism has produced a 'memory boom' in its own right and resulted in raising the political profile of Asian Americans, I argue that this has also come at the cost of straining to breaking point post-war arrangements for symbolizing and cementing US-Japanese reconciliation. The paper builds on existing research to delineate the expanding scope of Asia's memory wars and introduces new insights into some of the US activists' inter-ethnic alliance building that underscores the increasingly global nature of these memory conflicts as well as the potentially lasting repercussions for societies far beyond East Asia.*

Keywords: *Comfort women, USA, diaspora, public history, heritage, memorials*

Introduction¹

On 28 December 2015, the foreign ministers of South Korea and Japan issued a 'declaration of war'. While formally they were in fact announcing a bilateral agreement designed to "finally and irreversibly" resolve the 'comfort women' issue, this was perceived by many survivors and their supporters as nothing short of a declaration of war on everything for which they had been lobbying over the previous quarter century.²

Their struggle to hold the Japanese government to account over the Imperial Japanese military's wartime system of sexual servitude (estimated to have involved approximately 200,000 women) is a central point of conflict in what scholars have termed Asia's "memory/history problem".³ In the eyes of many Japanese rightwingers, this 'problem' evolved into an all-out 'history war' after 'comfort women' activists in South Korea erected a Peace Statue in front of the Japanese embassy in Seoul in 2011.⁴ The most heated battles over the commemoration of World War Two in Asia have seen state and non-state actors collide over a host of unresolved issues connected to the war itself and Japanese colonialism more generally, especially in South Korea, China, Taiwan, and Japan. But Asia's memory wars have also become increasingly globalised over recent decades.⁵

In this context, the issue of the 'comfort women' has become the special focus of a struggle by a global alliance of activists to

counter Japanese historical revisionism.⁶ In this paper, I examine a hitherto under-researched battlefield in this globalised memory conflict, involving first ethnic Korean and later ethnic Chinese diaspora communities in the United States. While there is a plethora of literature on the Asian diaspora in the United States more generally, transnational ‘comfort women’ activism in this part of the world has only very recently attracted more scholarly attention.⁷ Studies of Korean ‘comfort women’ activists in Australia and parts of the United States hint at a complex and multi-faceted landscape of diaspora actors, connected to different global movements with varying feminist or nationalist overtones.⁸ They sometimes operate with very different “frames of meaning”, informed by questions of ethnicity and identity, and dependent on temporal contingencies and influential allies.⁹ Hence, only following the actions against or reactions to Japanese revisionism paints an incomplete picture. But what exactly happens when activists addressing the sins of the past meet modern feminist movements or insert global issues into differing local struggles for identity and political representation?

In order to illuminate questions such as these, this paper focuses on the coordinated ‘comfort women’ activism of Korean American and other Asian American diaspora groups in certain regions of the United States. While their decades-long activism has produced a ‘memory boom’ in its own right and resulted in raising the political profile of Asian Americans, I argue that this has also come at the cost of straining to breaking point arrangements put in place in the aftermath of the Second World War that have served to symbolise and cement US-Japanese reconciliation. By doing so, I hope to illustrate how and why the borders of Asia’s memory wars have expanded and introduce new insights into some of the US activists’ inter-ethnic alliance building. This will underscore the increasingly global nature of these memory conflicts and alert readers to

potentially lasting repercussions for the memory of Asia’s war beyond the region itself.

The focus here is primarily on arguments over the establishment in the US of visible public memorials to the ‘comfort women’. As Frost and Vickers note in their introduction to this collection, this comes in the context of what Erika Doss describes as a “memorial mania”, whereby diverse constituencies in the United States’ heated political conflicts over identity have sought to erect statues, monuments and museums as permanent testimony to the justice both of their past grievances and present demands.¹⁰ This “mania” in the US can also be seen as part of a global cultural phenomenon, influencing attitudes across East Asia, so that even if Korean or Chinese commemorative campaigns take on somewhat different meanings in the North American context, they do so against the backdrop of largely shared assumptions concerning the symbolism and significance of memorials themselves.¹¹

Why Diaspora Communities?

Choi Inbom argues that the Korean diaspora¹² is a good case of a community forming numerous diaspora associations worldwide (over 2,000) and fostering a “sense of empathy and solidarity [...], leading to efforts to institutionalize transnational networks of exchange and communication”.¹³ If we look at these transnational networks of solidarity and action through the lens of Asia’s memory conflicts, it will become clear how significant these diaspora communities have indeed become, even if they are not as numerous as their Chinese counterparts, for instance.

According to data collected by the South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2017, the Korean diaspora comprises a total of 7.4 million people globally. Most of them live in the United States (c.2.54m), China (c.2.46m), and Japan (c.825,000),¹⁴ but they make up a rather small

segment of the overall population in these countries. However, scholars have increasingly come to the conclusion that the politics of diasporas matter – sometimes out of proportion to the communities’ actual size. One important reason lies in the effects of globalisation (not least of the transmission of information) and the challenges that more “globally-minded” and globally connected diasporas pose for the state institutions of the “host nation”.¹⁵

On the one hand, many governments have sought to extend and deepen ties with their national diasporas, attempting to woo and embrace, but sometimes also exploit or silence them.¹⁶ The South Korean government started actively engaging with the Korean diaspora in the 1990s in an attempt to somewhat reverse the brain drain of the 1960s and 1970s, when Koreans had left in large numbers to seek better opportunities abroad, notably in Western countries.¹⁷ Changzoo Song argues that “generating economic gains through trade promotion and [attracting diaspora] investment”¹⁸ was and remains a top priority for the government in Seoul, along with strengthening Korean identity by promoting visits to Korea, easing immigration restrictions, or recognising dual citizenship.¹⁹ On the other hand, diaspora communities themselves are increasingly seen, in Fiona Adamson’s words, as the “harbingers of new forms of global identity politics”.²⁰ Some twenty years ago, Ien Ang already observed that “migrant groups have become collectively more inclined to see themselves not as minorities within nation-states, but as members of global diasporas that span national boundaries.”²¹ Since then it has not only become easier for diasporas to draw on historical roots and latch onto political issues originating in their ancestral homeland but also to connect local issues in the host nation to global movements when advocating for civil rights, for example.

One instance of this phenomenon is the globalisation of controversy over the ‘comfort

women’ issue. Today, in a “post-#MeToo-era”, the campaign on behalf of ‘comfort women’ resonates with many feminist activists, and indeed has been lauded as a “vanguard movement” of “transnational feminism” ever since the 1990s.²² At the same time, as the following cases illustrate, in the process of going global, the ‘comfort women’ controversy is refracted through the prism of local political and cultural tensions as diaspora communities jostle for recognition in their host society.

Race Riots, Korean Political Mobilization and the ‘Comfort Women’ Issue

In the United States, and especially in California, adoption by Korean Americans of the ‘comfort women’ campaign as a totemic cause has come in the context of longstanding efforts to raise the community’s social and political status. In 1992, racially motivated turmoil gripped the city of Los Angeles, sparked by the acquittal of four police officers accused of brutality against an African American, Rodney King. Los Angeles’ Korean Americans found themselves caught in the middle of a sudden explosion of racial tension between the African and Asian American communities and the city’s predominantly white police force. Korean Americans suffered violent attacks and hundreds of their shops were looted and set on fire. This event is widely seen as a watershed moment in the history of Korean American political engagement.²³

Shelley Sang-Hee Lee argues that the Los Angeles uprisings generated shockwaves that were intensely felt as far away as the Korean peninsula, where America was now beginning to be perceived as an unwelcoming and less economically attractive destination for immigration. This impression was compounded by South Korea’s recent democratisation and its prospering economy.²⁴ For Koreans living in the US, the Los Angeles uprisings revealed the

community's vulnerability: it lacked a strong political voice,²⁵ and lacked support from other Asian American communities.²⁶ This was in stark contrast to the heyday of Asian American immigration to the United States immediately following the Hart-Cellar Act of 1965, which had liberalised immigration regulations for Asians seeking to come to America.²⁷

Back then, as Karen L. Ishizuka reminds us, "[a]gainst the backdrop of the Vietnam War and the revelation [sic] of the Third World, the concept of 'Asian American' was formed as a political identity developed out of the oppositional consciousness of the Long Sixties in order to be seen and heard."²⁸ The African American Civil Rights Movement served as an important inspiration for many of the newcomers from Asia, and pan-Asian organisations connected different ethnic minority groups. However, in the following decades these links degraded or dissolved. No event made this clearer than the Los Angeles uprisings of 1992 and the following wave of anti-immigration sentiment, which spurred attempts by Korean American organizers to promote their community's political engagement through grassroots mobilisation and to rebuild lost interethnic connections.²⁹ However, by the early 2000s, this had yet to translate into enhanced Korean American political involvement. Voter registration and voter turnout remained low, also in part due to persistent institutional barriers.³⁰ It was in this context that the 'comfort women' issue found its way into the US public sphere.

In 2010, the Korean American Voters' Council, today known as KACE,³¹ a voting rights advocacy group, championed the installation of a small memorial in Palisades Park, a predominantly Korean American municipality in Bergen County, New Jersey. This constituted the first American site in what was soon to become an expanding transnational commemorative landscape dedicated to the memory of the 'comfort women'. For KACE,

this formed part of a larger effort of political mobilization. It unfolded in the context of increasing recognition of the Korean American community as a significant voting demographic in New Jersey (thanks to the 2010 US census and the subsequent redistricting of the state), as McCarthy and Hasunuma observe.³² Jihwan Yoon, who also interviewed figures involved in this initiative, further argues that markers of 'comfort women' memory constituted

the symbolic source for grouping and developing the collective sense of ethnicity because Korean-Americans could emotionally connect to "comfort women" with their own marginalized experiences and build solidarity with cultural power inherent in the history of sexual slavery [and that this emotional link] has encouraged Korean-Americans to select the memorializing of "comfort women" as they (re)construct an ethnic belonging and use it for enhancing political engagement and a declaration of legitimacy within US society.³³

The Palisades Park memorial was a significant attempt by KACE to harness 'comfort women' memory to these broader ends. McCarthy and Hasunuma also show that the activists had in fact drawn inspiration from previous efforts by the local African American community to have the Atlantic slave trade memorialised.³⁴ KACE would go on to garner support from this and other communities and organisations, among them local Jewish Americans and the Kupferberg Holocaust Center in New York.³⁵ Moreover, along with other Asian American activists, KACE had previously lobbied for US Congress Resolution 121, passed in 2007, which called on the Japanese government to not only "formally acknowledge, apologize, and accept historical responsibility" for the sexual

enslavement of women during the war in Asia, but also to “educate current and future generations about this crime while following the international community’s recommendations with respect to the ‘comfort women’.”³⁶ The passing of this Resolution has been attributed to “the growing importance of the Chinese-American and Korean-American lobbies”.³⁷ Their ability to enlist support from organisations such as Amnesty International or the United Nations has been described as contributing to “a more ‘global’ awareness of the issues involved”.³⁸ Writing in 2016, Lien and Esteban observed a sharp increase over the preceding few years in both voter participation and numbers of Korean Americans elected to local and state government positions. They attributed this to aggressive civic action from within the community since the mid-1990s.³⁹ This coincided with awareness of the ‘comfort women’ issue rising among Korean American communities through church-organised visits by ‘comfort women’ survivors or civil society action staged by non-governmental organisations, such as the Washington Coalition of Comfort Women Issues, Inc.⁴⁰ Although it would be wrong to view it in purely instrumental terms, campaigning on the ‘comfort women’ issue did play a role in the aforementioned efforts at community mobilization.

However, while initially aimed largely at increasing mobilisation within the Korean American community itself, the consequent localisation of the Asian American memory landscape introduced a victim-centred perspective on World War Two that jarred with dominant US narratives of that conflict. In addition to the overarching heroic narrative of the United States liberating the world from fascism, there was also increasing recognition from the 1970s and 1980s both of the Nazi Holocaust of the Jews (which served further to burnish US heroism in ending it, as well as cementing US support for the state of Israel),

and of the victimhood of Japanese Americans unjustly interned during the war (who received an official apology from President Reagan). In narratives of Asian American victimhood, Japanese Americans had come to take pride of place.⁴¹ New Jersey’s ‘comfort women’ memorial turned this on its head. But rather than arousing criticism from the ethnic Japanese community within the United States, the new memorial drew attack primarily from politicians in Japan itself and from Japanese diplomats. In 2012, the Japanese Consul-General in New York was among the first to officially urge the mayor of Palisades Park to remove the memorial in order to “protect” US-Japanese international relations from possible harm.⁴² In the same year, two delegations by Japan’s Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) even undertook the long journey from Japan to New Jersey to reiterate the demand for the statue’s removal. While the Consul-General had challenged the historical accuracy of the number of ‘comfort women’ cited in the memorial’s inscriptions, the LDP delegations claimed flat-out that “the comfort women were a lie”.⁴³

Tomomi Yamaguchi argues that it took Japanese officials two years to respond to the new memorial in New Jersey because of another commemorative initiative that had drawn the ire of the Japanese right.⁴⁴ This was the installation in front of the Japanese embassy in Seoul in 2011 of a ‘Peace Statue’ depicting a young ‘comfort woman’. The furore surrounding the Seoul statue prompted the Japanese right-wing press to scour the planet for instances of similarly ‘insulting’ memorials. Yamaguchi finds that it was from 2011 onwards that Japanese ultra-conservatives ramped up their international operations against such challenges to official Japanese war narratives. Following the return to power of the LDP in Japan in late 2012, under the leadership of Prime Minister Abe Shinzo (himself a prominent ‘comfort women’ denialist), these efforts received more concerted backing from

Japan's diplomatic corps. The Japanese pushback in turn further galvanised diaspora communities to intensify their campaigning on the 'comfort women' issue.⁴⁵

The New Jersey saga can thus be seen as part of a larger, global phenomenon and the first sign of Asia's conflict over its troubled past taking a significant hold in the United States. It constitutes one instance of how a campaign associated with contested memories of conflict in Asia, once adopted by an Asian American minority, becomes refracted through the lens of US minority politics. It reflects, as other scholars have previously noted, a mingling of – in part – nostalgic attachment to the 'old country', espousal of universalist causes, and aspirations to enhance communal status through alliance building.⁴⁶ The complex interaction of these various factors and motives is just as evident on the western shores of the United States, in California, where it takes on a somewhat different pattern.

Inter-Ethnic Atrocity Alliances

The New Jersey case was in part an attempt to link 'comfort women' memory to the cause of local voter mobilisation among the Korean American community through capitalising on ethnicity specific issues. California supplies an instance of political mobilisation through inter-ethnic alliance-building amongst Asian minority communities, as well as with progressive and pacifist movements more broadly.

The municipality of Glendale, located in Los Angeles County, less than ten miles from Koreatown, which was devastated in the Los Angeles uprisings of 1992, is one such example. Glendale has a large Korean American population, as well as the biggest Armenian population in the United States.⁴⁷ In 2013, Glendale was the site of the first Peace Statue to be erected in the US – modeled on the statue erected in front of the Japanese embassy in

Seoul in 2011, which has since become a widely-recognised symbol for the 'comfort women's' global struggle. The statue in Glendale was lobbied for by the Korean American Forum of California (KAFC), a human rights organisation that has not shied away from comparing the 'comfort women' system to Nazi death camps, invoking this parallel in the cause of "seek[ing] comparable self-effacement from Japan, as was shown by post-WWII Germany".⁴⁸ This campaign received strong backing from several Glendale council members, whose votes overruled the veto cast by then-mayor Dave Weaver. Weaver, aware of the waves caused by the New Jersey memorial, reportedly argued that Glendale "had no business in involving itself in international issues".⁴⁹ By contrast, Councilmember Zareh Sinanyan spelled out why the 'comfort women' issue resonated so deeply with local community members, especially those of Armenian heritage, and why Glendale therefore deserved its own Peace Statue. In 2013, Sinanyan, whose grandfather was a survivor of the Armenian Genocide of 1915, told *The Rafu Shimpo*, the oldest Japanese-English bilingual newspaper in the US,

Everything I do in life is shaped by the fact that 98 years ago my people were slaughtered, expelled, raped and subjected to all kinds of horrors...Denial of mass crime lead to only bad things. [...] Replace the word 'Japanese' with 'Turkish' and 'Armenian' with 'Korean' and I was living my own experience... It's historical fact. Let's not go there. It just doesn't hold water.⁵⁰

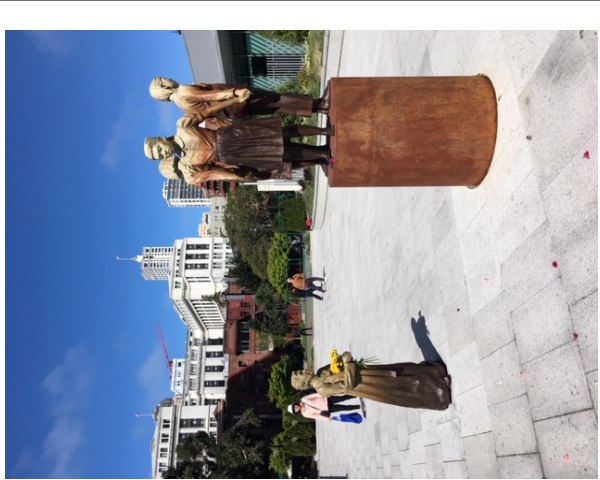
This kind of inter-ethnic solidarity, which thus led to the approval and subsequent installation of the United States' first 'comfort women' Peace Statue, relied for its proverbial glue not on the marginalisation or political

underrepresentation of a given minority, but on a shared sense of atrocity remembrance. Observations from other places, such as Bergen County, underline the importance of such a shared sense in US ‘comfort women’ activism.⁵¹ It sees communities connect on moral or indeed political grounds by capitalising on what is imagined as a shared collective memory of victimisation and its repeated denial by prominent government actors.

In Glendale, the creation of this inter-ethnic victimhood alliance resulted in aggravated tensions with the local Japanese American community, which was itself divided over the Peace Statue, the majority eventually speaking out against it.⁵² Moreover, the statue’s installation drew opposition from Japanese diplomats in Los Angeles and from Glendale’s sister city in Japan, Higashiosaka. On the other hand, Councilmember Sinanyan, who would go on to become mayor of Glendale in 2014, intensified relations with South Korea a few years later. In 2019, Sinanyan travelled to Busan “to sign a pact on friendly relations and cooperation with the local Haeundae municipality [...] known for its hosting of the annual Busan International Film Festival,”⁵³ seen as a natural economic partner for Glendale, home of DreamWorks Animation. Busan had, by then, become another flashpoint in Asia’s memory wars with its own Peace Statue placed in front of the local Japanese Consulate-General.⁵⁴ Allowing Mayor Sinanyan’s travels to be framed by prominent activists not simply as a business trip but also as a pilgrimage to Busan’s own Peace Statue created an advantageous climate for his negotiations in South Korea, cementing a global link between Busan and Glendale not only as global partners in animation cinema but also as ‘comfort women’ sister cities.⁵⁵

Glendale’s statue wars soon spread to San Francisco, where Asian sister-city relations and domestic inter-ethnic political solidarity also came into play. There, however, the lead was taken not by Korean Americans but by Chinese Americans, whose adoption of the ‘comfort women’ cause in the mid-2010s coincided with a heightened profile for the issue within China itself, and Chinese state backing for efforts to inscribe ‘comfort women’ documents on UNESCO’s Memory of the World Register.⁵⁶ San Francisco’s ‘Women’s Column of Strength’ was erected in the city’s Chinatown on 22 September 2017, on a rooftop adjacent to a newly-opened public park. The monument, unlike others dedicated to the memory of the ‘comfort women’, did not simply feature a solitary young Korean girl, demurely seated on a chair. Here, a Korean figure stands on an elevated pedestal, holding hands with Chinese and Filipina counterparts. Gazing up at this young trio is a statue of former ‘comfort woman’ Kim Hak-sun, who in 1991 was among the first ex-‘comfort women’ to testify to a global audience about her wartime ordeal. This monument’s symbolic language thus explicitly connects different Asian diaspora communities (and generations) in San Francisco through an appeal to shared memories of victimhood at Japanese hands, while the posture of the figures and inclusion of Kim’s statue implicitly express defiance of Japanese denialism today. San Francisco thus offers a particularly telling example of the mobilising and connecting power of a globalising ‘comfort women’ memory.

Remembrance as Resistance



“Women’s Column of Strength”, San Francisco

The Comfort Women Justice Coalition (CWJC) frames the erection of this statue as one act in a broader campaign of “resistance”, which also encompasses active support for the push for UNESCO registration.⁵⁷ Chinese American and Korean American activists joined forces in the CWJC, a self-described “grassroots, multi-ethnic and multi-national group of individuals and organizations that are part of the global ‘Comfort Women’ Justice Movement”.⁵⁸ Such inter-ethnic political solidarity among Asian Americans is in itself not a novel phenomenon, with precedents in the inter-ethnic community building of the 1960s and 1970s discussed above. Interviews conducted by Dana Y. Nakano in the San Francisco Bay Area during the early 2000s reveal that such solidarity across ethnic lines was then already seen as “a necessary political tool”,⁵⁹ as one Chinese American interlocutor put it, for building momentum for change on issues affecting all Asian American communities. Ann H. Kim also argues that it is crucial to consider “panethnicity” and its role for Korean American identity, “as its relevance now seems to be a necessary condition for political mobilization as Asian Americans”.⁶⁰ Nakano agrees but points to the pitfalls of inter-ethnic solidarity, since

struggles concerning “ethnic and class-based privileges [...] continue to divide the Asian American population”.⁶¹

This raises the question of what kind of change the activists were hoping to achieve through such solidarity in this instance. Interviews conducted in San Francisco in 2019 by Edward Vickers show that the process leading up to the memorial’s creation variously strengthened and undermined ties between particular Asian American communities. The shared objective of commemorating ‘comfort women’ that united Chinese American and Korean American activists sprang from somewhat divergent motives, while the issue caused tensions with some Japanese Americans (as well as with Japan’s official representatives in the US). Leading Chinese American activists had long aspired to build a monument commemorating the victims of the Nanjing Massacre but had been unsuccessful in doing so,⁶² frustrated by a moratorium on memorials in public spaces and a lack of broad public support.⁶³ Building or strengthening ties of atrocity solidarity across ethnicities – successfully accomplished in the earlier case of US Congress Resolution 121 – was the result.

Founding members of the Rape of Nanking Redress Coalition, a Chinese American activist group established in 1997, became co-founders of the CWJC and were instrumental in erecting the San Francisco ‘comfort women’ memorial in 2017.⁶⁴ Notable among these were two former judges, Julie Tang and Lilian Sing – forceful and articulate advocates whose legal background was a significant asset in bringing the statue project to completion. Tang recalled being approached some time in 2015 by “a group from the Chinese community” with the suggestion that “you guys” (i.e., the Nanking Redress campaigners) build a memorial to the ‘comfort women’.⁶⁵ “Fine, but we don’t have the money”, she and her colleagues responded. “We’ll take care of the money”,⁶⁶ this group assured them, “you just build it”.⁶⁷ Tang

remembered that raising the money was “easy”, once “momentum” gathered: “Everything just came together, and we educated a lot of people.”⁶⁸

The year 2015 marked the 70th anniversary of the end of World War Two, which was celebrated with great fanfare in China itself. That year, the Chinese government sponsored a successful application to have documents relating to the Nanjing Massacre inscribed on UNESCO’s Memory of the World Register, involved China in an international drive for registration of ‘comfort women’-related documents, and opened the world’s largest ‘comfort women’ memorial in Nanjing. In San Francisco’s Chinatown, 2015 also saw the opening of a new ‘Overseas Memorial to the War against Japanese Aggression’, an initiative involving strong links to commemorative institutions in the People’s Republic of China.⁶⁹ Julie Tang firmly disavowed any formal links between the statue project and this new ‘Overseas Memorial’, but it seems likely that some of the Chinatown luminaries who contributed funds and support to the latter were among those keen to see the ‘comfort women’ statue erected.⁷⁰

While the Nanjing Massacre and China’s ‘War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression’ are issues of narrow appeal in the US context, relating directly only to the Chinese American community, the ‘comfort women’ phenomenon resonates with various Asian minorities, most significantly Korean Americans. Moreover, as an instance of organised, transnational oppression and exploitation of women, the ‘comfort women’ campaign can draw support from feminist activists whose interests are global rather than regional. Both by joining forces with Korean American activists and by framing Chinese victimhood (exemplified by the ‘Rape of Nanjing’) in the context of what Carol Gluck calls the “traveling trope [the ‘comfort women’], that [stands] globally for sexual violence against women”,⁷¹ the CWJC was able

to attract greater acknowledgement and support than the Chinese American community could have garnered on its own.⁷² A similar strategy has been observed by Satoko Oka Norimatsu amongst Asian communities in Canada.⁷³

The success of this strategy has been contingent on an ability to connect to other groups and persuade policy-makers and the general population of the global significance of the ‘comfort women’. Already, from the 1990s onwards, ‘comfort women’ activists in the US forged connections to international female rights groups, assisted by international outrage over the mass rape of women during the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia and in Rwanda.⁷⁴ This was enough to put the ‘comfort women’ issue on the radar of some feminist campaigners, but the issue initially gained little traction within the US in a context of rising anti-immigrant sentiment. Meanwhile, amongst Asian Americans themselves, part of the appeal of this issue lay in intersecting memories of victimhood not only in wartime East Asia, but in America itself. Kimura Maki argues that the fact that “many [Korean American] families suffered from colonialism and racial discrimination both before and after they arrived in the US” makes it “understandable that [they] are particularly interested in and sympathetic to ‘comfort women’ victim-survivors.”⁷⁵ The resonance of the Nanjing Massacre for Chinese Americans is enhanced by similar factors, as well as by a frustration with the neglect of the mainland Asian theatre of war in mainstream US narratives of World War Two. The Chinese American author Iris Chang dubbed the Rape of Nanjing China’s ‘forgotten Holocaust’ in 1997,⁷⁶ and the Rape of Nanking Redress Coalition was formed the same year.

Significant in heightening awareness of the ‘comfort women’ amongst Asian Americans and the wider public has been an intensification of state-sponsored Japanese denialism. As we

have seen, attempts to block Glendale's 'comfort women' memorial attracted greater publicity. Michael Wong, a member of the CWJC, felt that official Japanese efforts to suppress commemoration had been one factor contributing to the Coalition's motivation and momentum. Julie Tang recalled a significant shift in attitude and tactics on the part of Japanese diplomats. In the 1990s, they had tried to "wine and dine" the Nanking Redress activists, even issuing invitations to Japan (which were "courteously refused").⁷⁷ However, by the time of San Francisco's City Hall hearings on the statue proposal in the 2010s, the approach of Japanese lobbyists and officials had been transformed, in ways that astonished Wong:

[...] the right-wing denialists came from Japan and they just said totally outrageous things - like the Ku Klux Klan, you know... All of our communities, the Chinese, the Koreans... these are common stories that people just hear in our families... And the things the denialists were saying were so provocative that even people outside the Asian community were shocked... Have you guys ever heard of the "Me Too" Movement? Have you ever heard of Women's Equality? Even the Japanese Consul General wrote a couple of articles in the San Francisco Chronicle, and he seemed totally oblivious. It's incredible! These are the Japanese equivalent of the State Department... You guys don't understand American politics!⁷⁸

Such tactics helped to galvanise the movement by provoking progressive Californian opinion, especially those associated with pacifist and feminist causes. Wong, a leading member of the group Veterans for Peace, had been a conscientious objector during the Vietnam War; activists of his vintage could equate Japanese

denialism with the US government's obfuscation of the horrors of that conflict. Judith Mirkinson, a lawyer, feminist and "anti-imperialist" with experience of living and working in East Asia (dating back to the Vietnam War era), became president of the CWJC.⁷⁹ Japanese denialism, largely (if not entirely) state-orchestrated, may not have forged the coalition in the first place, but it made it easier for the CWJC to garner support from a broad progressive constituency. This included prominent members of California's ethnic Japanese community, such as (Democratic) Congressman Mike Honda.

Nonetheless, the campaign for the San Francisco memorial had to overcome an important legal difficulty. In an attempt to curb local manifestations of America's 'memorial mania', in the early 2000s San Francisco's local authorities placed a moratorium on the erection of new statues in public places. For the lawyerly activists of the CWJC, their skill in circumventing this prohibition was a source of considerable pride. They did so by ensuring that, at the time that the statue was erected, it stood on private land (in fact, on the roof of a private building) - albeit land that, under the terms of a planning agreement, would be merged with a neighbouring public park on completion of the related building project. Meanwhile, until it was ready to unveil, they took pains to keep the precise location of the statue concealed from the Japanese Consulate.⁸⁰

This unveiling took place in 2017, the year of the 80th anniversary of the Nanjing Massacre. "Our stories are linked",⁸¹ Mirkinson told the press at a memorial service held to mark that anniversary. The *China Daily* quoted her as saying that "The fate of over 400,000 [sic] women sexually enslaved by the Japanese Imperial Army during World War II is part and parcel of what happened during the Nanjing Massacre".⁸² Although the degree of coordination is unclear, the CWJC maintained

close contact with ‘comfort women’ campaigners in East Asia, including China; Su Zhiliang, a leading figure in Chinese commemorative efforts, assisted with the wording of the Chinese inscription accompanying the San Francisco statue.⁸³ The CWJC has also sought actively to support the global campaign for inscription of the archive *Voices of the Comfort Women* on UNESCO’s Memory of the World Register.

It should be noted that the CWJC campaign is not limited to statues. Activists have sought to connect to students on campuses and in high schools, too. In 2016, they succeeded in having some discussion of the ‘comfort women’ inserted into California’s new History-Social Science Framework for Public Schools. The framework stipulated that “comfort women can be taught as an example of institutionalized sexual slavery”.⁸⁴ Beside the ‘comfort women’, other previously neglected wartime atrocities, such as the Armenian genocide of 1915 or the Battle of Manila in 1945, were also mentioned in the framework.⁸⁵ Such moves indicated how Asian Americans were increasingly coming to be seen as “America’s new ‘swing vote’.”⁸⁶

Nonetheless, for the broader American public, some Asian Americans are perhaps more relatable than others. As perceptions of the threat posed by China’s rise have grown in recent years, Chinese Americans have to contend with mounting domestic suspicion of “fifth columnism”, reinforcing the importance for them of forging inter-ethnic alliances in order to shore up their status and legitimacy. At the same time, as Edward Vickers argues, China’s rise is also a key factor fueling nationalism in Japan, and with it the state-backed project of historical revisionism that has fueled resentment amongst Japan’s neighbours, and especially in South Korea.⁸¹ Ironically, then, Japan’s nationalist response to China, in so far as it alienates progressive opinion in the United States, could conceivably contribute to jeopardising the American

alliance on which Japanese security depends.

Partnerships for Peace?

The installation of a ‘comfort women’ memorial in San Francisco was not going to single-handedly dismantle the US-Japan security partnership though. But it did generate the discontinuation of another kind of US-Japan partnership. The memorial’s erection prompted the mayor of Osaka, Yoshimura Hirofumi, a staunch opponent of ‘comfort women’ commemoration, to end his city’s long-standing partnership with San Francisco.⁸⁸ While this move generated particularly high waves in the media and contributed to the hardening of fronts among diaspora actors who positioned themselves for or against this memorial, this outcry seemed to have largely washed over those actually running and facilitating the kind of international exchange and collaboration this partnership helped to create.

Osaka and San Francisco had entered a sister city relationship shortly after the US occupation of Japan formally ended in 1953.⁸⁹ During the Cold War, such sister-city arrangements across old Second World War divisions were widespread across the West. In Europe, for example, such partnerships have been credited with contributing to post-war reconciliation.⁹⁰ In the United States, this practice was significantly boosted by President Eisenhower’s Sisters Cities International Program, launched in 1956 to improve international relations and “lessen the chance of new conflicts”⁹¹ through “people-to-people-diplomacy”.⁹² Such a programme seemed in line with a need for reconciliation in the aftermath of World War Two, though it was to evolve over time. Besides facilitating educational exchanges, these partnerships have increasingly focused, since the 2000s, on promoting mutual investment or intensifying knowledge transfer, boosting municipal

portfolios in a global economy. While San Francisco and Osaka initially joined the sister city programme in the spirit of post-war reconciliation, more instrumental economic factors were at stake when official ties were severed unilaterally by Osaka city officials in 2018.⁹³ Some scholars see this as a manifestation of the “paradiplomacy” of sister cities, whereby municipal authorities or civil society actors seek to challenge the nation-state’s monopoly over projection of political power on the international stage.⁹⁴ Others argue that diaspora activism constitutes a similar challenge.⁹⁵ In the case of San Francisco, the conjunction of diaspora activism and municipal politics in one of the United States’ most self-consciously progressive cities has superseded Cold War peace diplomacy and opened up a new front in Asia’s global history wars.

Within the Japanese American community itself, this rupture also exposed painful divisions, as some members of this community had sympathised with the ‘comfort women’ commemoration movement. Congressman Mike Honda’s involvement has already been noted. The *Nichi Bei Weekly*, a Japanese American online news outlet, reported an email exchange with Kathleen Kimura, co-chairwoman of the San Francisco-Osaka Sister City Association, who wrote that “[o]ur relationship with the people of Osaka will never be terminated. San Francisco high school students will continue to go to Osaka. Students from Osaka will continue to come to San Francisco.”⁹⁶ It remains to be seen what kind of implications the termination of the official sister-city relationship will have for grassroots ties, or for public attitudes in Osaka, Japan, or California regarding appropriate commemoration of wartime suffering.

Conclusion

This article has examined the involvement of Korean and Chinese diaspora communities in the United States in transforming Asia’s ‘memory wars’ into a global conflict. Legacies of inter-ethnic violence laid the groundwork for concerted efforts at Korean American political mobilisation. The salience of the ‘comfort women’ cause in discourses of national identity within South Korea itself during the 1990s amplified the resonance of this issue for ethnic Koreans in North America who were seeking ways of forging a stronger “collective sense of ethnicity”.⁹⁷ Such mobilization efforts found physical expression in New Jersey’s Palisades Park in 2010, resulting in the first public memorial to the ‘comfort women’ anywhere in the world (the Peace Statue in Seoul was to be erected a year later). ‘Comfort women’ memory henceforth permanently occupied a physical public space in the United States, marking a new phase of intensified remembering, and indeed of intensifying contestation of this issue on a more global scale.

The Californian cases discussed here show that Palisades Park was only the beginning. ‘Comfort women’ commemoration outside of East Asia experienced a memory boom in its own right as inter-ethnic atrocity alliances were formed in the 2010s, notably between Korean American and Armenian American communities and subsequently with other communities, notably Chinese Americans. The commemorative project was presented as an effort to push back against historical revisionism (and reactionary patriarchy). But this article further shows that pursuing these higher goals was not the only reason for the proliferation of ‘comfort women’ memorials in the US or the formation of new inter-ethnic alliances. Indeed, just because representatives of the Asian diaspora rallied behind the same issue, this did not mean that all shared the same views or objectives. In some contexts, such as San Francisco, the ‘comfort women’ issue appears to have offered a vehicle of potentially broader appeal for commemorative

efforts that earlier had had a somewhat different focus. It will thus be important for future research to delve even deeper into the domestic and transnational dimensions inherent in the campaigning of different diaspora activists.

Such research may further illuminate the collateral damage such campaigning can incur. Long-established forms of transnational cooperation and Cold War reconciliation, namely city partnerships, have been threatened, or, as in San Francisco's case, discontinued altogether. These relatively successful forms of "people-to-people diplomacy"⁹⁸ increasingly find themselves in the firing line of campaigns by American East Asian diasporas attempting to counter Japanese historical revisionism. But while the revisionism deserves to be challenged, we may ask, what tactics are appropriate or proportionate? Carol Gluck recently argued that resurgent nationalism might indeed be a force too strong to counter by traditional means of solidarity across borders, or "traveling tropes" such as the 'comfort women'.⁹⁹ Recognising that more traditional ways of organising - using remembrance as resistance, for instance - might not result in the outcome desired by many activists could be an important lesson to draw from the example of globalising 'comfort women' memory.

This reflection may appear to contradict the analysis here of the San Francisco case. The CWJC activists certainly feel they have scored a victory with their inter-ethnic memorial. And the Osaka authorities' discontinuation of their city partnership with San Francisco can be seen simply as confirmation that Japanese nationalist politicians stand on 'the wrong side of history'. However, the consequent strengthening of solidarity among some like-minded diaspora groups and their supporters nonetheless comes at the cost of other relationships. Is this therefore the time for new forms of remembrance and activism? In the long run, diaspora activists too will have to face the question of how conducive the appropriation of 'comfort women' memory will be to peace and reconciliation in this struggle over memory, if indeed peace and reconciliation are the primary goals in Asia's global memory wars.¹⁰⁰

This article was revised and updated on April 10, 2021 to recognize the contributions of relevant scholarship of which the author was previously unaware. Mark Selden, editor.

This article is a part of **The Special Issue: The 'Comfort Women' as Public History**. See [the Table of Contents](#).

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Please also see the supplementary issue to this special issue, **Academic Integrity at Stake: the Ramseyer Article**, edited by Alexis Dudden.

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Notes

¹ This article was made possible by a Small Grant from the Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation for which the author is very thankful. The author is furthermore grateful to Professor Edward Vickers for sharing his research notes on Asian American diaspora activism in California.

² Justin McCurry, “Former sex slaves reject Japan and South Korea’s ‘comfort women’ accord”, *The Guardian*, 26 January 2016, accessed on 8 January 2017.

³ Barry Schwartz, Kim Mikyong, “Introduction: Northeast Asia’s Memory Problem”, in idem (eds.), *Northeast Asia’s Difficult Past: Essays in Collective Memory*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, pp. 1-30.

⁴ According to Tomomi Yamaguchi, the term ‘history wars’ was first coined by the *Sankei Shimbun*, a Japanese nationalist newspaper. See, Tomomi Yamaguchi, “The ‘History Wars’ and the ‘Comfort Women’ Issue: Revisionism and the Right-wing in Contemporary Japan and the U.S.”, in *The Asia-Pacific Journal | Japan Focus* 18.6.3 (2020): p. 2.

⁵ Daniel Schumacher, “Asia’s ‘Boom’ of Difficult Memories: Remembering World War Two Across East and Southeast Asia”, in *History Compass* 13.11 (2015): pp. 560-577.

⁶ See, for example, see: Tomomi Yamaguchi, “The ‘History Wars’ and the ‘Comfort Women’ Issue: Revisionism and the Right-wing in Contemporary Japan and the U.S.”, in *The Asia-Pacific Journal | Japan Focus* 18.6.3 (2020): pp. 1-23; Satoko Oka Norimatsu, “Canada’s ‘History Wars’: The ‘Comfort Women’ and the Nanjing Massacre”, in *The Asia-Pacific Journal | Japan Focus* 18.6.4 (2020): pp. 1-18; Edward Vickers, “Commemorating the ‘Comfort Women’ Beyond Korea”: The Chinese Case”, in Mark R. Frost, Daniel Schumacher, Edward Vickers, *Remembering Asia’s World War Two*, London: Routledge: 2019, pp. 174-208; ; Mary M. McCarthy and Linda C. Hasunuma, “Coalition building and mobilization: case studies of the comfort women memorials in the United States”, in *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 6 (2018): pp. 411-434.

⁷ Welcome additions to the literature include (but are not limited to) Yamaguchi, “The ‘History

Wars’ and the ‘Comfort Women’ Issue”; Norimatsu, “Canada’s ‘History Wars’”; Linda C. Hasunuma and Mary M. McCarthy, “Creating a Collective Memory of the Comfort Women in the USA”, in *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 32 (2019): pp. 145-162.

⁸ Rangsook Yoon, “Erecting the “Comfort Women” Memorials: From Seoul to San Francisco”, in *de arte* 53.2-3 (2018): pp. 70-85; Sierra Rooney, “The Politics of Shame: The Glendale Comfort Women Memorial and the Complications of Transnational Commemorations”, in *de arte* 53.2-3 (2018): pp. 86-102; Anna Song, “The Task of an Activist: ‘Imagined Communities’ and the ‘Comfort Women’ Campaigns in Australia”, in *Asian Studies Review* 37.3 (2013): p. 388; Jungmin Seo “Politics of Memory in Korea and China: Remembering the Comfort Women and the Nanjing Massacre, in *New Political Science* 30.3 (2008): p. 374.

⁹ Carol Gluck, “Operations of Memory: ‘Comfort Women’ and the World”, in Sheila Miyoshi Jager and Rana Mitter (eds.), *Ruptured Histories: War, Memory, and the Post-Cold War in Asia*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007, pp. 47-77.

¹⁰ Erika Doss, *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2010.

¹¹ McCarthy and Hasunuma speak of a “universalizing discourse” that the activists tap into. See, McCarthy and Hasunuma, “Coalition building and mobilization”, p. 2.

¹² For the purpose of this article, I will adopt a broad definition that conceptualizes diasporas as communities that dispersed to one or more countries, where they actively “maintain [a] collective identity, cultural beliefs and practices [along with] language, or religion”, and where they “preserve and maintain a variety of explicit ties with their original home country”, See, Inbom Choi, “Korean Diaspora in the Making. Its Current Status and Impact on the Korean Economy”, in C. Fred Bergsten and Inbom Choi (eds.), *The Korean Diaspora in the World Economy*, Washington D.C.: Institute for International Economics, 2003, p. 11.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Korea, “[Overseas Koreans](#)”, 2019, 17 March 2020.

¹⁵ Fiona B. Adamson, “The Growing Importance of Diaspora Politics”, in *Current History* (November 2016): p. 291-297.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Changzoo Song, “Engaging the diaspora in an era of transnationalism”, in *World of Labor* 64 (2014): pp. 3, 7.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 5.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 4.

²⁰ Adamson, “The Growing Importance of Diaspora Politics”, p. 297.

²¹ Ien Ang, “Together-in-Difference: Beyond Diaspora, into Hybridity”, in *Asian Studies Review* 27.2. (2003): p. 142/143. Tölölyan even speaks of a ‘transnational moment’ that diasporas have entered that make their cross-border activism into the anti-thesis of the modern nation-state. (See, idem, p. 143.)

²² Pamela Thoma, ““Such an Unthinkable Thing’: Asian American Transnational Feminism and the “Comfort Women’ of World War II Conference”, in Margaret Stetz and Bonnie B.C. Oh (eds.), *Legacies of the Comfort Women of World War II*, London: Routledge, 2001, pp. 101-127.

²³ EunSook Lee and Hahrie Han, “Engaging Korean Americans in Civic Activism”, in Rachel Miyung Joo and Shelley Sang-Hee Lee (eds.), *A Companion to Korean American Studies*,

Leiden: Brill, 2016, p. 617.

²⁴ Shelley Sang-Hee Lee, “After the Watershed: Korean Migration Since 1965”, in Rachel Miyung Joo and Shelley Sang-Hee Lee (eds.), *A Companion to Korean American Studies*, Leiden: Brill, 2016, p. 37.

²⁵ Kyeyoung Park, “Use and Abuse of Race and Culture: Black-Korean1 Tension in America”, in *American Anthropologist*, New Series, 98.3 (1996): pp. 492-499; Elaine H. Kim, “Home Is Where the Han Is: A Korean American Perspective on the Los Angeles Upheavals”, in *Social Justice* 20.1/2 (Spring-Summer 1993): pp. 1-21.

²⁶ Ann H. Kim, “Korean Ethnicity and Asian American Panethnicity”, in Rachel Miyung Joo and Shelley Sang-Hee Lee (eds.), *A Companion to Korean American Studies*, Leiden: Brill, 2016, p. 350.

²⁷ Lee, “After the Watershed”, p. 35.

²⁸ Karen L. Ishizuka, *Serve the People: Making Asian America in the Long Sixties*, London: Verso, 2016, p. 22.

²⁹ Lee and Han, “Engaging Korean Americans in Civic Activism”, pp. 618f.

³⁰ Pei-te Lien and Rhoanne Esteban, “Korean Americans and Electoral Politics”, in Rachel Miyung Joo and Shelley Sang-Hee Lee (eds.), *A Companion to Korean American Studies*, Leiden: Brill, 2016, p. 585, 587.

³¹ The organization is now called the Korean American Civil Empowerment (KACE)

³² McCarthy and Hasunuma, “Coalition building and mobilization”, p. 8-9.

³³ Jihwan Yoon, *The Korean Comfort Women Commemorative Campaign: Role of Intersectionality, Symbolic Space, and Transnational Circulation in Politics of Memory and Human Rights*, PhD thesis (Tennessee) 2017, p. 157.

³⁴ McCarthy and Hasunuma, “Coalition building and mobilization”, p. 8.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 9-10.

³⁶ Both quotations from: [H.Res.121 — 110th Congress \(2007-2008\)](#), accessed on 30 July 2019.

³⁷ Alexis Dudden and H.R. 759, “US Congressional Resolution Calls on Japan to Accept Responsibility for Wartime Comfort Women”, in *The Asia-Pacific Journal | Japan Focus* 4.4 (2006): p. 1.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Pei-te Lien and Rhoanne Esteban, “Korean Americans and Electoral Politics”, in Rachel Miyung Joo and Shelley Sang-Hee Lee (eds.), *A Companion to Korean American Studies*, Leiden: Brill, 2016, p. 592-597.

⁴⁰ Washington Coalition for Comfort Women Issues, Inc., “[WCCW History](#)”, accessed on 1 May 2020; Agnes Constante, “[Who are the ‘comfort women’, and why are U.S.-based memorials for them controversial?](#)”, *NBC News*, accessed on 7 May 2019.

⁴¹ Donald Teruo Hata and Nadine Ishitani Hata, *Japanese Americans and World War II: Mass Removal, Imprisonment, and Redress*, 4th ed., Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.

⁴² A prominent article in the *New York Times* triggered a host of letters to the newspaper in support of keeping the memorial in Palisades Park and protecting the ‘right to free speech’, free from foreign government interference. See, Kirk Semple, “[In New Jersey, Memorial for ‘Comfort Women’ Deepens Old Animosity](#)”, *New York Times*, 18 May 2012, accessed on 21 February 2014; Dennis P. Halpin, “Palisades Park and the First Amendment”, *US Korea*

Institute at SAIS: Policy Brief, 29 May 2013.

⁴³ qtd. in Semple, “In New Jersey, Memorial for ‘Comfort Women’ Deepens Old Animosity”.

⁴⁴ Yamaguchi, “The ‘History Wars’ and the ‘Comfort Women’ Issue”, p. 6.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 6ff.

⁴⁶ See McCarthy and Hasunuma’s argument about “universal messaging” and “coalition building across ethnicities”: “Coalition building and mobilization”, p. 12.

⁴⁷ Arun Rath, “[The Armenian Diaspora Remembers and Mourns](#)”, NPR, 25 April 2015, accessed on 20 April 2020.

⁴⁸ Thomas J. Ward and William D. Lay, *Park Statue Politics: World War II Comfort Women Memorials in the United States*, Bristol: E-International Relations Publ., 2019, p. 58.

⁴⁹ qtd. in: “[Glendale Mayor Regrets Installing Comfort Women Statue](#)”, *The Rafu Shimpo: Los Angeles Japanese Daily News*, 12 November 2013, 2 April 2020.

⁵⁰ qtd. in: Rafu Staff Report, “[Glendale Approves Comfort Women Memorial](#)”, *The Rafu Shimpo: Los Angeles Japanese Daily News*, 15 July 2013, accessed on 2 April 2020.

⁵¹ McCarthy and Hasunuma, “Coalition building and mobilization”, p. 10.

⁵² Yamaguchi, “The ‘History Wars’ and the ‘Comfort Women’ Issue”, p. 9.

⁵³ Justice for Comfort Women, “[Glendale Mayor to Visit Busan to Look at Comfort Women Statue](#)”, *Justice for Comfort Women*, 5 March 2019, accessed on 8 June 2019.

⁵⁴ Rana Mitter, “[Can Japan Lay Its ‘Comfort Women’ Ghosts to Rest?](#)”, *South China Morning Post*, 14 January 2017, accessed on 15 January 2017.

⁵⁵ Justice for Comfort Women, “[Glendale Mayor to Visit Busan to Look at Comfort Women Statue](#)”, *Justice for Comfort Women*, 5 March 2019, accessed on 8 June 2019.

⁵⁶ Edward Vickers, “Commemorating Comfort Women Beyond Korea: the Chinese Case,” in Mark R. Frost, Daniel Schumacher and Edward Vickers (eds.), *Remembering Asia’s World War Two*. London and New York: Routledge, 2019, pp. 174-207.

⁵⁷ This refers to how the CWJC have been framing their efforts themselves. See, “[Remembrance and Resistance: ‘Comfort Women’ and the US Pivot to Asia](#)”, History, Blog post, 27 June 2016, 16 March 2020.

⁵⁸ This reflects the CWJC’s mission statement: Comfort Women Justice Coalition, “[About CWJC](#)”, Blog post, 2017, 16 March 2020.

⁵⁹ Dana Y. Nakano, “An Interlocking Panethnicity: The Negotiation of Multiple Identities Among Asian American Social Movement Leaders”, in *Sociological Perspectives* 56.4 (2013): p. 579.

⁶⁰ Ann H. Kim, “Korean Ethnicity and Asian American Panethnicity”, in Rachel Miyung Joo and Shelley Sang-Hee Lee (eds.), *A Companion to Korean American Studies*, Leiden: Brill, 2016, p. 337.

⁶¹ Nakano, “An Interlocking Panethnicity”, p. 591.

⁶² Interview II by Edward Vickers with Julie Tang and Lilian Sing, co-founders of the Comfort Women Justice Coalition, and Phyllis Kim, Board member of Korean American Forum of California, unpublished, San Francisco, 20 April 2019.

⁶³ Interview I by Edward Vickers with Julie Tang, co-founder of the Comfort Women Justice Coalition, Michael Wong, Board member of Veterans for Peace, and Phyllis Kim, Board member of Korean American Forum of California, unpublished, San Francisco, 20 April 2019.

⁶⁴ Interview II by Edward Vickers, 20 April 2019.

- ⁶⁵ Interview I by Edward Vickers, 20 April 2019.
- ⁶⁶ Ibid.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid.
- ⁶⁹ Although the exhibition features endorsements not only from the PRC Consul in San Francisco, but also from the local representative of the Republic of China on Taiwan (which in 2015 still had a Kuomintang president).
- ⁷⁰ Interview I by Edward Vickers, 20 April 2019.
- ⁷¹ Carol Gluck, [“Memory in Hypernationalist Times: The Comfort Women as Traveling Trope”](#), *global-e*, 2 May 2019, 7 April 2020.
- ⁷² Interview II by Edward Vickers, 20 April 2019.
- ⁷³ Norimatsu, “Canada’s ‘History Wars’”, pp. 1-18
- ⁷⁴ Gluck, “Memory in Hypernationalist Times”; Hasunuma and McCarthy, “Creating a Collective Memory of the Comfort Women in the USA”, p. 147; Maki Kimura, *Unfolding the ‘Comfort Women’ Debates: Modernity, Violence, Women’s Voices*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2016, p. 219. One of the earliest organisations that advocated for wartime reparation was the Washington Coalition for Comfort Women Issues Inc., founded in 1992.
- ⁷⁵ Both quotes in Kimura, *Unfolding the ‘Comfort Women’ Debates*, p. 234.
- ⁷⁶ Iris Chang, *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II*, New York: Basic Books, 1997.
- ⁷⁷ Interview I by Edward Vickers, 20 April 2019.
- ⁷⁸ Ibid.
- ⁷⁹ Interview II by Edward Vickers, 20 April 2019.
- ⁸⁰ Interview I by Edward Vickers, 20 April 2019.
- ⁸¹ Liang Meichen, [“Nanjing Massacre Remembered”](#), *China Daily*, 11 December 2017, 7 April 2020.
- ⁸² Ibid.
- ⁸³ Interview I by Edward Vickers, 20 April 2019.
- ⁸⁴ California Department of Education, [History-Social Science Framework For California Public Schools: Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve](#), California Department of Education, 2017, p.353. That US education has also become an arena where memories such as these are actively contested is widely known and has attracted comment from many other scholars. See, for example, Hasunuma and McCarthy, “Creating a Collective Memory of the Comfort Women in the USA”, p. 156.
- ⁸⁵ California Department of Education, [“Superintendent Torlakson Announces Approval of History-Social Science Framework”](#), News Release, 14 July 2016, 10 March 2020.
- ⁸⁶ Ward and Lay, *Park Statue Politics*, p. 63.
- ⁸⁷ Edward Vickers, [“Japan’s Pyrrhic Victory Over ‘Comfort Women’ Commemoration”](#), *The Diplomat*, 25 November 2017, accessed on 30 November 2017.
- ⁸⁸ *Japan Times*, [“San Francisco calls Osaka’s decision to end sister-city ties over ‘comfort women’ statue ‘unfortunate’”](#), 4 October 2018, accessed on 1 July 2019. It should, however, be noted that the immediate cause of the break in relations was San Francisco’s refusal to accede to a demand from Osaka that the inscription on the memorial refer to ‘tens of thousands’ rather than ‘hundreds of thousands’ of victims. In the end, then, the dispute

degenerated into a ‘numbers game’ (Interview I by Edward Vickers, 20 April 2019).

⁸⁹ In 1953, the Korean War had ended which had seen massive American troops commitment that would result in the US military continuing to maintain a powerful presence until this day.

⁹⁰ Marek Furmankiewicz, “Town-twinning as a factor generating international flows of goods and people – the example of Poland”, in *Belgeo* 1.2 (2005): p. 146; Tüzin Baycan-Levent, Seda Kundak and Aliye Ahu Gülümser, “City-to-city linkages in a mobile society: the role of urban networks in Eurocities and Sister Cities”, in *International Journal of Sciences Technology and Management* 10.1 (2008): p. 85, 87f.

⁹¹ From the organisation’s mission statement. See, Sister Cities International (SCI), “[Connect Globally. Thrive Locally](#)”, 14 March 2020.

⁹² Furmankiewicz, “Town-twinning as a factor generating international flows of goods and people”, p. 146.

⁹³ Justin McCurry, “[Osaka drops San Francisco as a sister city over ‘comfort women’ statue,](#)”, *The Guardian*, 4 October 2018, accessed on 6 April 2020.

⁹⁴ Virginie Mamadouh, “Town Twinning: Over the (ir)relevance of the paradiplomacy of European cities”, in Virginie Mamadouh and Anne van Wageningen (eds.), *Urban Europe: Fifty Tales of the City*, Amsterdam: AUP, 2016, pp. 339-346.

⁹⁵ Fiona B. Adamson, “The Growing Importance of Diaspora Politics”, in *Current History* (November 2016): p. 291-297.

⁹⁶ Tomo Hirai, “[Osaka mayor terminates sister city ties with S.F. over ‘comfort women’ memorial](#)”, *Nichi Bei Weekly*, 11 October 2018, 14 March 2020.

⁹⁷ Yoon, *The Korean Comfort Women Commemorative Campaign*, p. 157; McCarthy and Hasunuma, “Coalition building and mobilization”, p. 2.

⁹⁸ Furmankiewicz, “Town-twinning as a factor generating international flows of goods and people”, p. 146; Baycan-Levent, Kundak and Gülümser, “City-to-city linkages in a mobile society”, p. 85, 87f.

⁹⁹ Gluck, “Memory in Hypernationalist Times”.

¹⁰⁰ For similar questions being raised in a broader context, see also Joohee Kim, “Going transnational? A feminist view of “comfort women” memorials”, in *Asian Journal of Women’s Studies* 26.3 (2020): pp. 397-409; Mark R. Frost, Edward Vickers and Daniel Schumacher, Introduction: Locating Asia’s War Memory Boom: a new temporal and geopolitical perspective”, in idem (eds.), *Remembering Asia’s World War Two*, London: Routledge, 2019, pp. 1-24.