

**Collective Memory of Japanese Military ‘Comfort Women’
and South Korean Media:
The Case of Television Dramas, *Eyes of Dawn* (1991)
and *Snowy Road* (2015)**

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Abstract

A nation’s memory is a reconstruction of the past. Accordingly, this study explores how South Korean television (TV) dramas *Eyes of Dawn* (1991) and *Snowy Road* (2015) helped shape the collective memory of Japanese colonial rule. Both dramas highlighted the experiences of comfort women, Korean women forced to provide sex to Japanese soldiers. This study analyzes the representations, technical factors, and newspaper discourse of the dramas to examine how they influenced collective memories of comfort women. By comparing and contrasting the dramas, this study reveals that while both generated public awareness and controversy, *Eyes of Dawn* and *Snowy Road* represented differently oriented colonial memories of comfort women: A patriotic-oriented memory and a humanism-focused memory, respectively. Specifically, in illuminating colonial rule, *Eyes of Dawn* showed a traditional good and evil dichotomy, while *Snowy Road* revealed a more complex and diverse context. Given the socio-political contexts of 1991 and 2015, this study suggests that *Eyes of Dawn* functioned to inform the public about the comfort women, whereas *Snowy Road* aimed to reflect upon the impact of comfort women in South Korean society. Thus, while acknowledging that collective memory is a construct that can change over time, we contend that the media’s role (especially TV drama) is critical in this process. More generally, this study contributes to the study of memory, journalism, history, and popular communication.

Key words

collective memory, television drama, comfort women, South Korea, Japanese colonial era

Introduction

From 1910 to 1945, Korea was under Japanese colonial rule. The colonial period is unique in Korean memory because all Koreans felt the severity of Japanese oppression. Experiences of the colonial period are directly or indirectly etched into individual lives and have contributed to identity formation through their impression on various forms of memory. Thus, colonial memory does not necessarily indicate past events with fixed meanings. Instead, colonial memory may be considered a kind of topic that can be produced or consumed in diverse ways according to interrelated discourses. For example, there are two national holidays related to Japanese rule: The March 1st Independence Movement Day and the August 15th National Liberation Day. The anniversary of liberation from Japanese colonial rule is celebrated not only by the government, but also civic groups and the mass media. Such commemorations engender Korean collective memory.

However, there are many aspects of Japanese colonial rule that Koreans would prefer to keep hidden; a typical example being the enlistment of so-called Japanese military comfort women¹ (hereafter, comfort women). These “young women and girls of various ethnic and national backgrounds,” numbering in the tens of thousands, were forced “into sexual servitude during the Asia Pacific War [...] [beginning] with the invasion of Manchuria in 1931 and end[ing] with Japan’s defeat in 1945” (Soh, 2008, p. xii). Although the exact numbers are still debated, estimates of the numbers of comfort women range between 50,000 and 200,000, and a large majority of victims were Korean women. Since official historians and the government declined to deal with the issue of comfort women, media texts have played an important role in reproducing the collective memory of comfort women in South Korea. With its vivid and spectacle-oriented features associated with banal everydayness, TV, in particular, is considered one of the essential mechanisms that reproduce collective memories related to the colonial period (Edgerton, 2000; Laffond, 2011; Moss, 2008).

¹ The term “comfort women” has evoked controversies as the word comfort, meaning “giving rest,” presents a Japanese perspective. However, in Korea, due to the confusion with different terms and repulsion among surviving victims, the term “Japanese military ‘comfort women’” is officially used.

Researchers, however, have yet to focus their full attention on studies of comfort women with respect to their media representations. Although there exists a plethora of research on comfort women in the fields of women's studies (see Min, 2003) and historical anthropology (see Soh, 2008), studies illuminating the role of media texts in the reproduction of collective memory on comfort women discourse are especially lacking (for exceptions, see Kim, 2000; Lee & Min, 2011). To fill this gap in the literature, this study examines South Korean TV dramas that represent comfort women by applying the memory studies framework. We believe that the lived experiences of the weak and vulnerable can best be addressed with the theoretical lens of collective memory, which emphasizes constructiveness, selectiveness, and fluidity in understanding the past (Olick & Robbins, 1998; Schudson, 1992; Schwartz, 1996).

In this study, we compare how two South Korean TV dramas—*Eyes of Dawn* (1991) and *Snony Road* (2015)—represented comfort women to demonstrate how the socio-political milieu of 2015 differed from that of 1991. While these two programs significantly influenced audiences' memories and perceptions of comfort women, we treat them not as idiosyncratic texts but as parts of Korean media that portrayed comfort women during each period. The first drama, *Eyes of Dawn*, was triggered a recognition of the comfort women issue as the issue was not actively discussed in South Korea until the drama became popular in 1991. The second drama, *Snony Road*, was a feature program commemorating the 70th anniversary of liberation from Japan's colonial rule, and was televised to the public on Independence Movement Day. By analyzing narrative style, production techniques, and news discourse on *Eyes of Dawn* (1991) and *Snony Road* (2015), this study aims to uncover the unique socio-political milieu that contributed to the different substantive portrayals of comfort women in each drama, and, furthermore, intends to determine how these dramas have reproduced the collective memory of comfort women in the 1990s as well as in present day South Korea.

Collective Memory and the Mass Media

Collective memory is conceptualized as socially-constructed. According to Halbwachs (1992, p. 22), “[w]hile the collective memory endures and draws strength from its base in a coherent body of people, it is individuals as

group members who remember.” In other words, Halbwachs (1992) argues that individuals depend on a certain group context to recollect the past. She further contends that social structures, particularly the social frame of memory, affect what individuals remember (Halbwachs, 1992). In a similar yet different angle, Schwartz (1996) focused on memory itself as a social frame as he investigated how American President Abraham Lincoln, as a collective memory, was used and organically articulated by the society. He points out that the past is a social construction formed by the concerns of the present (Schwartz, 1996). Likewise, many theorists of collective memory suggest a complex view of the relation between past and present in shaping collective memory and have studied not only how collective memory works in certain periods but also how it is transformed as an ongoing negotiation through time (Olick & Levy, 1997; Schudson, 1992; Schwartz, 1996; Trouillot, 1995; Zerubavel, 1994). Thus, collective memory is more of a process of sense-making through time and will always be selective, incomplete, and partial.

Collective memories do not exist in the abstract; instead, they are material—often having a sort of textual form as they require a process of symbolization in order to become a collective memory (Steiner & Zelizer, 1995). The media are increasingly important agents for promoting remembrance (Peri, 1999). Many researchers have explored how the media represent or portray events or figures of the past—especially wars or disasters—as they shape collective memory (Choi, 2009; Kitch, 2006; Mendelson & Kitch, 2011; Olick & Robbins, 1998; Peri, 1999; Robinson, 2009; Schwalbe, 2006; Schwartz, 1996). For example, Schwalbe (2006) examined the visual framing of U.S. news websites and their role in shaping collective memory by remembering past events of the Iraq War. She found that the visual reports of news websites tended to bolster the patriotic war narrative and showed a few anniversary commemorations of the War. Analyzing TV coverage of the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Rabin in 1995, Peri (1999) found that the media became the principal mnemonic site and the most influential mnemonic agent. These studies reveal how mass media is dominant and omnipresent in everyday life, while illuminating the media’s decisive role in shaping current collective memories (Laffond, 2011).

Amongst different medium, TV is regarded particularly influential as an agent of memory production (Moss, 2008). Edgerton (2000) argues that TV “is the principal means by which most people learn about history today [...]”

[T]he medium's nonfictional and fictional portrayals have similarly transformed the way tens of millions of viewers think about historical figures" (p. 7). Visual representations such as TV programs have the ability to embody memories, and thereby help people to form a collective memory. Thus, when memories, embodied through visual representation, are produced and consumed via the media, this shapes collective memory (Tae, 2012).

South Korean scholars also have examined the role of the media in shaping collective memory (Choi, 2009; Kim, 2005; Lee, 2003; Tae, 2012). Most studies have examined the Korean War and Independence Day. For example, analyzing a TV documentary about Independence Day, Tae (2012) found that Independence Day was remembered as a past event that symbolized and held ideological values, such as nationalism and patriotism. The author concluded that public memory as a historical fact was highlighted through the documentary. He also suggested that the memory of Independence Day has been utilized as a nationalistic mechanism for implementing economic development and globalization. Although research on collective memory exists, collective memory studies related to comfort women during the colonial period in South Korea are rare.

Representation of memory by diverse media outlets does not simply show one historical fact or one perspective. Representation substantially constructs the meanings as shared by collective memory and these mediated memories are multilayered and complex in nature. Since media can function to operate as both memory agent and as an indicator for sociological and political changes simultaneously (Laffond, 2011), we need to examine the intertwined relationship between media representation and the collective memory.

Methods

Study Selection: *Eyes of Dawn* and *Snowy Road*

The drama, *Eyes of Dawn*, comprising 38 episodes, aired between October 1991 and February 1992, on MBC. Based on a bestselling novel by Seong-Jong Kim, published in 1981, *Eyes of Dawn* is the story of three young Koreans caught in the maelstrom of the nation's modern history.² Three main characters—two heroes (Jang, Ha-Lim and Choi, Dae-Chi) and

one heroine (Yoon, Yeo-Ok)—appear in the drama. The latter, is a heroic figure who suffered as a comfort woman. Spanning from the colonial period to the Korean War, the series brought attention to Japanese war crimes (the existence of comfort women in particular) and the tragedies wrought by Korea's ideological divisions. The drama became one of the top-rated TV dramas in South Korea, with an average viewer rating of about 44.3% (the highest rating: 58.4%). This study examines the content of twelve episodes, including those covering the colonial period (episodes 1 to 10) and those after liberation in which Yoon faced difficulties returning to her hometown due to her role as a comfort woman (episodes 21 and 32).

The second drama, *Snowy Road*, aired between February 28 and March 1, 2015, on KBS. Consisting of two episodes as a feature program, *Snowy Road* focused on the story of two characters—Young-ae and Jong-bun. As childhood friends, they were forcefully taken to a comfort house to act as comfort women. Showing the present life of the only survivor, Young-ae, this drama used the flashback format (mixed editing of past and present by Jong-bun's recollection). Although this drama was not highly rated at the time of airing,³ *Snowy Road* was highly acclaimed for its quality and was re-produced as a feature film in March 2017, reaching one hundred thousand viewers. *Snowy Road* won several prestigious awards, including awards from the 67th Prix Italia China, the 24th Golden Rooster & Hundred Flowers Film Festival, and the 37th Banff World Media Festival. Because this drama focuses on the experiences of its main characters as comfort women, our analysis draws from only two episodes.

Some scholars may argue that these two dramas are not comparable in terms of the degree to which they have influenced the formation of collective memory among South Koreans. Nevertheless, we select *Snowy Road* as a target drama. First, *Snowy Road* utilizes the same media platform—TV drama. Second, there are ample resources related to *Snowy Road*, including media reports, critics' comments, and audience responses. Third, *Snowy Road*

² The drama was set during the ten-year period from 1943 to 1953. Korea was liberated from Japan in 1945, and was under the U.S. military administration between 1945 and 1948. Following the establishment of the South Korean and North Korean governments in 1948, the two nations became embattled in the Korean War between 1950 and 1953.

³ In South Korea, with the advent of multiple channels and online media, today's media outlets have changed. Consequently, ratings have been rapidly decreasing since 2000. Thus, the success of TV dramas cannot be determined simply by their ratings.

was reproduced into a film, causing it to receive more attention from the public and the media. Forth, *Snowy Road* was the only media content related to comfort women during the 70th anniversary of Korean Independence.

Additionally, the analysis includes news articles that discussed the dramas. To collect the news stories, we used the Korean Integrated News Database System (KINDS) operated by Korea Press Foundation⁴ as well as websites such as *Naver* and the *JoongAng Ilbo*.⁵ Considering that *Eyes of Dawn* aired until February 6, we used the keyword “eyes of dawn” to find 137 news articles from October 7, 1991 to February 28, 1992. Using the same process, we retrieved 219 news articles on *Snowy Road* from February 26, 2015 to March 25, 2015. Since the search for the drama’s title *Snowy Road* yielded too many news articles, we added the key words “independence” and “comfort women” to filter the articles.

Data Analysis

This study analyzes these TV dramas, which are depicted in a narrative style. We focus on how these narrative styles portray characters as comfort women. Both dramas showed the recruitment, assignment, disposal, and aftermath of comfort women. The dramas use other technical factors—subtitles, narrations, sound tracks, and genre conventions—to explain the contexts or environments of the drama. This study also analyzes how these factors are used in each drama. In addition to the drama text itself, the study explores how news stories reported on the dramas. These analyses will help elucidate how the reproduction of collective memory on comfort women projected in South Korean popular cultural media has evolved over time.

⁴ The KINDS service includes most newspapers published in South Korea. However, a few newspapers did not provide their own articles to KINDS.

⁵ *Naver* is the most popular search engine in South Korea. The *JoongAng Ilbo* is a newspaper company published in Seoul. It is one of the top three newspapers in South Korea in terms of circulation.

Findings

Portrayal of Comfort Women

The first episode of *Eyes of Dawn* started with a sensational scene. A Japanese soldier put some Korean women on a train that was transporting comfort women, and afterward a Japanese military officer raped the heroine (Yoon, Yeo-Ok). The scene was graphically violent. Yoon tried to escape, but the officer beat her and cut her hair using a Japanese sword. Through conversations overheard on the train, the drama revealed that Korean women were deceitfully recruited—conned into believing they would be working in munition factories, as the Japanese government needed factory workers during World War II.

While *Eyes of Dawn* hinted at the fraudulent recruitment of comfort women, *Snowy Road* illustrates in detail women's lives before recruitment and what had happened to them afterward. The two main characters, Jong-bun and Young-ae, young girls about the same age, but with very different class status, are brought into the same train where there are many other young Korean girls. Young-ae was fooled into working in a labor team. Jong-bun was kidnapped at night when her mom went to a city to work. While events in the two dramas show the characters in the same space of the train, the steam engine sound symbolizes how these girls are pulled far away from home and family and into danger. *Snowy Road* also reveals that there were conflicts and class differences among these girls when they met for the first time. Young-ae shouts, in Japanese, at the officers—invoking her Japanese name and arguing that she is different from other girls; however, the officers still beat her.

Both dramas also showed that Japanese soldiers were forcibly assigned comfort women after they arrived in Nanjing (China), which was occupied by a Japanese military unit. Both dramas demonstrated that the life of comfort women was miserable with violent acts portrayed during the assigning scene. Even so, *Eyes of Dawn* and *Snowy Road* differ in terms of the representation of the violence and rape, as well as in their focus upon the lives of comfort women in the military unit.

Eyes of Dawn depicts smiling Japanese soldiers standing in line to enter the comfort houses, contrasting this mood with that of the comfort women. Japanese soldiers thought nothing of comfort women. For exam-

ple, in the third episode, one military officer kills a comfort woman, a friend of Yoon's, just to satisfy his resentment caused by the attack of the enemy. This scene reveals the miserable condition of both Korean soldiers and comfort women. The main love story of the *Eyes of Dawn* starts in a wretched comfort house where one Korean student soldier (Choi, Dea-Chi) encounters Yoon, who asks him to bring a knife so she can commit suicide. Although Choi refuses, Yoon laments over her situation saying, "My mother would be dead [...] if she knew my condition." The drama also depicts how Japanese comfort women repeatedly disregarded their Korean comfort women counterparts. The Japanese called the Korean comfort women "Chosenpi," a disparaging term for Koreans.

Contrastingly, *Snowy Road* tried to adopt a more complex attitude towards the Japanese soldiers and the Japanese comfort women by not focusing on them directly. The drama used the sound of an iron door creaking and close-up shots of soldiers lifting numbered tickets to show that many soldiers visited the comfort houses. In terms of Japanese comfort women, *Snowy Road* revealed that their situation was little better (they only dealt with officers and received real money, while Korean girls received only military scrip) compared to the Korean girls, but the drama did not present any conflicts among the Japanese and Korean comfort women. Also, there were some scenes with a Japanese soldier who was represented from a humanistic perspective; he cried in front of his superior, confessing that he missed his family and hesitated shooting Korean comfort women. Rather than showing suicide or wailing (although there is an important scene when Young-ae tries to commit suicide by running to an icy lake), *Snowy Road* calmly displays the endless routines of comfort women, the poor surroundings, and the loneliness and fear they would have felt. Of course, *Snowy Road* also reveals the brutal violence and impersonal acts that occurred in the comfort house. For example, Young-ae's uterus was removed since she refused to take contraceptives, and one of her friends was shot when her venereal disease worsened (because she did not get any treatment). However, the drama lacked any kind of sensational images of sex and violence, focusing instead on showing how these girls survived and overcame this miserable situation through friendship and solidarity. For example, one scene showing Jong-bun and Young-ae knocking on the wall to check if the other was alive reveals that the biggest hope they had was simply to verify the existence of the other each day.

In the end, the comfort women encountered tragedy. *Eyes of Dawn* contextualizes this moment quite historically; after Yoon was moved to Saipan, the war was not going in Japan's favor. Because of an air raid by U.S. troops, comfort women took refuge in a cave. Japanese soldiers removed only the Korean comfort women from the cave, gunning them down with machine-guns. Directed in a dramatic fashion, this scene used a slow-motion technique with sad background music. Japanese soldiers shot at the comfort women repeatedly, and the women fell down dead. This scene maximized the brutality of this type of Japanese war crime.

Snony Road similarly presents the disposal of comfort women as barbaric; however, it employs a cynical or objective approach that actually increases the shock tactics in the text. As communicated in the written command ("On-site supplies should all be destroyed"), Korean comfort women were treated as supplies "which had no value now and thus needed to be thrown out."⁶ It seems that *Snony Road* focuses on how the comfort women's lives were effectively concealed as nursing labor by Japan since these women were ashamed and could not tell anybody about what really happened to them.⁷ In effect, while other kinds of labor exploitation by Japan could be singled out after independence, comfort women were never free of their pain as the cultural standards at that time made them shameful of their past as sex slaves.

Along these lines, both dramas showed how comfort women experienced a variety of hardships after liberation from Japan—lasting even to the present day. In the 21st episode of *Eyes of Dawn*, Yoon returned to her hometown, but the local people despised her not only because she was a comfort woman but also because she inherited cultivated lands from her land-owning father. When a man broke into Yoon's house to steal a land registration certificate, he slights Yoon by saying that she was knew about the superiority of Japanese or Korean men from her sexual experiences. In the 32nd episode, in which Yoon, accused of spying, was put on trial, a prose-

⁶ This description was offered by Young-ae when Jong-bun asked why all the Korean comfort women were killed.

⁷ Given the conservative patriarchal society of the 1940s, and the fact that comfort women were so young and vulnerable, it is understandable why Young-ae says that she will lie to even her mom about what she had been doing. Jong-bun identifies her as "spoiled" and refuses her hope to meet her first love.

cutor inquired of Yoon: “Comfort women were prostitutes for the Japanese military troops. Didn’t you receive any money for sexual services?” Another hero, Ha-Lim Jang, refuted that these girls were forced into prostitution. However, the defense counsel responded, “Weren’t able to refuse? Why are you alive?” Yoon answered,

I wanted to survive. I was taken to the Japanese military soldiers when I was only 17 years old. I could not die even after I recognized what comfort women were. I wanted to survive, and go back to the hometown. We don’t have any faults. We sold out our body, but you sold out our country. Nonetheless, you survived.

Snony Road elaborated on the everyday lives of comfort women 70 years after liberation. Adopting the flashback format, this drama demonstrated the hardships that comfort women still face. They were alone, poor, and suffering from nightmares and phantasms: Jong-bun, who lived as Young-ae for the rest of her life since she had to receive money from the government,⁸ did needlework, but barely eked by, even so people viewed her as stingy. Moreover, by displaying the fact that independence patriots were recognized and rewarded, *Snony Road* reflects on the unfair treatment of comfort women in contemporary Korea. Surviving comfort women have suffered permanent injury from disease, psychological trauma, and/or social ostracism. However, they have yet to receive any official apology or compensation. *Snony Road* ends with the following subtitle urging viewers to remember:

March the 1st of 2015, 185 out of 238, [...] [victims] registered as [...] comfort women, have passed away, and now only 53 survive. We should never forget those victims who have not even received a proper apology, but left the world and those who still suffer from war and violence.

⁸ Jong-bun was kidnapped; thus, there was no record of her being forced into labor. Young-ae, on the other hand, was recruited as part of an “emotional labor force;” therefore, she was on a list to receive government compensation.

The comparison of the two drama narratives depicting the misery of comfort women's lives illustrates that both dramas successfully showed how severely Korean comfort women suffered. However, while *Eyes of Dawn* tended to suggest a binary opposition between Japan (victimizer) and Korea (victim), *Snony Road* illustrated a more complex relationship between and among Japanese and Koreans.

Technical Factors of the Dramas

Both dramas, *Eyes of Dawn* and *Snony Road*, are basically melodramas containing a love story—the former with three characters, and the latter with a friendship involving two characters. However, the two dramas differ in terms of technical style and the different technical factors they incorporate. *Eyes of Dawn* poses as a historical drama, while *Snony Road* emphasizes lyricism and humanism. This study assesses aural and visual factors in the two dramas.

First, in terms of aural factors, *Eyes of Dawn* uses narration to explain important scenes, while *Snony Road* utilizes conversations to provide critical information. Narration is typically used in documentaries. *Eyes of Dawn* borrowed this technique to highlight historical facts and provide objectivity for the viewers. For example, in the second episode, a narrator describes the enlistment of comfort women, providing critical historical information to the viewers. Also in the last scene involving comfort women (the disposal scene), narration was used effectively to understand their deaths:

As the U.S. [...] air raid on the Japanese troops in Saipan [begins], the cleaning order is given to the Japanese troops. Like destroying secret military documents, the Japanese troops treat comfort women as objects to be destroyed. Korean comfort women are an unacceptable disgrace to the Japanese Imperial troops.

By contrast, to describe the same incident, *Snony Road* uses conversations between Japanese soldiers and conversations between Young-ae and Jong-bun. After escaping the comfort house, Young-ae was wounded and knew that she would soon die, so she asks Jong-bun to leave her and go. She gives Jong-bun a photo, which was taken in the comfort house by the Japanese to give the false impression that the women were working as

nurse supporters, and says, “Please keep this. You have to remember all of us in this picture. Please! You are not alone. Everybody else here in this photo is with you.” Conversation is typically more personal and subjective compared to narration. Thus, conveying important messages and information through conversation increased the lyricism of the drama.

Second, regarding visual factors, *Eyes of Dawn* appropriately inserted subtitles and monochrome documentary films to increase the sense of historical truth. The subtitles in *Eyes of Dawn* were used to provide information about places, time, and historical figures. For example, subtitles indicated that Yoon was sent to a military troop located in Nanjing, China, which accords with actual facts, as the Nanjing occupation of Japanese military troops occurred in 1937.⁹ When Yoon moved to other places, such as Zhengzhou and Saipan, subtitles informed viewers of the locations. In addition, subtitles provided real names of historical figures, like Japanese General Shiro Ishii.¹⁰ *Eyes of Dawn* also showed actual battle footage and real comfort women in Nanjing and Saipan through black-and-white documentary films. These subtitles and documentary films allow viewers to understand the dramatic setting in the context of actual history, and thus demonstrate historical facts and objectivity. One news article points out that this effective docudrama technique made viewers feel that they were experiencing history (Jeon, 1992).

In contrast, *Snowy Road* focused on the relation between the historical past and the continuous present by cross-editing recollection scenes and present scenes. The past (the story of Japanese colonialism and comfort women) and the present (Jong-bun’s ordinary life in her neighborhood) are continuously cross-edited through directive techniques such as daydreams, nightmares, phantasms, or even through the use of the same (or similar) objects. Present day *Snowy Road* shows not only the reality of comfort women 70 years after independence but also conveys a sub-story of a juve-

⁹ The Nanjing Massacre, also known as the Rape of Nanjing, involved mass murder and rape during a six-week period following the Japanese capture of the city of Nanjing on December 13, 1937. The drama showed that the Choi troop committed these war crimes. This description of the drama enhanced the historical impression.

¹⁰ Shiro Ishii was a Japanese microbiologist and the lieutenant general of Unit 731, a biological warfare unit of the Imperial Japanese Army that conducted human experimentation during World War II. The drama showed a special project code - *Maruta* (referred to euphemistically as “logs”) - that experimented on people.

nile delinquent who lives alone next door. As the drama develops, the juvenile girl, an orphan, becomes close with Jong-bun, and at the end they get to live together for a while. *Snony Road* seems to reveal the emotional similarities between the young girls at the comfort house and the so-called troublemakers of today; they are all little girls who are alone and scared. Moreover, the neighbor girl empathizes with and consoles Jong-bun. When Jong-bun told her that she was ashamed to be back home after her experience as a comfort woman, the girl replies that there was nothing for Jong-bun to be ashamed of—that nothing is her fault. Thus, *Snony Road* successfully problematizes the comfort women issue and suggests that it is only through empathy and solidarity that these women can truly heal. In this sense, while *Eyes of Dawn* adopted documentary realism, *Snony Road* promoted emotional realism (Ang, 1985).

News Coverage about the Dramas

The main point of news articles about *Eyes of Dawn* and *Snony Road* is to acknowledge, reflect on, and remember comfort women in South Korea. As one editorial writer pointed out, the comfort women issue had not been discussed actively before *Eyes of Dawn* (Cho, 1992), as though it took broadcasting *Eyes of Dawn* to attract public attention and stir up public opinion (Lee, 1992). One article stated:

The drama fully managed the comfort women issue that is a disgrace for our nation. Recently, the prime minister of Japan [...] visit[ed] South Korea. [Putting] the comfort women issue [...] in the spotlight again. [...] [T]hrough a comfort woman, Yeo-Ok Yoon, the drama reveals the miserable state of Korean comfort women[,] [...] provok[ing] public anger toward Japan (Yonhap News, 1992).

Twenty-three years has passed since the airing of *Eyes of Dawn*, and the chief director of KBS, Bo-hyun Moon, recognizes that the fundamental problem has not been solved—comfort women are still suffering while people are celebrating the 70th anniversary of independence (Lee, 2015). Now, news articles about *Snony Road* seem to discuss not only the fact that the comfort women issue should be recognized and the women should be

compensated by Japan but also discuss how we should remember the past and how we could make the present better. Journalist Choi (2015) believes that, whether or not Japan's attitude changes, we should remember the victims under Japanese colonial rule, just as we commemorate independence fighters. Another editorial points out that the drama urges us to remember rather than just be outraged about the comfort women history, as the production team maintained placidity in *Snomy Road*, even though the story could have been told with burning anger (Takbal, 2015).

News articles about *Snomy Road* focused on empathy and solidarity in the process of remembering. One article argued that, because most of the main roles and staff were women, the commonality of living as women could establish solidarity and offer a strong reason for empathy (Ko, 2015). Many viewers were moved by *Snomy Road*, posting to social network sites with comments like "I couldn't stop crying," "Before I thought of comfort women as something really far from me, but my heart aches because of the actress' emotional acting," and "There is something that should not be forgotten" (ChosunBiz, 2015). Similarly, another news article summarized what this drama emphasized:

Although *Snomy Road* is a drama about comfort women, it does not deal with it directly. Rather [it] [...] shows that [the women lost their] dream, life, and time. [...] By introducing the juvenile delinquent, Eun-su[,] [...] *Snomy Road* tried to connect those two minorities who were alienated from [...] society. Through this [...] the drama argues that the comfort women issue is not just a past history. Although comfort women are [...] old[er], their lives and the history of their pain should not be regarded as "old" (Mediaus, 2015).

Journalist Yoon (2015) also suggested that there seems to be no difference between the violence suffered by comfort women and by Eun-su, contending that humanism is the key trait this drama employs rather than plain patriotism.

The two dramas also influenced history education at some middle and high schools as students had—up to that point—not been taught about comfort women. One article reported:

Without *Eyes of Dawn*, the generation born after the Liberation would not know much about the 36-year colonial period. How can we inform them of cruel Japanese Imperialism? [...] A principal at a certain high school persuaded students to watch *Eyes of Dawn* thinking of it as a text that bears witness to the terrible sights of Japanese Imperialism. Some schools asked MBC for videos [...] to use as Korean [...] educational materials (Kim, H., 1992).

Similarly, the director of *Snowy Road*, Yong-hun Ham, expressed that a drama's responsibility is to ask the right question regarding a social problem, although it may not provide an answer (Jang, 2015). He argues that these kinds of drama should be continuously produced since repeated questioning leads to correct answers (Jang, 2015). Journalists also point out that recent movies that deal with the Japanese colonial period, including *Snowy Road*, have power not only to inform people about history but also to move people to act (i.e., to raise donations to build a shelter for comfort women and gather signatures for renegotiating the Dec. 28 agreement¹¹) (Kim, 2017).

One article stated that drama may help viewers grasp the reality of war crimes: It is better to borrow the description of literature [...] to know real facts of dehumanization during the war. [...] [O]fficial documents of countries that initiated a war could be fabricated and obliterated. Also, such documents could not record [...] individual[s] pain. (Cho, 1992).

Overall, newspapers reported that both dramas successfully raised the comfort women issue in South Korea when aired (Jung, 2015). Newspapers actively highlighted meanings or implications of each drama and suggested ways to interpret and understand the media texts at each historical period. This supplementary role of the media in shaping colonial memory was recognized as useful for viewers. Thus, news coverage of the dramas played

¹¹ In this agreement, Japan promised to pay \$8.3 million to an organization taking care of survivors. In return, the two countries deemed the sexual slavery issue resolved irreversibly and final (Hyun, 2016).

a role in contributing to the collective emotion of the public and in the formation of collective memory about the colonial period, while simultaneously illustrating how collective memories of the same subject may change over time.

Discussion

Watching TV dramas or reading news articles about comfort women stimulates the public's social imagination related to the matter. The memory of the colonial period is not fixed but reconstructed according to social consensus. Thus, collective memory about comfort women, as a particular social memory, can continuously transform based on the orientation of the memory emphasized in the public sphere. For example, *Eyes of Dawn* showed the traditional dichotomy of good and evil, representing Japanese as demons or wrongdoers, while Koreans were portrayed solely as victims. There may have been conscientious Japanese during the war, but the drama did not show such characters. Newspapers also never reported diverse aspects of the situation during the colonial period. Thus, the representation in *Eyes of Dawn* obscures other memories about colonial rule. By contrast, *Snowy Road* presents a more complicated relationship between Japanese and Koreans and illustrates more complex and diverse aspects of the comfort women era (i.e., how surviving comfort women suffered in contemporary Korea). Thus, we argue that, while *Eyes of Dawn* produced a patriotic-oriented framework in the production of collective memory on comfort women, *Snowy Road* projected a humanism-focused framework.

Because these dramas were produced in 1991 and in 2015, respectively, we examined how the differing socio-political milieu at each time contributed to the frameworks employed by each drama. Prior to 1991, the comfort women issue was not talked about publicly in South Korea, until the first survivor, Hak-sun Kim, spoke out about her experience and the *Eyes of Dawn* was first televised (Kim, S., 1992; Park, Lee, Hand, Anderson, & Schleitwiler, 2016). Until the 1990s, the cultural legacy of a patriarchal society prevailed in South Korea (Soh, 1996). Thus, the comfort women issue was taboo because women's chastity was important in society due to Confucian beliefs. However, the 1987 democratization and the first testimony about comfort women in 1991, may have contributed to the production of *Eyes of Dawn*. At that time, because most Koreans were ill-in-

formed about the subject, the producers and directors may have focused on more realistic descriptions of who comfort women were and how they suffered.

The success of *Eyes of Dawn* was important in shaping collective memory as well as in raising the issue. As Peri (1999, p. 107) pointed out, “For many people [TV] offers the main, if not the only, information they have about many historical events.” Thus, *Eyes of Dawn* played a crucial role in providing the public with depictions of many modern historical events. For example, the drama was the first to portray the Jeju Uprising in a TV drama,¹² allowing viewers to learn about sensitive modern Korean history during the colonial period, as well as about U.S. military rule, which was often not covered in official history education (Kim, H., 1992).

Even still the mediated memory of comfort women in *Eyes of Dawn* lacked the viewpoint of comfort women themselves, as it was presented in a more patriarchal perspective. Thanks to the Korean women’s movement and many former comfort women’s testimonies, the perspectives or identities of comfort women has shifted from “victims to transnational activists, and from hidden ghosts to historical subjects” (Lee, 2014). For example, beginning in 1992, there have been regular demonstrations in front of the Japanese embassy in Seoul seeking formal and individual apologies and compensation from the Japanese government (Edozien, 2012). Whenever problems related to Japan arise, including the comfort women issue, history textbook controversies,¹³ and the Dokdo¹⁴ issue, these demonstrations (called the Wednesday demonstrations) have attracted considerable attention.

These elements of the socio-cultural milieu enabled *Snomy Road* to highlight the solidarity among women, rather than focusing on the difficulties and violence women suffered. The director and writer of *Snomy Road* also

¹² The “Jeju Uprising” was a revolt on Jeju Island in South Korea. Between 14,000 and 60,000 individuals were killed. Previously assumed to be a communist uprising, there was little interest in discussing its history. However, this drama revealed that the uprising was due to residents’ resistance against the government.

¹³ Japanese history textbook controversies refer to controversial content in government-approved history textbooks used in secondary education of Japan. Asian countries, including China, South Korea, North Korea, and Taiwan, have protested the attempt to justify aggressive acts during Japanese imperialism.

¹⁴ Dokdo is a group of small islets in the East Sea, over which South Korea has territorial sovereignty. However, South Korea and Japan have both claimed the islets as part of their respective countries.

pointed out that the comfort women should not be portrayed simply as victims, but rather as survivors, focusing on their everyday lives instead of the sexual violence they endured (Lee, 2016). Moreover, we argue that since the writer and director of *Snony Road* were both female, their gender sensitivity was more apparent in the production process. For instance, in terms of visualization, they realized how male and female staff interpret the level of sexual scenes differently—discussing the military man unbuckling the belt scene, female staff found it uncomfortable to watch, but male staff felt it was too mild to represent rape (Yoo, 2017). *Snony Road* tried hard not to exploit comfort women as the material of the drama and took caution to avoid repeating any kind of violence to comfort women throughout their drama (Lee, 2016). Because of these differences in socio-political milieu and the purposes of producers, *Snony Road* represented comfort women through relational and humanist perspectives.

At the end of 2015, the 70th anniversary of South Korea's independence from Japanese colonial rule, the governments of Korea and Japan signed the Dec. 28 agreement. This raised public indignation, and many civic groups refused to endorse it (Kennedy, 2016). One of the former comfort women Yong-soo Lee decried the agreement, stating, "We are not craving money. What we demand is that Japan make official reparations for the crime it had committed" (Choe, 2015). Despite democratization and women's movements, we cannot say that today's Korean society has resolved the comfort women issue. The Japanese government still refuses to issue a sincere formal apology.

A nation's memory is a reconstruction of the past (Halbwachs, 1992), yet there are still many buried memories relating to South Korea's past. Here, we see some possibilities to recover those memories through media, particularly TV dramas, which help the public construct a collective memory about minorities or the less-privileged, such as the comfort women. By analyzing two different media representations of comfort women in *Eyes of Dawn* and *Snony Road*, we argue that the unique socio-political milieu of the 1990s and the present in South Korea contributed to the portrayals of comfort women in each drama, and, simultaneously, these dramas have reproduced the collective memory of comfort women in their respective airing periods. Moreover, in terms of the initial formation of collective memory of the comfort women issue in South Korea, the role of *Eyes of Dawn* was essential, though criticized for somewhat stereotyped representations.

However, this study does not examine the role of each drama as an independent variable, as the connection between each drama and the formation of collective memory is beyond the scope of this study. Future research should explore how audiences have perceived or understood comfort women.

In 2016 and 2017, eight former comfort women passed away; now only 38 survivors remain. For that reason, there is an urgent need to follow the directive of *Snowy Road* to remember, reflect upon, and to sympathize with the comfort women issue in a broader perspective of humanism. Furthermore, in regards to future studies—because different collective memories can coexist depending on diverse factors, such as media use and education—researchers should use qualitative methods, such as focus group interviews, to examine how the public perceives the representations of comfort women by the media.

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