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'Comfort Women' Comics, Multi-faceted

Revisiting the 2014 Manhwa Exhibit in Angoulême from the Perspective of Manga Studies

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Introduction

The International Comics Festival in Angoulême, held annually around the end of January, is the biggest of its kind in Europe, and it plays an important role also for Asian actors. While Japanese artists have been receiving festival awards since the late 1990s and Japanese publishers have been attending the festival as well, the Korean government began official participation in 2003.[1] In view of the recent international tensions in East Asia, it is not surprising that such festivals, too, may become the site of political contention. Precisely this happened in early 2014. At the time, the 41st festival commemorated the centennial of World War I, and in relation to the subtheme of war-induced violence against women, the French organizers had accepted the proposal of a state-sponsored Korean exhibition featuring specially commissioned comics[2] (Kor. *manhwa*) on

[1] Followed by Hong Kong in 2011 and Taiwan in 2012.

[2] I refrain from using the word *comic book/s* due to its connotation of a specific, American publication format. In line with recent comics studies custom, the word *comics* signifies both the singular and the plural.

‘comfort women,’ that is, “women forced into sexual slavery between 1932–45 to provide sex for Japanese soldiers” (Kingston 2014, 43) (fig. 1).[3]

When this leaked out in August 2013, a Japanese revisionist named Fujii Mitsuhiko took action; specifically, he launched the ROMPA project and booked a booth within the Little Asia hall of the festival where he intended to disseminate his counter-narrative, a self-produced 83-page comics (Jp. *manga*) titled *The J facts* (fig. 2). The protagonist is the author himself. He teaches some high school girls what they do not get to learn at school allegedly, for example, that the word ‘comfort women’ (Jp. *jūgun ianfu*) was coined long after the war, and that there were not as many women forced into military prostitution as often claimed. Compared to the most famous revisionist manga artist, Kobayashi Yoshinori, who made similar claims in vol. 3 of his *New Arrogantist Manifesto* (*Shin gōmanizumu sengen*, 1997), *The J facts* assume a more ‘educational’ (*gakushū*) mode of manga, not necessarily because of the abundant amount of words, but the clearly gendered set-up of the male protagonist teaching girls, the redundant way in which words and images interact, and the rather gawky character design.

One day before the festival’s opening, the organizers revoked their permission for the ROMPA booth on the grounds that it was not meant to promote comics but political propaganda as indicated, among other things, by the appearance of swastika symbols. Concurrently, although not in direct connection, Japan’s ambassador to France, Suzuki Yōichi, gave a press conference, where he voiced his concern about a private comics festival turning into a site of international politics. During the festival itself, Japanese embassy staff distributed a flyer (A4 size, duplex print) that provided an explanation about the history of Japanese reparations paid to the Republic of Korea since the Normalization Treaty of 1965 and endeavors related to the ‘comfort women’ issue made since the early 1990s. The content of the Korean exhibition provoked such action, in particular, many works’ subject matter and use of words ranging from titles such as *Japan Playing Innocent* (Lee Hyun-se) and *Make an Earnest Apology* (Cha Sung-jin) to written paragraphs that set the ideo-logical message of a longer narrative straight, as for example at the very end of the 13-page short story *70 Years of Nightmare* by Choi Shin-oh (fig. 3).

[3] Editors’ note: Please refer to the appendix on pages 161–169.

The festival organizers justified the exhibition in the name of 'engaged,' but still 'pure art,' revealing a kind of Eurocentric ignorance toward the actual weight of the past and its close connection to present international tensions.[4] Clearly, both the French organizers and the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs defied one kind of politics while serving another. This alone would merit discussion, as would the diverging stance toward the relation between politics and art. Indeed, the lack of acceptance for political commentary through art is characteristic of Japanese public institutions in recent years. With respect to comics, this stance manifested itself a few months prior to the Angoulême festival, when Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga Yoshihide made two caricatures in the French satirical magazine *Le Canard Enchainé* a state affair with his official complaint.[5] The same stance can also be assumed to have affected the cancellation of an official Japanese participation in the 2014 Angoulême festival. The initial plan was that Japan's Agency for Cultural Affairs would organize an exhibition dedicated to Yokoyama Yūichi (b. 1967) and his then-latest work *World Map Room* (*Sekai chizu no ma*, East Press 2013, 176 pages).[6] Since the early 2000s, Yokoyama had made his mark as a creator of book-length comics that evade the basic characteristics of 'manga proper' such as empathetic characters and easy to follow story arcs. Available also outside of Japan, his works go well with French comics aficionados although not necessarily manga fans. If they relate to politics at all, then it is to the (fan-)cultural micro-politics of what constitutes a typical manga and in terms of representation perhaps also to the insinuation of Mussolini's World Map Room (Sala del Mappamonde) at the Palazzo Venezia in Rome, which has not attracted the attention of comics critics so far.

The manhwa exhibition in Angoulême has been discussed mostly with regard to nations—Korea, Japan, and France—or nationalized actors (cf. Murata et al., 2014; Kingston 2014; Lim 2014; Lee 2014; Seiron editorial

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[4] See French quotations and Japanese translation in Murata et al., 2014, 71 and 75.

[5] Published on September 11, 2013, the caricatures related the decision of the IOC to hold the Olympic Summer Games of 2020 in Tokyo to the radioactive contamination caused by the 2011 Fukushima Daiichi Disaster.

[6] Curator Kanazawa Kodama realized it later at an art venue outside of Angoulême under the title *Yūichi Yokoyama: Wandering through maps/une exposition a travers les cartes* ((Pavillon Blanc, Centre d'Art de Colomiers, France; September–December 2014).

2014). However, the French festival organizers did not act on behalf of the French government; the revisionist ROMPA group did not represent the Japanese government; and the initiative by the Korean Ministry of Gender Equality and Family appeared rather exceptional in comparison to Korea's previous, more economically motivated festival participation (and was partially linked to the career agenda of then minister Ms. Cho Yoon-sun). One way to complicate the discursive juxtaposition of allegedly homogenous national actors would be to differentiate between the two levels: nation-states and their foreign policy on the one hand, and human rights, in this case women's, on the other hand. But with respect to the manhwa exhibition of 2014, attention to medium specificity is also required, pertaining to the exhibition medium, which facilitates certain readings and by that a preference for certain ideological messages, and to the comics medium, which affects signification not only semiotically (by entwining words and images, and employing speech balloons, among other things), but also culturally, that is, through conventions, expectations, and contexts of use. Especially with regard to Japanese comics, it is vital to consider that publication sites and genre-specific markers position the individual texts in a way which prompts readers to acknowledge some as 'manga proper' and others not (cf. Berndt 2016). Against this backdrop, it appears as a blatant generalization to assume "the impossibility of adequately conveying the experiences women faced in a medium designed for popular consumption that blends pictures and text" (Ropers 2011, 253). As the discussion of Art Spiegelman's Holocaust narrative *Maus* (1980–1991) has evinced, the question is no longer whether comics as such can represent a contested historical issue correctly or not; rather, the attention has shifted to the specific kinds of historical narrative in comics and their undermining of ideological essentialism (cf. Berndt 2015). Noteworthy enough, assuming to know how the 'comfort women' issue is to be correctly represented goes hand and hand with denying comics the potential to be more than a mere container for predetermined content. In contradistinction, this article pursues which sorts of comics relate the contested historical issue at what kind of site and thereby to which target group.

The first section analyzes the state-funded Korean exhibition whose content has been reconstructed with the help of photographs, printed materials, and oral reports.[7] The second section provides a brief overview of how the 'comfort women' issue has surfaced in Japanese manga since the 1990s when it first went public in Korea and abroad. Due to not only political reasons (as in the case of decidedly revisionist voices) but also manga-specific ones (as in the case of highly gendered 'female' productions), a Japanese equivalent to the Korean exhibition is implausible. Therefore, I refrain from bringing exhi-bition studies into play, that is, considering the display's materiality. Instead, I focus on the comics themselves as well as their cultural position, confining *culture* not to the national frame, but considering different forms within the nation, including the subcultural comics com-munity as well as the cultural industry.

1 The Korean exhibition

Organized by the Korean Ministry of Gender Equality and Family in cooperation with the Korean Association of Manhwa Creators and the Korea Manhwa Contents Agency (KOMACON), the manhwa exhibition in Angoulême presented works by the following 19 Korean artists or artist teams under the title *Flowers that Don't Wilt: I'm the Evidence*.[8]

(1) Ahn Soo-cheol (installations *Automata*, and script for the water-colored graphic narrative *Train of Violence* illustrated by Kang Hyo-Sook)
(2) Cha Sung-jin (cartoons *When the day comes*, *Make an Earnest Apology*)
(3) Choi In-sun (sequence of color illustrations titled *Where are we headed?*)
(4) Choi Shin-oh (b.1978; colored graphic narrative *70 Years of Nightmare*, 13 pages)
(5) Gendry-Kim, Geum-suk (monochrome graphic narrative *The Secret*, ink-brushed)

[7] I would like to thank especially Dr. Yoo Sookyung (International Manga Research Center, Kyoto), Itō Yū (id.), and Prof. Dr. Yamanaka Chie (Jin'ai University, Fukui) for sharing their materials and thoughts.

[8] Some of these artists have worked in France or seen their works published there (for example, Numbers 6, 9, and 15), which may also have motivated their inclusion.

(6) Kim Gwang-seong (art) and (7.) Jeong Gi-young (script) (colored graphic narrative *Butterfly Song*, 97 pages, Chinese ink on traditional mulberry paper)
(8) Kim Hyung-bae (untitled cartoon)
(9) Kim Jungi-gi (b. 1975; monochrome performance drawing *Entangled Knot*)
(10) Kim Shin (untitled cartoon)
(11) Ko Kyung-il (untitled cartoons)
(12) Lee Hyun-se (b. 1956; cartoons *The Japanese saber disdained*, *Japan Playing Innocent*)
(13) Oh Se-yeong (b.1986; monochrome graphic narrative *The Spring of a 14-year-old Girl*, penned)
(14) Park Jae-dong (220 x 20cm color painting *The Road that Doesn't End*)
(15) Park Kun-woong (b. 1972; 6-page monochrome graphic narrative *Tattoo*, paper cut oder woodblock-like style)
(16) Park Sung-min (b. 1981; cartoon *Corpse*)
(17) Shin Jisue (sequence of 24 framed illustrations titled *83*)
(18) Shin Myeong-hwan (installation with digital video *Flowers that Don't Wilt*)
(19) Tak Young-ho (b.1982; colored graphic narrative *The Ring*)

Senior cartoonist Lee Hyun-se and animator Shin Myeong-hwan, both also exhibiting artists, served as a general supervisor and acting curator, respectively. The exhibition was held not at the festival's Orientalizing Little Asia space, but the *Théâtre d'Angoulême*, precisely its cellar-vault, and spread out over 60m², divided into three parts—past, present, and future—leading to a wall-length message board on which visitors could post messages written on ivy-leaf shaped slips of paper. An estimated number of 15,000 people came to see the show during the four days of the festival. Shortly thereafter, it was held again at the Korean Manhwa Museum in Bucheon.

As an exhibition's discourse works not only through verbalized or verbalizable representation but also through the selection and arrangement of the works themselves, the question arises as to what notion of manhwa (comics) these works represent. The Korean organizers applied a broad notion—one that can also be found in Japan—namely, manhwa as stretching from single-image cartoons[9] (sometimes not drawn but painted; cf. No. 14) to picture-book illustrations and sequential art that approached typical comics through panel layouts and combinations of the visual with the verbal by means of speech balloons, sound words, speed or impact lines, 'sweat drops,' and the like (Numbers 4, 5, 6/7, 13, 15, and 19). Yet, despite the variety of formats (which further included two short animated films), the exhibits shared a number of striking representational similarities, which worked to the effect that the 'comfort women' discourse within contemporary Korea appeared unanimous and homogenized. First of all, the majority of them emphasized 'Koreanness' by means of easily recognizable ethnic motifs related to the young women's hairstyle and clothing (*hanbok/chimachogori*, for example). Secondly, the exhibits featured only Korean 'comfort women,' passing over the fact that Chinese, Southeast Asian, and even Japanese girls, too, had been made to serve Japanese soldiers during the Pacific War and also that Korean soldiers used Vietnamese women sexually during the Vietnam War when fighting alongside the U.S. army. These characteristics suggest a general inclination toward ethno-nationalism rather than human rights and especially women's, which by their nature are fundamentally transnational. As a whole, the exhibition makes the featured women, whether actual or fictive, represent the victimized nation, or as John Lie (2016, 135) puts in another context, "our women hav[ing] been smitten." That is not to ignore that some narratives—such as *The Secret* (No. 5), and *The Ring* (No.19)—are also critical of postwar Korean society, pointing to the hard conditions for those women who survived and returned home, but kept their hardships a secret, even against their family. *Butterfly Song* (No. 6; fig. 4), for example, features a grandmother and her eventual coming-out, triggered by the Wednesday rallies in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul; while this displeases her children's generation, her decision resonates with the granddaughter.

The exhibition's 'feminization' of the nation, which leans heavily on patriarchal presuppositions, coincides also with the fact that only five out of the 19 participating artists were women (namely, Numbers 2, 3, 5, 13, and 17 in the above list). Further indicative of the emphasis on the nation

[9] As distinct from the English-language habit, in East Asian comics cultures the word *cartoon* has been predominantly used for still images such as caricatures, and as such been distinguished from multi-page graphic narratives.

rather then ‘woman’ is the ignorance of *soonjeong manhwa*, the globally renowned female genre of Korean comics (cf. Noh 2004; Yoo 2012; Choo 2010). This ignorance is in line with another salient characteristic of the exhibition, that is, its strong inclination toward historical realism, which manifests itself in the pointed linkage between past and present, taking the form of flashback sequences in graphic narratives such as *Butterfly Song* or *The Ring*, and the deployment of authenticating devices such as the frequently cited monument in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul.[10] Manhwa by and for women have not necessarily been engaged much in historical or social realism since the end of the military regime.[11] In any case, the Korean exhibition in Angoulême distanced itself from manhwa styles reminiscent of industrially established (and as such gendered) genres. Preference was rather given to what might be called ‘art-college comics’ in consideration of the fact that the so-called manhwa programs at Korean art colleges tend to employ fine-art painters as professors instead of industry-experienced graphic storytellers like in Japan. But the problematic of ‘art comics’ (as the alleged opposite of ‘genre comics’) does not necessarily apply to ‘painted cartoons,’ as their inclusion can be explained with the necessity of aesthetic or sensory variation in display. After all, exhibitions do not consist of pure ideological content, and narrative comics—resting on still, and in East Asia traditionally monochrome, images arranged as panels on printed pages—are not easily translated into the gallery space, which privileges watching instead of reading. Originals compensate for this, even if accompanied by French translations as in the Angoulême exhibition. In this regard it is interesting to note that the *Butterfly Song* was initially created on traditional Mulberry paper, but lost this material property when printed on glossy paper later.[12]

More remarkable than ‘artsy’ formats is the matter of style though. On closer inspection, those multi-page exhibits, which appear especially

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[10] “… a South Korean nongovernment organization commissioned a statue of an Asian girl barefoot in traditional dress, sitting next to an empty chair her gaze fixed eerily in silent rebuke across the street on the Japanese Embassy in Seoul. The bronze statue was unveiled in December 2011 to mark the 1,000th weekly protest by a dwindling number of comfort women … .” (Kingston 2014, 52–53).

[11] As distinct from the 1980s, cf. Lee 2015.

[12] In *Nabiui norae* (Butterfly Song), one of the three volumes published in August 2014 by Seoul publisher Hyongsol Life, which contained an extended version of the exhibition. The other two were titled *Dorajikkot* (Balloon Flowers) and *Sison* (Viewpoint).

comics-like due to their employment of panel layouts, speech balloons, and sometimes also visual modifiers show either a rather dated style—such as *70 Years of Nightmare*, which is reminiscent of 1970s children's comics, or picture books influenced by comics (fig. 5)—or a line work, which sets them clearly apart from industrial productions insofar as it is brushed not penned and even applied to the frames of panels and balloons (fig. 6) as well as dialogue within balloons (fig. 7). Also, hand lettering is rather exceptional in East Asian comics, not only because it impairs the transparency and shareability of entertaining graphic narratives, but also because of the script; for example, the Chinese characters used in Japanese do not rarely have many graphical components and hence are more clearly reproduced in print. Especially when combined with highly affective mangaesque modifiers, such as the vertical facial strokes that signify blush (fig. 7), hand lettering and hand drawing tend to come across as foreign, at least in the eyes of regular readers. Suggesting the existence of an individual, who was, or is, really there, the drawing hand authorizes and authenticates the political testimony, and it facilitates the dissociation of the exhibition from commercially successful manhwa, something it cannot avoid being compared to as long as it claims to represent 'manhwa.' As distinct from the exhibition's agenda, manhwa based in the cultural industry are characterized by a strong inclination toward the transnational; historically they have been shaped by close ties to Japanese manga in the first place. This has presented Korean comics critics with a significant challenge, as the balancing act between a nationally defined cultural particularism and the medium's specificity was to be managed.[13] The most popular manhwa at the time of the Angoulême exhibition was *Misaeng* (Jp. *Misen*) by Yoon Taeho (Naver 2012–2013), belonging to the specifically Korean genre of *webtoons*, or online comics (cf. Park 2013), which the exhibition did not consider either. Telling the story of a *shōgi*[14] player-turned-salaryman, the Japanese translation of this graphic narrative has seen five volumes so far, and the Korean TV drama adaptation (2014) was not only aired but also remade in Japan (by Fuji TV in 2016). A popular female webtoon series, available also in English, is *Cheese in the Trap* by Soonkki (Naver, since 2010).[15]

[13] See Yamanaka (2006 and 2013) for detailed discourse analysis.

[14] A chess-like Japanese board-game.

[15] The first printed book volume (out of 15 by now) was published in 2012, the TV series aired in 2016.

The fact that the 2014 exhibition kept its distance toward generic manhwa in the above sense suggests a traditional orientation to 'art' (as opposite to entertainment, consumption, industry) and as such to a target group which does not primarily consist of younger manhwa/manga fans. This was eventually the case in Angoulême. The mainly middle-aged French visitors, generally interested in graphic novels and historical issues, did not comment on the relationship between Korea and Japan in their ivy-leaf messages (cf. Murata et al., 2014). Against this backdrop, one may assume that the nationalist overtone of the exhibition was ultimately directed to the domestic Korean discourse than European audiences.

2 'Comfort Women' in Japanese Manga

Needless to say, Korea and Japan stand in stark contrast not only with respect to the political 'comfort women' issue, but also its treatment in comics. To begin with, a similar exhibition organized by a Japanese state institution would be unthinkable, no matter whether consisting of newly commissioned works or already published manga. But this does not mean that 'comfort women' do not appear in manga besides the non-fictional revisionist accounts, which have come to stand out due to the attention paid to them by historians (rather than manga critics). In addition to the already mentioned Kobayashi Yoshinori, the infamous *Manga Kenkan-ryū–Hating the Korean Wave* by Yamano Sharin (2005-2009)[16] is representative of this group. Likewise non-fictional, but targeted at elementary school children are educational history-via-manga editions, such as the multi-volume *Japanese History for Boys and Girls*. Volume 20 addressing the War in Asia and the Pacific touches on the issue briefly with the explanation, "Young women were collected in order to take care of the soldiers everywhere from the Japanese mainland, China and Korea to Southeast Asia." The accompanying visuals and dialogue imply that young Korean women volunteered out of economic necessity (Kodama & Aomura 1998, 112). In comparison, *Comfort Women* by veteran artist Mizuki Shigeru (1922-2015) distinguishes itself from the above examples in two regards: by the candid stance of an actual witness—Mizuki recalls

[16] Cf. Raddatz 2013 for a historian's account of that manga, Lie 2016 for a discussion of the *Korean Wave*.

himself and other soldiers queuing in front of a 'comfort station' for hours and an almost ghost-like women sneaking out of it to pee—and by its first appearance not in a book, but a magazine alongside with installments of serialized manga entertainment, i.e., in the May 1999 issue of *Big Comic*. This publication site positions the 8-page comics essay as 'manga proper,' regardless of style.

Fictional accounts are mainly short stories created by (and often also for) women. Japanese-Studies scholars have especially noted two short stories from the 1990s authored by Ishizaka Kei (b. 1956), a female artist, who had received her training with Tezuka Productions before starting to publish her own graphic narratives in 1979, properly in manga magazines, although not magazines targeted at female readers. In "Attack Champion" (1991, 22 pages), whose title refers to the term for condoms common among Japanese soldiers (*totsugeki ichiban*), she features a young Japanese woman, who—as a member of the war-time Female Volunteer Corps (*joshi teishintai*)—manages the sexual 'service' for the soldiers of the imperial army in China, and a 16-year old Korean girl, who is forced into it. Toward the end of the narrative, when everyone is about to escape the approaching Chinese army, the girl reveals her gonorrhea infection with the words, "No Chinese soldier would want to rape this body… " (Ishizaki 1991, 94), before she dies.

In "To Kill that Memory One Day" (1996, 29 pages), alsobei Ishizaka, a Japanese student of the East-Asian history of thought meets an old Korean lady who was about to commit suicide in front of the Japanese Embassy. As it turns out during their dinner, she had been forced into military prostitution as a young girl. Through a flashback sequence, we learn about her encounter with a Japanese kamikaze pilot who, on the last evening of his life, urges her to live on (fig. 8). Thus, the manga narrative (which harks back to an actual testimony) seems to imply a fraternization with the enemy, a downplaying of the woman's hardship and a partial rehabilitation of the Japanese army, at least for readers, who are unfamiliar with manga's gendered genres. Historian Ropers finds Ishizaka "clouding the [original] story's overall message, in effect leaving the reader with potentially far more ambivalent conclusions as to the treatment women suffered at the hands of the Japanese military than in the original work" (Ropers 2011, 254). From the perspective of manga studies, it becomes vital to determine the very kind of reader. In consideration of the fact that Ishizaka's short story was created for a major manga magazine targeted at male youths (*seinen*), namely, *Weekly Young Jump*, it stands to reason that she introduced the pilot character to provide the male core readership of the magazine with an access path to the woman's emotions, something already prefigured in the manga's beginning, when the Japanese student serves as focalizer.

From today's perspective, it is surprising that twenty years ago, such political narratives appeared in. Probably due to the topicality of the subject—suffice to mention the Chief Cabinet Secretary Kōno Yōhei's statement in August 1993—this phenomenon is indicative of how much the political climate in Japan has changed since then. Remarkably, Ishizaka's work is not well-liked neither by Japanese revisionists, as indicated by Kobayashi Yoshinori, who objected to her short manga "The Peaceable" (*An'onzoku*, 1983),[17] nor by historians like Erik Ropers, who asserts with respect to the second example introduced above that "Ishizaka's narrative shocks readers' sensibilities with its depictions of sexual violence while also sentimentally appealing to their emotions." (Ropers 2011, 259). "Sentimentally appealing to emotions"—or more precisely, affects—seems to be unwelcome in the academic field of modern history, but it is a common characteristic of manga on 'comfort women,' especially those created in a much more female mode then Ishizaka's, which correspond to seinen manga with their unadorned page compositions, clear temporal structure, and subdued sex scene. In so-called *Ladies Comics*, manga targeted specifically at mature women, sex-related visual spectacle is the norm rather than the exception, as, for example, the short story "Footprints of Rancor" (2013, 39 pages) by Ichikawa Miu evinces. Here, too, a young Korean women, forced into military prostitution, developes a romantic relationship with a Japanese soldier (fig. 9), but while he prepares her escape, she is beheaded by his jealous superior, after which she returns night by night as a ghost to haunt the culprit.

A similar romantic encounter forms the core of Yasutake Wataru's short manga "Soldier Wife" (2013, 32 pages), but with the difference that the protagonist is a young Japanese woman. Urgend by her fatherless and impoverished middle-class family, she enrolls as a 'special nurse' and

[17] For the respective source and image see Berndt 2015, 91.

departs for Southeast Asia, only to realize upon arrival that she is supposed to pay off the debts related to her brother's tuberculosis by working as a military prostitute, a so-called 'soldier wife' (fig. 10). While receiving special treatment in the beginning due to her racial status, after a conflict with a high ranking officer, she is being sent to the front, where she experiences the same hardships as 'comfort women' from other Asian countries. But visually, she appears as a blond, white-skinned, and round-eyed beauty, lacking any phenotypical identifiers as Japanese. Notoriously, such character design harks back to shōjo (girls) manga conventions, and it is usually regarded as either providing a 'post-racial' projection screen or attesting to Japanese Occidentalism. In Yasutake Wataru's manga, it is clearly employed to single out the heroine, on the one hand against 'bad' Japanese (such as the brother operator), and on the other hand against women of other ethnic decent.[18] The potential of generically female manga to alternate the main character's hair color according to affective state and thereby suggest a fluid kind of identity is not unfolded here. Blondness stands in for purity and desirability, which get rewarded in the end, when the heroine is reunited with the soldier, who helped her right after her arrival (fig. 10), and experiences a happy ending, now truly as a soldier's wife.

Abstaining from media-specific contexts, it is easy to dismiss such manga narratives in the name of downplaying or even pornographizing the historical hardship of 'comfort women.' However, it should not be overlooked that in the above examples the representation of blondness and the depiction of sexuality are meant for a female, not male, gaze. Furthermore, the additional page of explanatory text added to each short manga story at the end deserves attention. This is charactertistic of magazines by publisher Bunkasha, which is not necessarily specialized on female manga genres, but runs the monthly *Scary Fairytales*, where stylistic traditions of the Ladies Comic genre are applied to adaptations of a culturally broad range of literature and legends. The two examples introduced here appeared in the special issue *Japan's War History: Comfort Women, Workers, Prostitutes – Cruelly Treated Women*, October 2013 (fig. 11).

[18] Cf. Antononka 2016 for a discussion of this multifarious phenomenon.

Discussion

Ropers regards commercially published comics as being stinted, but fails to notice the particular potential of such productions, namely, the potential of unfolding the power of affect as a supra-individual, shareable feeling, which interconnects instead of establishing (critical) distance (Massumi 2011). In the generically female manga examples introduced in the latter part of section 2, this power interconnects women of different nationality as victims of structural and physical violence, and women of different historic eras, that is, past victims and present readers. It also interconnects women with men as likewise vulnerable human beings subjected to the violence of war. This potential, however, takes a female mode, a "sentimental appeal to emotions," which is unlikely to attract the interest of men, either revisionists or state officials. Apparently, it does not suit nationalism either. Thus, we are left with two opposite poles: fine art-cartoons and comics targeted at a 'universal' audience for the promotion of ethnic particularism on the one hand, and highly conventional commercial productions that appeal to a limited as gendered audience in an affective way on the other, and further a divide on the inter/national level on the one hand, and a male/female divide on the other. Finally, it is hope that this article demonstrated not only the potential of affect, but also the potential of manga/manhwa/comics studies as a way to exceed convenient binaries, including 'art' as a harbor of political critique and as such to be neatly separated from commercial, conventional, and affective media texts.

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Appendix

Fig. 1 Photo of the exhibition *Flowers that Don't Wilt: I'm the Evidence* (January 2014). Courtesy of Itō Yū.

Fig. 2 Fujii Mitsuhiko (script) & Ōkumo Yūzan (art). 2014. "The J Facts". *Will*, April, 330–331.

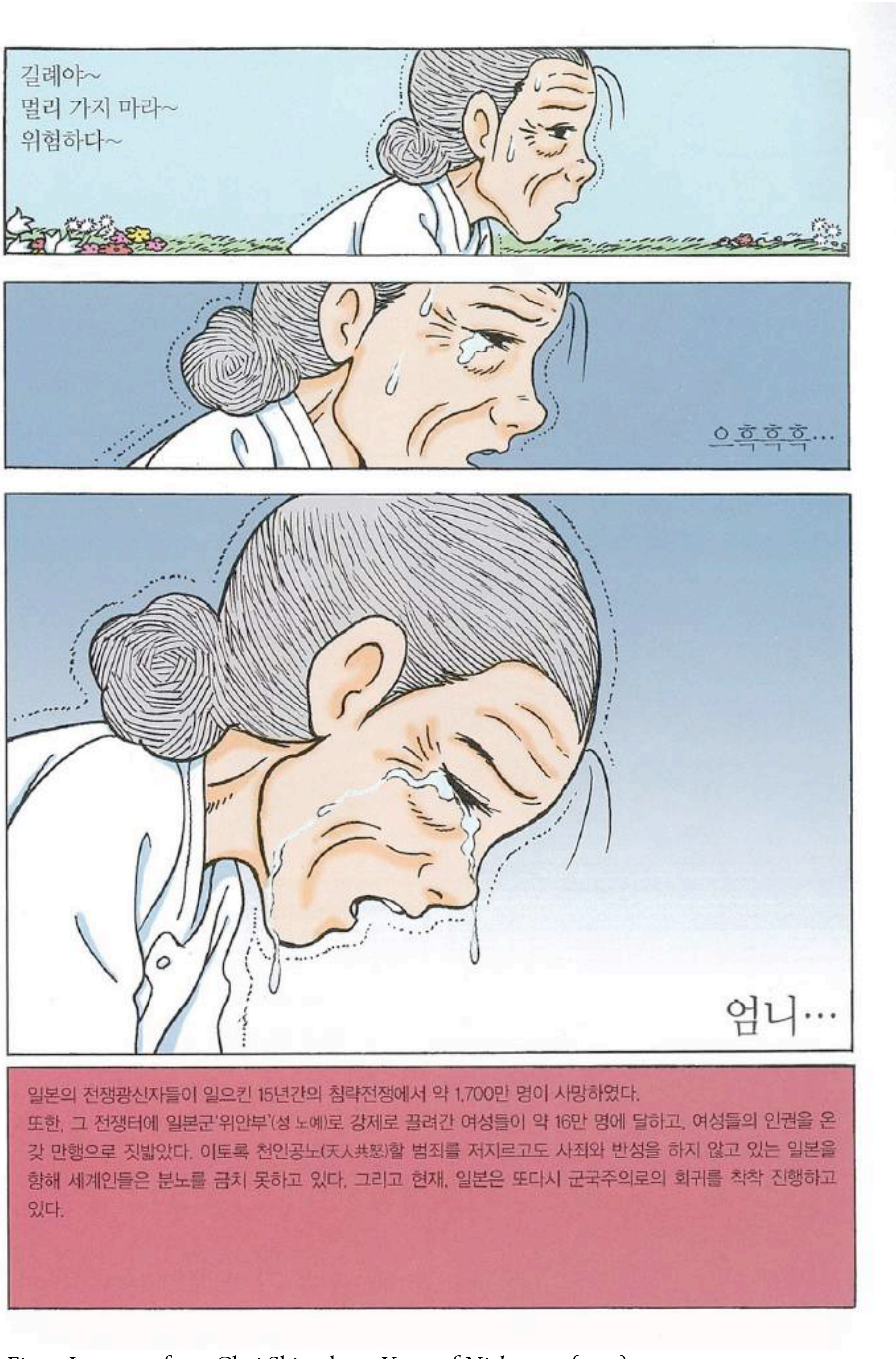

Fig. 3 Last page from Choi Shin-oh *70 Years of Nightmare* (2014).

Fig. 4 Page from Kim Gwang-seong (art) and Jeong Gi-young (script) *Butterfly Song* (2014).

Fig. 5 Page from Choi Shin-oh *70 Years of Nightmare* (2014).

Fig. 6 Page from Geum-suk Gendry-Kim *The Secret* (2014).

Fig. 7 Panel from Kim Gwang-seong (art) and Jeong Gi-young (script) *Butterfly Song* (2014).

Fig. 8 Double spread from Ishizaka Kei "To Kill that Memory One Day" (*Aru hi ano kioku o koroshi ni*, 1996).

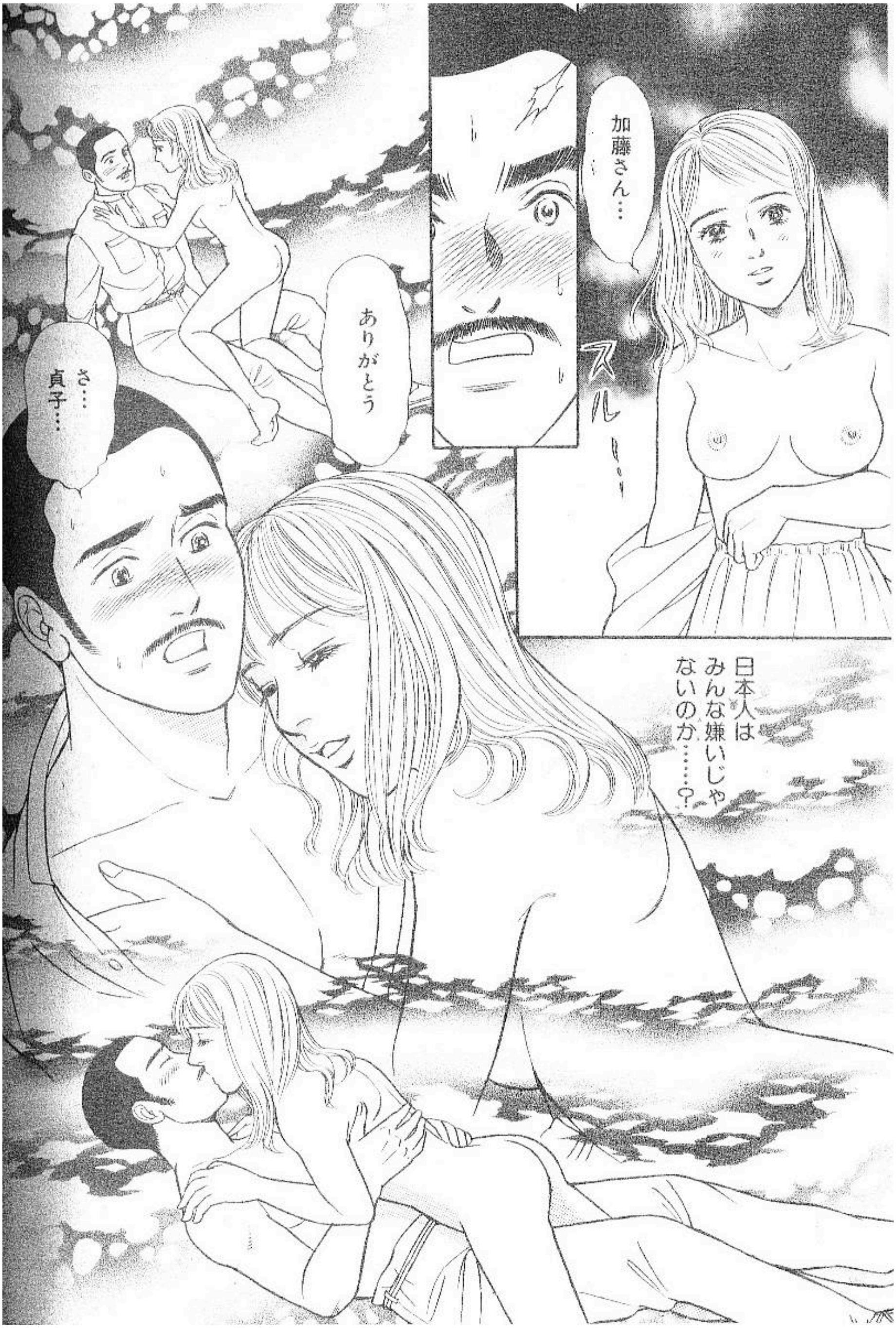

Fig. 9 Page from Ichikawa Miu "Footprints of Rancor" (*Urami no ashiato*, 2013).

Fig. 10 Page from Yasutake Wataru "Soldier Wife" (*Heitai nyōbō*, 2013).

Fig. 11 Cover of the monthly *Scary Fairytales* (Kowai dōwa), October 2013, special issue *Japan's War History: Comfort Women, Workers, Prostitutes – Cruelly Treated Women*.