The Asia Pacific Journal | Japan Focus Volume 22 | Issue 2 | Number 2 | Article ID 5824 | Feb. 20, 2024

Photographs of the US Military Base in Cold War Korea: through the Photographic Gaze Of Kuwabara Shisei

Ji Hye Han

Abstract: *This paper critically investigates the photographic representation of the US military presence in 1960s–80s Korea by Kuwabara Shisei (1936–), one of the most eminent Japanese photojournalists who has worked in Korea since 1964. The paper specifically discusses a collection of images of the United States Forces Korea (USFK) in his 1986 photobook Kankoku gen'ei (Korea 1964–86) which features the most comprehensive work he produced in Korea. Through close visual analysis and examination of the pictorial narrative that Kuwabara presents throughout the collection of USFK images in the photobook, the paper explores how Kuwabara's images tap into the different kinds of Cold War imaginaries from the existing visual iteration of the USFK in more widely circulating mass media, novels, and movies in Korea at the time. In addition, it underscores USFK images of Kuwabara as his staunch statement against the global presence of the US military. Kuwabara crafts his argument with the hindsight of a Japanese veteran photojournalist who had gained keen insight into the global American military base network through his experiences in Japan, Vietnam, and Cambodia during the 1960s and 1970s. Overall, through close analysis of Kuwabara's photographs, the paper sheds light on the value of looking at photographic representations of the US military for building an understanding of cultural implication of the US military presence in Cold War Korea.*

Keywords*: Kuwabara Shisei, Photography, USFK, Kankoku gen'ei, Cold War, Military bases*

Introduction

In July 1964, emerging Japanese photographer Kuwabara Shisei (1936–) got on a plane to Korea. Two years prior, Kuwabara had held his solo exhibition on Minamata disease at the reputable Fuji Photo Salon, Tokyo and in 1963 was awarded the *Nihon shashin hihyōka kyōkai shinjin shō* (Rookie Prize from the Japan Photo Critics Association), one of the most prestigious prizes for early-career photographers. Kuwabara's journey to becoming a successful documentary photographer, however, was not easy. From the beginning of his career, Kuwabara, who graduated from Tokyo Agricultural University in 1960, struggled to make "photographs of strong identity" to compete with colleagues whom he thought to have received a "more proper education" in the field of photography.[1] For example, one of the motivations that led him to the city of Minamata in Kumamoto prefecture in 1960, where he documented people suffering from Minamata disease, was this pressure to make strong photographs. In addition, Kuwabara recalls how he was strongly touched, motivated, and shocked by an article on Minamata disease that he read in the weekly magazine *Shūkan Asahi*.[2] These early works on Minamata disease helped Kuwabara make a name for himself.[3]

Meanwhile, Kuwabara was preparing to work in Korea for his second project. Pursuing work in Korea was, however, highly challenging at the time. To begin with, Korea did not yet have normal diplomatic relations with Japan, precluding many Japanese from entering the country. After the Japanese colonization of Korea (1905–1945) ended, the two countries did not normalize diplomatic relations until 1965, partially reflecting intense anti-Japanese sentiment in Korea. This inaccessibility to a certain extent

1 Kuwabara (2012). Kuwabara studied basic photography theory and techniques at the school *Tokyo Sōgō Shasen* for a year and a half.

2 Kuwabara is one of the first photographers to visualize the experiences of Minamata victims. This point is, for example, discussed in George (2001); Thomas (2014).

3 Kuwabara (2012). Kuwabara continuously worked on Minamata for over ten years.

explains why Korea was not an alluring subject for many Japanese photographers at the time. However, for Kuwabara, Korea seemed to have appeared quite attractive for a few reasons. First, as he writes in the epilogue of his photobook, *Kankoku gen'ei*, Kuwabara saw rich possibilities in Korea as a photographic subject. "Korea, with its rich culture and diverse history, seemed like a treasure trove of historical resources," he writes, for example. "It is no exaggeration to say that the blood, tears, and sweat that must have been shed by the nameless Koreans over many generations created Korea's rich vein of ore" (Kuwabara, 1986). Second, Kuwabara had a deep interest in Korea ever since his college years, largely owing to a Korean roommate who introduced him to Korean culture (Kuwabara, 2012).

After eight years of waiting and preparation, Kuwabara spent five months in Korea from July 1964 until December 1964 under the sponsorship of *Taiyo* (a Japanese literary and general interest magazine) and *Arirang* (a Korean entertainment magazine). He visited again in March 1965 to cover the college student-led protests against the upcoming talks between Japan and Korea on the diplomatic normalization issue as well as the inaugural ceremony of Korea's troop dispatch to Vietnam in September 1965.[4] Although Kuwabara stayed for a short time and worked in a highly compromising milieu, which was marked by the dictatorship of Park Chung-hee (1961–1979) and strong anti-Japanese sentiment, he produced a rich body of photographs on current events in Korea.

One photobook that features the most comprehensive corpus of works that Kuwabara produced in Korea is Kankoku gen'ei (1986). In this photobook of belated nature—in the sense that it is a compilation of his works from the 1960s and 80s—the photographer presents different aspects of Korea in the process of transforming from a war-torn to a middle-income country. To be more specific, as implied by its title, *Kankoku gen'ei* is a collection of what Kuwabara considered to be the *gen'ei* or original/primordial/foundational scenes of Korea. This two kanji compound phrase, a neologism that is not officially registered in the Japanese dictionary, consists of 原, the character for "original,"; "primitive,"; "fundamental,"; "proto," and 影, the character for "shadow;" "reflection;" "image;" "trace." Together, *gen'ei* refers to primordial or foundational camera-based imagery. By using this neologism, Kuwabara highlights his photographs as some of the earliest images of Korea introduced to the Japanese audience. To a certain extent, this was true, since not many Japanese photographers at the time had access to Korea. At the same time, the photographer underscores his role as the creator of foundational images of Korea.

One of the *gen'ei* that Kuwabara presents in the photobook is of the USFK (United States Forces Korea), to which he devotes the entire third chapter. During the Cold War, Korea and Japan served as two major host countries of US military overseas bases and experienced the strong presence of the US military on their soil. The legacy of the US military in Korea can be traced back to Korea's liberation from Japanese colonization after World War II, when Korea, or more specifically, the southern half of the Korean peninsula, was ruled by the United States Army Military Government (USAMG) until August 15, 1948. The USFK (The US Armed Forces in Korea) completed its scheduled withdrawal on June 30, 1949. With the outbreak of the Korean War (1950–53), however, the US-led UN forces returned to Korea. Even after the armistice, the US continued to station its military through the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Korea. In this way, Korea served as a significant military strategic point for the US' security strategy in the Cold War. Kuwabara's perception of USFK as one of the *gen'ei* of Korea largely reflects this legacy and significance of the presence of the US military in Korea.

To understand the context in which Kuwabara produced USFK images and the implication of these photographs as visual materials that challenge existing cultural imaginaries and narratives of the

4 The diplomatic relationship between Korea and Japan was normalized on June 22, 1965.

presence of the US military in Cold War Korea, the following definition of Cold War by historian Masuda Hajimu is highly helpful: an imaginary war that was brought by the ordinary people (not just high-ranking policymakers) throughout the world who "strove to silence disagreements and restore social order in the chaotic post-WWII era under the mantle of an imagined reality of global confrontation" (Masuda, 2019: 124) According to Masuda, the Cold War originated in fiction, fantasy, and myth in that it "existed not because it was there but because people thought that it existed" (Masuda, 2015: 1–2). In short, the Cold War was a conflict of a constructed nature that became "reality as opposed to something that existed as an objective situation immediately following WWII" (Masuda, 2015: 2) This conflict came to be solidified and shared in the postwar era, which necessitated such an imagined reality. Even though the Cold War reached its peak between 1948–53, Cold War tensions continued to last until 1991 when the Soviet Union collapsed (McMahon, 2003). Masuda's definition of the Cold War, which highlights its ideological, imaginary, and constructed aspects, is highly relevant for discussing Kuwabara's USFK photographs. This is not to say that his images were used as propaganda. Rather, as it shall be seen, through a collection of USFK images in the photobook, a medium of narrative potential, Kuwabara seeks to stimulate viewers' imaginations and present differing narratives and imaginaries on the global presence of the US military, one of the central elements of the Cold War.

Complicating the Major Representations of the US Military in Korea

The third chapter of *Kankoku gen'ei*, entitled "Far East Strategy, USFK," features ten black and white photos. Out of ten, two solely depict American GIs; two focus on Korean women; and six feature various interactions between American GIs and the Korean women catering to them. The chapter opens with a paragraph in which Kuwabara fills in the intended audience, mainly Japanese viewers, with the historical background of USFK and essential information

Figure 1: Left: Kuwabara Shisei, Untitled, from Kankoku gen'ei, *21 x 30 cm, 1964; Right: the first page of the third chapter of Kankoku gen'ei, 1964.*

about it, such as its major locations, sizes, and even the rationale behind the presence of the USFK. His description underscores Korea as one significant military strategic point, along with the Philippines and Japan, in the US' security strategy during the Cold War.

This paragraph is visually accompanied by the first two photographs of the chapter (figure 1). In the first photo, American GIs are photographed as they test fire a machine gun near the DMZ (demilitarized zone). The solemn facial expression of the GIs shows their serious attitude toward the training. The lack of individuality of the GIs, who are all in their uniforms and whose helmets cast deep shadows on their upper half faces, heightens the sense of group solidarity. Overall, the scene presents GIs as one loyal group diligently fulfilling their duty to protect Korea.

Figure 2 is an image of an American GI, which highlights the US military capability and its duty to protect Korea, resonates with the legacy of images depicting American soldiers in Korea. Since the period of the United States Army Military Government in Korea (1945–1948), the US and Korean govern-

Figure 2: A poster produced by the ROK-U.S. Combined Forces Command, 1950s. Presented at The History of Korean Poster Design for 100 Years *exhibition at Tongdaemun History and Culture Park, Korea (Aug.–Sep. 2010). See https://mdesign.design-house.co.kr/article/article_view/108/53812?per_page=19&sch_txt=*

ments propagated the image of the US as a nation "that has protected Korea from the communist forces, helped it fight poverty through economic support, and greatly contributed to its modernization" (Cha and Yom, 2012: 236). Central to the construction of this image was the USFK, through which most Koreans came to imagine the US (Cha and Yom, 2012: 259). Various visual materials, such as posters (ex. figure 2), news films from the 1950s and 60s, and photographs that accompanied major US military periodicals and numerous Korean newspapers, were often used to propagate the image of the trustworthy and benevolent American GI, pointing to the US itself as an ally by extension.[5] This point can be demonstrated, for example, in figure 2, which visualizes the relationship between the US and Korea as the one between the big brother and a little brother. A taller US soldier stands back-to-back with a Korean soldier, underscoring the trust between the two. In addition, the slogan of the poster highlights how the two together had shed blood on the battlefield (of the Koran War) and will continue to collaborate in reconstructing (war-torn Korea) during the time of peace. In this sense, the first photograph of the chapter (figure 1), celebrating the militant masculinity of the USFK, could be seen as repeating this widely known image of the US.

Figure 3: Kuwabara Shisei, Untitled *(at the near DMZ), from* Kankoku gen'ei, *38.5 x 26 cm, 1964.*

Similarly, the second photograph presents in close-up two American GIs on sentry duty at an outpost near the DMZ. Both soldiers—one with a massive telescope and the other with a sharp gaze—vigilantly look over the wire fence. Even though it is not clear what they are looking at, they again appear as vigilant allies and guardians of Korea.

This popular image of USFK, however, is unsettled in the subsequent photographs. In the third photograph, one finds a GI and Korean woman leaning toward each other as if to whisper while another GI and older woman on the left gaze at them (figure 4 right). The hand of the woman on the right, which tightly holds on to the wires, and her feet on the

5 Many similar posters were produced by the government and military-related institutions to highlight the US as the trusted ally of Korea; *Liberty News* is a news film that was initially made when the Korean War broke out. In 1952, the US military transferred the production of news films to the US Department of Public Information (USIS) and invested heavily to establish Sangnam Studio in Changwon, where, until 1967, news films like *Liberty News* and other cultural films were produced. USIS-Korea led the production of *Liberty News*, but many Korean filmmakers also actively participated. It was provided to Koreans free of charge, making it accessible to nearly everyone.

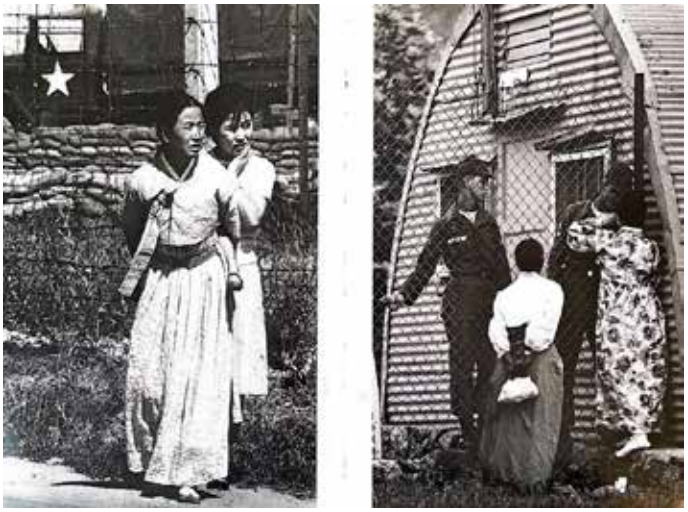

Figure 4: Left: Kuwabara Shisei, Untitled *(at Tongduch'ŏn), from* Kankoku gen'ei*, 19 x 29.7 cm 1964; Right: Kuwabara Shisei,* Untitled *(at P'aju), from* Kankoku gen'ei*, 19 x 29.7 cm, 1964.*

stone on which she levels herself with the GI, highlight the woman's desperation to be closer to the GI. The two look like lovers who are forcibly separated by the wired fence. The rose patterns on the woman's traditional *hanbok* further enhance the romantic air of the scene. Entirely immersed in themselves, the two seem unaware of the photographer's presence or the disapproving look of the two women in the photo on the other side of the page (figure 4 left). Through the strategic placement of the photos, Kuwabara gives the impression that the two women in the fourth photo are looking at the couple.

In the third photograph (figure 4 right), in which the GIs appear as ambivalent individuals enjoying their time with the local women, the USFK does not look entirely reliable or like the focused protector and ally of Korea as seen in the first two photographs (figure 1, figure 3). At the same time, it is notable that the American GIs are not presented as brutal foreign dominators either, as in the popular nationalist discourse in Korea at the time. As seen in widely known novels like *Bunji* (Land of Excrement, 1965), *Amerika* (America, 1972), and *Hwangguui Bimyeong* (A Scream of Hwang-gu, 1974), another popular

Figure 5 (top): Tokiwa Toyoko, Cheap hotels, Wakabacho *from the series* Poisonous Flowers*, 1955. Gelatine silver print, 325×485mm; Figure 6 (bottom): Tōmatsu Shōmei,* Chewing Gum and Chocolate*, 1969. Gelatine silver print, 300×226m.*

image of American GIs was brutal foreign interlopers exploiting local women.[6]

Rather than being exclusive to Korea, this recurrent cultural representation of the American GI resonated with common images in Japan. For instance, a

6 For more on the popular imagery of American GIs in Korean novels of the time see, Kim (2008). Koh (2009) explores the typical imagery of US military in Korean cinema between 1958–2001.

similarly repeated negative image of American GIs are found in films such as *Kinkakuji* (The Temple of the Golden Pavilion, 1976), which is based on the novel of the same title (1956) by Yukio Mishima (1925–70), *Buta to gunkan* (Pigs and Battleships, 1961), and *Akasen kichi* (Red Light Base, 1953).[7] Also, one can think of some of the major precedents of camptown imagery produced by well-known postwar Japanese photographers such as Tōmatsu Shōmei (1930–2012) and Tokiwa Tokyo (1930–2019). For instance, in their photos (figure 5 and figure 6), which are notable for their visual similarity in terms of their composition, subject matter, and overall tone, Tōmatsu and Tokiwa highlight the moments between the local women and American GIs. Both images foreground a sense of humiliation and vulnerability.

While the above-noted films, novels, and photographs are just a sampling, which is neither exhaustive nor comprehensive, they confirm the presence of the US military as a major subject in different cultural fields in Korea and Japan during the Cold War. More importantly, as seen above, some of the most popular cultural representations of the US military in Cold War Japan and Korea shared a similar pattern marked by representations of American GIs, camptown sex workers, mixed-race children and typification of these figures. For example, the American GI is often depicted as an imperialistic interloper or a trusted ally of Korea (or Japan) who is superior vis-à-vis the Korean men (or Japanese men). As it shall be seen, camptown sex workers were often typified as either "fallen women" or as victims of American imperialism/militarism who symbolize Korea (or Japan) and its neocolonial status vis-à-vis the US (Kim, 1998). While this article does not go into further discussion, it is important to note that the so-called mixed-race children born between American GIs and local camptown women were often depicted as a threat to the perception of a homogenous ethnic society in both Japan and Korea.[8]

These shared cultural representations of the US military in Korea and Japan can be understood as the result of the two countries' shared historical experiences of US military occupation during the Cold War. For example, US troops in Japan and Korea respectively numbered 172,861 and 326,863 in 1951; 150,874 and 71,043 in 1957; 82,264 and 52,197 in 1970; 46,004 and 46,004 in 1980 (Höhn and Moon, 2010: 9). Given the massive presence of the US military, through which the US was largely imagined in Japan and Korea during the Cold War, it is not surprising that American GIs became the main subject in various cultural representations in both countries.

Moreover, Japanese and Korean attempts to refigure themselves in the face of the dominant presence of the US military and the influence of American culture had a significant effect on what kinds of common cultural representations of the US military emerged in either country. For example, Japan experienced the devastation of World War II, the following Occupation (1945–52), and then high economic growth/urbanization throughout the 1960s and 80s. On the other hand, since its liberation in 1945, South Korea has faced the US Occupation (1945–1948), the Korean War (1950–1953), a coup by Park Chung-hee (1961), and rapid urbanization that left the country unsettled, with the very nature of its social reality undefined. In this context, the two countries shared the concern for national identity. Also, the fear of miscegenation and belief in monoethnicity and patriarchal nationalism were widespread, which played a significant role in giving shape to the above-noted standardized representations of the US military in Cold War Japan and Korea. In this sense, the recurrent images of the US military, which are deeply related to the fears and beliefs that are spawned from the question of identity with which Japan and Korea struggled during the Cold War,

7 For more on typical Japanese cinematic imageries of US bases (and some camptowns), see, for example: Yoshida (2020). Also, Kitamura (2019) examines how in the film *Buta to gunkan* (*Pigs and Battleships*, 1961), the director Imamura Shōhei (1926–) criticizes the hegemonic presence of the US power in postwar Japan.

8 For example, Lee (2015), which explores representation of the mixed-race children in Korean War novels between 1950s and 1980s, illustrates this point

could be understood as what Homi K. Bhabha calls "stereotypes." Bhabha defines a stereotype as "an arrested, fetishistic mode of representation within its field of identification" (Bhabha, 1994: 109). It is this kind of stereotypical image of the US base that Kuwabara's USFK images are responding to. Kuwabara both creates his own vision of the USFK based on a popular image of it, while also challenging some of the widely known images of it.

Deconstructing the Typical Representations of Camptown Sex Workers

In addition to challenging the stereotypical images of the American GI, Kuwabara questions yet another standardized representation of the major figure in many US base images, namely that of the camptown sex workers. As briefly noted above, during the 1950s and 60s, the camptown sex workers in Korea, who were called by various derogatory terms such as *yanggalbo* (western whore) and *yanggongju* (western princess), were largely depicted in numerous cultural registers as "fallen women" or victims of American imperialism/militarism who symbolized Korea's unbalanced power relationship vis-a-vis the US (Kim, 1998: 175-202). This representation of camptown women goes together with the androcentric nationalist discourse of the time, which was tinted with Confucian patriarchal ideology of chastity and the discourse of a monoethnic nation (*tanil minjok*). The discourse "expected/mandated Korean women to be chaste and vigilant against foreign males and, by extension, masculine foreign power" (Choi, 1998: 14.) In this context, the camptown women, who not only exposed the metaphoric impotence of the Korean men through their economic capability but also pierced wounds to the masculine pride of Korean men through their mingling with the American GIs, were vilified and typified as defiled and promiscuous.[9] In essence, the camptown women were regarded as a threat to the Confucian patriarchal ideology and beliefs in a monoethnic country.

These perceptions and representations of camptown women were widely depicted in well-known films and novels of the time. For example, in *Jiokhwa* (*A Flower in Hell*, 1958), a movie about the love triangle between a camptown prostitute and two brothers working at the US base, and *Obaltan* (*The Aimless Bullet*, 1961), a film about a pressured accountant and his dysfunctional family who struggle to integrate into post-Korean War society, the camptown women are presented as a degraded presence (Koh, 2001). Similarly, in *Wangnŭnggwajudun'gun* or *Royal Tomb and Occupation Force* (1963) by Ha Geung-chan (1931–2007), the daughter of the protagonist, Geum-rye, is depicted as a "fallen woman" whose relationship with the American GI resulted in an unwelcomed presence of the mixed-race child (Lee, 2015). On the other hand, in the novel *Land of Excrement* (1965), the mother and sister of the protagonist, who appear as passive victims of the violence and abuse of the American GIs, are presented as a symbol of Korea's position in its power relationship vis-à-vis the US.

Figure 7: Joo Myung-duck, Untitled (1963-65), 18.5 x 12.5 cm, from The Mixed Names *(Seoul: sigak), 2015. Courtesy of Museum Hanmi.*

The representation of a camptown sex worker as a degraded being can also be found in one of the photographs by major Korean pioneering photographer Joo Myung-duck (1940–). In this photograph of a woman in a leopard patterned coat, Joo, to a certain extent, highlights a typical picture of a

9 It has been reported that during the early 1960s, the income earned by camptown sex workers made up 25 percent of Korea's GNP. For example, see *Unanswered Question*, episode 1008, "Monkey House and Secret Room," directed by Jeong-cheol Won, aired November 7, 2015, on SBS, https://programs.sbs.co.kr/culture/unansweredquestions/vod/4020/22000148461.

camptown sex-worker as a "fallen woman." The implication of the woman in gaudy clothing like the leopard patterned coat as a "fallen woman" could be better understood when one considers how respected women in Korea–a sacrificial mothers and trustworthy wives– were depicted as wearing plain peasant clothes such as *Jeogori* blouse and loose baggy *monpe* pants that hid curves of her body (Moon, 2010: 41). Even if one were to wear western clothes, respected women would refrain from wearing showy, fancy, colorful clothes such as the leopard coat worn by the woman in the photo. The women who wore gaudy clothes were commonly understood as engaging in the despised profession of US military-oriented prostitution. In this sense, Joo's photograph here can be seen as repeating the recurrent idea and representation of the camptown sex worker as a defiled woman. At the same time, the photograph highlighting the crying half-Korean half-Black child calls for sympathy from the viewer and leads them to ponder on the implications of such hybridity in Korea.[10]

Figure 8: Tōmatsu Shōmei, Chewing Gum and Chocolate (8)*, 1959, Ink-jet print, 330×230mm.*

10 Joo's *The Mixed Names* (1969) is notable for his sympathetic presentation of the mixed-race children.

Before going further, it is again worth noting that this representation of camptown sex workers is strikingly similar to that of their Japanese counterparts. For instance, films such as *Buta to gunkan* (*Pigs and Battleships*, 1961), *Jingi Naki Tatakai* (*Battle Without Honor and Humanity*, 1973), and *Nippon Konchūki* (*The Insect Woman*, 1963) all present standardized pictures of camptown women as defiled beings or as victims of American imperialism/militarism. This kind of representation of the camptown sex worker can also be found in some of the major representations of camptowns in Japan. For example, in the photograph (figure 8), which presents a close up of a seemingly pregnant woman in a tight black dress wearing black sunglasses in front of English sign, Tōmatsu Shōmei, one of the most renowned postwar Japanese photographers, to a great extent repeats the popular picture of camptown sex workers known in Japan as *pan-pan*. Regarding the media image of pan-pan, John Dower writes, "… the *pan-pan*—tough, vulnerable figures remembered for their bright lipsticks, nail polish, sharp clothes, and sometimes enviable material possessions. They became inseparable from the urban nightscapes and memory landscape of postwar Japan. Photographs of them remain among the most melancholy and evocative of this period: the leaning figure in the dark, wearing a kerchief, handbag on her arm, often lighting or smoking a cigarette" (Dower, 1999: 132). Dower's illustration confirms the resonance between the woman in Tōmatsu's photograph and the widely circulating image of the camptown sex worker at the time. In this sense, the *pan-pan* in the picture (figure 8) may be considered a type, instead of an individual.

As one can see, underlying these standardized cultural representations of the American GI and camptown sex worker in Korea—which were shared with Japan to a large extent—are contradicting views on them. Depending on the occasion, the American GI appears as either the trusted ally and mighty protector of Korea, or the foreign imperialist dominator. The Korean camptown woman, on the other hand, are portrayed as either a debased woman who

compromised her nation's integrity, or the allegory of Korea (Choi, 1998: 25). It is this fundamental ambivalence residing at the core of the typical representation of the American GIs and camptown women that Kuwabara brings to the attention in his collection of USFK images. For instance, in the previous photo (figure 4), in which American GIs and camptown sex workers are respectively represented as an individuals who are genuinely in love and who eagerly enjoy what is offered at the camptown, Kuwabara questions above-discussed popular and widespread images of these figures. It may have been possible for Kuwabara to take such a critical lens on some of the most widely circulating stereotypical images and perceptions of the US military presence in Cold War Korea partially because of his distinctive position as a foreign documentary photographer working in Korea.

Figure 8: Tōmatsu Shōmei, Chewing Gum and Chocolate (8)*, 1959, Ink-jet print, 330×230mm.*

In another photograph (figure 9), Kuwabara further deconstructs the typical representations of the American GIs and camptown sex workers.[11] Here, he presents an American GI and Korean camptown woman—their backdrop, a club catering to the US servicemembers. The scene is a symbolic picture of one of the major US camptowns in P'aju, which used to be called the "GI's Kingdom." Within the seemingly typical visual representation of the two, however, Kuwabara adds layers to it. Instead of the tint of the rosy aura seen in the earlier photo (figure 4), this time, he adds a sense of tension to the scene. To begin, the body postures of the two figures seem somewhat stiff and uncomfortable. In addition, their reflections form a strange trio with the two palm trees on the door of the club. Moreover, one can see that the black gloves of the American GI, which keep the American GI's bare hands from touching the skin of the Korean camptown woman (perhaps not intentionally, but nonetheless), belying the physical intimacy between the two. Much like the wired fences in the previous photos (figure 4), the glove also serves as a reference to to the condition of Korea as a host country of the US military bases, and the numerous boundaries, both visible and invisible, that arise as a result of that condition. The black gloves suggest the limitation—and possible repulsion—underlying GIs' attraction to and interaction with the local women in the context of the racial and cultural differences. At the same time, the black gloves of the American GI seem to show how hurriedly the GI came to enjoy his leisure time. The woman's clothing, which is suitable for spring or fall, implies that the weather is not as cold. It is most probable that the GI in the scene was in combat training, during which he should have worn gloves to protect his hands while moving, carrying, and holding the weapons, and came to the club without even taking off his gloves. In either case, rather than looking like a sturdy guardian of Korea or a violent foreign interloper exploiting a Korean woman, the American GI appears as the anonymous individual enjoying his leisure time at the camptown. In the photo, which underscores the American GI as both a soldier as well as an eager tourist enjoying down time on his military tour, the photographer highlights the doubled subjectivity of the American GI. While

11 It should be pointed out that the language itself plays a huge part in this process of "standardization." By labeling the sex workers as camptwon women (*Kiji'chon yŏsŏng* in Korean), one erases their individualities while limiting their association to camptown only.

Figure 10: Kuwabara Shisei, Untitled *(at Munsan), from* Kankoku gen'ei, *42 x 29.5 cm, 1965.*

he is a dutiful soldier on a tour, he is also a foreign tourist.

Similarly, in this photograph, which shows a group including two camptown women and two American GIs having fun, Kuwabara further questions the typical representation of the Korean camptown woman as the passive victim vis-à-vis the American GI seen in the popular media and nationalist discourse of the time. The scene, which presents two women wearing sunglasses, comfortable pants, and picket shirts and beaming at the camera, could be depicting the group returning from a picnic. Through images like this one, the photographer implies that the camptown women may have not always engaged with the US military within a simple aggressor-victim context, as their interactions were widely framed in the nationalist discourses—the camptown women look like anything but victims here.

In fact, in Cold War Korea there were many camptown sex workers and American GIs who engaged in amicable relationships that ended up in marriage. For example, when interracial marriage was formally permitted by the military in 1951, the authorities of the USFK encountered hundreds of marriage applications (Moon, 2010: 65). Also, it was some of these "Korean brides" who became the foundation of the Korean-American community in the US. What is more, in the case of extreme abuse from the American GIs, the camptown women often raised their collective voices instead of being passive victims (Moon, 1997: 159–168). While it is true that the camptown women were indeed subjected to "harsh conditions of dire poverty and the disciplinary power of the domestic and foreign military and civilian authorities," they were hardly the "mere passive pawns" described by some of the military chaplains in Korea, like Reverend Ernest W. Karsten (Moon, 2010: 58). For example, in the summer of 1971, "'about 200 prostitutes carrying sticks demonstrated outside [Camp Ames] demanding immediate arrest' of a GI alleged to have murdered a camptown prostitute on July 16, 1971" (Moon, 1997: 159) In this sense, Kuwabara's photographs, which present camptown women as individuals who cannot be categorized into the simple dichotomy of the "fallen women" or the victim of American imperialism/militarism, add a real-life dimensionality to the widely circulated standardized representations of the camptown women.

On the Global Presence of the US Military

Another significant point that Kuwabara underscores in the same photograph (figure 10) is the ubiquitous aspect of the global US military base network, which he highlights by not specifying the place where the photo was taken. Just by looking at the photograph, it is difficult to tell the location unless one is familiar with the topography of Korea. The background of dreary countryside with dilapidated buildings, unpaved roads, and mountains hardly identifies the place as Korea. This unspecified place suggests the possibility of the photo of the American GIs and two local women having been taken anywhere in the Asia-Pacific region that US bases were found. In other words, the scene could have emerged from Japan, Taiwan, the Philippines, or Guam, where similar scenes with an American GI and the local women might be witnessed. As it shall be seen, it is this imperialistic aspect of the global US military network—in the sense that the US came to resem-

ble the former colonial powers in its construction of a global security system with American troops in Europe, the Far East, the Atlantic, and the Caribbean and the Pacific during the postwar era as pointed out by the former Assistant Under Secretary of State, Christopher T. Sandars—that Kuwabara critiques throughout the last page of the "Far East Strategy, USFK" chapter of *Kankoku gen'ei* (Sandars, 2000).

Figure 11: Kuwabara Shisei, Untitled *(at Walkerhill Hotel), from* Kankoku gen'ei*, 26 x 15cm, 1965*.

The last page of the chapter carries three images that Kuwabara produced at the Walkerhill Hotel and clubs catering to the American GIs. The first photograph presents a dance scene at the Walkerhill Hotel (figure 11). Named after General Walton H. Walker (1889–1950), a widely recognized hero in Korea who served with distinction in the Korean War, during which he commanded the Eighth United States Army, the Walkerhill Hotel opened in April 1963 as a high-quality entertainment facility for American soldiers. Kuwabara provides a glimpse into the hotel—which he calls "little Las Vegas"—in this black and white photo. Kuwabara captured here from high above American and Korean men dancing with the Korean women (Kuwabara, 1986). Neatly folded white napkins, wrinkle-free white tablecloths, clean wooden floors, formal dresses, and the overall elegant atmosphere of the scene imply that the occasion is an important banquet or event for high-ranking political and military figures of Korea and the US.

Visualizing these high-ranking political and military figures of Korea and the US, whose decisions largely account for the presence of the US military in Korea, is one of the most significant aspects of the USFK photographs in *Kankoku gen'ei*. I have argued how most of the US base images and major cultural representations of the US military solely focus on American GIs and camptown women. Even though these two figures are the most observable and recognizable characters representing the massive system of US base maintenance (because they are indeed both significant and integral), American GIs and camptown women have appeared in US base photographs to the extent that they are seen as cliché. This point may be considered in relation to the following comments by scholar Cinthia Enloe: "Military bases and women in prostitution have been assumed to go together, to be a 'natural' twosome and thus unworthy of political investigation" (Enloe, 2014: 157). In this sense, that the photograph (figure 11) brings to the attention of the viewers the multivalent aspects of the US military presence, including the curtain of invisibility that has shrouded powers and authorities, Kuwabara's work thus offers a potential opening for such "political investigation."

In addition to the fancy banquet at the Walkerhill Hotel, Kuwabara, in more detail, shows the kinds of entertainment—commonly known as the American 8th Army show—provided at the clubs catering to the regular American GIs. For example, the last photo in "Far East Strategy, USFK" chapter features a woman who seems to be an American 8th Army show performer (Figured 12). The woman, who looks away to the side, wears black a leotard while holding a traditional Korean instrument called *Sogo*. The unusual combination of leotard and Sogo, an instrument the performers usually play in traditional Korean *hanbok* or traditional costumes for *Nong-ak* (song for farming), seems to have been specially contrived for the show.

In another photo (Figure 13), Korean dancers in bikini tops with fluffy, feathery skirts dance with flowery-castanet-like objects in their hands. The tropical

Figure 12 (top): Kuwabara Shisei, Untitled *(at P'aju).* Kankoku gen'ei*, 10.2 x 17 cm, 1965; Figure 13 (bottom): Kuwabara Shisei,* Untitled *(at P'aju).* Kankoku gen'ei*, 16 x 10 cm, 1965.*

patterns of their dresses, bandanas, and flowers remind one of the dance performances one would encounter at tropical vacation sites. The tropics have a significant place in the US global military history and widely circulating "militouristic" imaginaries (Gonzalez, 2013). For instance, scholar Vernadette Vicuña Gonzalez illustrates how the understanding of regions in Asia-Pacific like the Philippines and Hawaii as tropics or "uniquely American tropics" is based on a profoundly gendered and racialized vision of the tropics as paradise in the context of "the masculinized and militarized desire for security in American's broader imperial project" in the Asia-Pacific (Gonzalez, 2013: 7-9). Gonzalez points out that the image of Paradise as "timeless, passive, island spaces with beaches ringed by palm trees, blue waters, warm sun, and welcoming, sensual yet innocent natives" has its origin in European fantasies of the New World (7). It was the idea of a premodern and pristine paradise that was at the core of colonial desire. In this sense, Gonzalez argues that "locating 'paradise' in the nexus of American touristic and militaristic designs on Asia and the Pacific makes visible the maneuvers of the US imperialism that have profoundly shaped life in the region, particularly in the last century" (7).

In short, in the context of US imperialism in the Asia-Pacific, regions like the Philippines and Hawaii were regarded as feminized lands "receptive to and in need of being claimed"—in other words, in need of securing (Gonzalez, 2013: 12). In this sense, it is possible to interpret the tropical performance and details at the club for the US soldiers in the photograph (figure 13) as participation in this long-held, colonial, gendered, and racialized vision of Asia-Pacific in the context of the Cold War. Overall, the photo shows how the American 8th Army show, like the one in the photo, revolved around the legacy of the global presence of the US military in the various Asia-Pacific regions and popular "militouristic" imaginaries residing on those sites.

At the same time, in the same photograph (figure 13), Kuwabara calls attention to the bold and rude gesture of American GI. Here, the photographer steeps half of the back in the dark and highlights the front part of the scene where the GI sits and laughs with his fingers pointed at the dancers. The GI does not seem to realize the rudeness or shamefulness of his action. Kuwabara further notes on the shamelessness of the American GI in the finishing paragraph of the chapter (figure 12 right bottom):

In the city where the US military base is located, the same scene is seen. The appearance of American soldiers and women seen at Pattaya in Thailand, Subic Bay in the Philippines, and Yokosuka in Japan or Naha in Okinawa can also be seen in the streets of Tongduch'ŏn or P'aju in Korea. A US soldier does not refuse to be shot when he is pointed at by the camera. Rather, he poses to be taken a picture of. Where does that brightness and cheerfulness of the US soldier come from? They do not seem to have even a bit of indebtedness for playing with/flirting with the women in the camptown (Kuwabara, 1986: 51).

Kuwabara not only pointing out but also rebuking the shamelessness of the American GIs for flirting with the local women—likely with the colonial perception and assumption that the women of occupied territories like Korea should be sexually available for them—is indicative of his central argument regarding the global presence of the American military. Here, Kuwabara underscores with bitterness the recurrent patterns in the social cost of maintaining the US bases that can be witnessed not only in Korea, but also in Guam, Thailand, the Philippines, Japan, and beyond. The photographer takes a bird's-eye view of the US overseas bases and situates the USFK in the larger geopolitical context of the Cold War. The presence of the US military in Korea and various entertainment venues catering to American GIs are part of the worldwide US base system. In other words, the scenes presented throughout the photos in the "Far East Strategy, USFK" chapter are the scenes that can be witnessed across the countries playing host to that base system. The texts and photos in the chapter, on the whole, underscore the global, imperialistic aspect of the vast network of overseas US military bases and their everyday effects on those living in the host countries.

The Limiting Photographic Gaze of an Asian Man

While expanding the existing representations of the presence of the US military in Korea, Kuwabara's images have some limiting aspects to them that largely reflect Kuwabara's gaze as an Asian man from a country that was occupied by the US and experienced the neo-colonial aspects of the US military.

To begin, many camptown images tend to focus on the American GI and the local camptown sex worker. Some of the most well-known works of Kuwabara, for example, also highlight these two characters (figure 14). Although there were other women, such as the cook, seamstress, laundress, and housemaids who helped maintain the US servicemembers and their living quarters, these women are never depicted in either the visual tropes or existing iterations of the US base constructed by men. Instead, it is the local sex worker who gets the most attention in the collection. This tendency of Kuwabara's is shared by other male photographers, writers, and filmmakers of the time. Among many things, this shows the extent to which the presence of the US military in Japan and Korea was understood, represented, and iterated in gendered terms by the men of the occupied country, or the host country of the US bases, who looked at the camptown women erotically much like the American GIs, yet felt strong contempt toward them for the sense of humiliation these women gave them by associating with the American GIs. In other words, this Asian male gaze manifests in numerous cultural representations of the US military presence, including works of Kuwabara, which tend to focus on American GIs and local camptown sex workers while omitting other regular characters of camptown life.

Second, many of Kuwabara's photographs present the American GI as either the dutiful, mighty ally/guardian of Korea or the shameless flirt/abuser of the local women. This shows how "the other" called the US, which is represented in the form of the US military, vacillates between the object of desire and derision at the end of the emasculated men of the colonized nation or a nation that experienced the neo-colonial aspect of the US military. What is underlying these two opposite depictions of the US

military, however, is eventually the same—the sense of envy and contempt for its power and wealth. This sense of envy, which is closely connected to the desire to recuperate their masculinity, manifests in the emasculated Korean men's internalization of the stance of the oppressor or imperialistic order (Choi, 1998). Perhaps, it is this psychological state of an emasculated man which is reflected in the images of the US base highlighting American GI as either the powerful ally/guardian of Korea or the shameless flirt/abuser of the local women. One envies the GIs (and in extension the US) for their power and wealth, but one hates them for their power and wealth, which in reverse casts light on their incompetency and poverty. This psychology is shared between Korean men and Japanese men. Dower, for example, demonstrates how Japanese men in postwar Japan swam in humiliation and envy vis-à-vis the American GIs (Dower, 1999: 135, 211).

Lastly and most importantly, let alone the shadows of the photographer himself, the Korean men, or more generally Asian men, are entirely missing except in the photo of the Walkerhill Hotel, which presents only the Korean male elites. Even though there were Korean men in the camptowns, such as pimps, local police, tailors, barbers, and photographers, many of these men are not included in depictions of camptown life. There are various ways to think of this invisibility. One way is to regard it as a metaphor for the disempowered Korean men vis-à-vis the US. Just like the photographer himself or the male protagonist of the films and novels discussed above, the disempowered Korean men can only remain as voyeurs peeping at the mingling of Korean women and American GIs from the shadows. Instead of intervening, they remain shadowy presences, looking on helplessly at the Korean women socializing with the foreign masculine power on whom most of them rely for their financial incomes.

Epilogue

It should be pointed out that, despite the absence and impotence of the Korean and Japanese men who can only be voyeurs, it was their gaze—Kuwabara's included—that crafted popular perceptions of the US military in Korea. In this sense, the invisibility of Asian men in images depicting US military bases may be explained as these Asian men being the subject of what they see, as opposed to the object. To explain further, the male gaze as a lens has been thoroughly explored, in one example, by the Japanese art historian Ikeda Shinobu in her study of a scene from a handscroll created in the Kamakura period (1185–1333): *Night Attack on the Sanjō Palace* from the *Illustrated Scrolls of the Tales of the Heiji Era* (Ikeda, 2003). Even though the subject of Ikeda's study may seem historically distant to this study, it nonetheless provides a highly relevant point regarding the male gaze. Ikeda, calling attention to the gaze of the elite male aristocrat patron who mostly commissioned the scroll as being central to the sexualized bodies of the women portrayed in the *Illustrated Scrolls of the Tales of the Heiji Era*, writes, "the images we create today are mirrors reflecting our gaze on the Other" (Ikeda, 2003: 48). Precisely the same point could be made of the photographs of the US military presence produced by the Asian men photographers like Kuwabara. They are not so much about the US military, per se, as they are about the Asian male's desires towards and perceptions of the 'other,' in this case called US servicemembers and camptown sex workers. At the same time, they concern Asian peoples' imaginaries and perceptions of the Americans during the Cold War. Thus, Kuwabara's photographic representations of the US military may be seen as a self-reflecting lens.

Bibliography

Bhabha, Homi, K. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. London: New York, Routledge.

Cha, Jae-young, and Chan Hee Yom 차재영, 염찬희. 2012. "1950년대 주한 미공보원의 기록영화와 미국의 이미지 구축「지옥화」(1958)에서부터「수취인불명」(2001)까지 [Documentary Films of the USIS Korea

in the 1950s for Constructing American Images]." 한국미국사학회 [*Korean Journal of Journalism & Communication Studies*] 56, no. 1: 235–474.

Choi, Chungmoo. 1998. "Nationalism and Construction of Gender in Korea." In *Dangerous Women: Gender and Korean Nationalism*, edited by Elaine H. Kim and Chungmoo Choi, 9–32. New York: Routledge.

Dower, John W. 1999. *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

Enloe, Cynthia. 2014. *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases*. Berkely and LA: University of California Press.

George, Timothy S. 2001. *Minamata: Pollution and the Struggle for Democracy in Postwar Japan*. Harvard University Asia Center.

Gonzalez, Vernadette Vicuña. 2013. *Securing Paradise: Tourism and Militarism in Hawai'i and the Philippines*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Höhn, Mariah, and Seungsook Moon. 2010. *Over There: Living with the U.S. Military Empire from World War Two to the Present*, edited by Mariah H.hn and Seungsook Moon. Durham N.C.: Duke University Press.

Ikeda, Shinobu. 2003. "The Image of Women in Battle Scenes: 'Sexually' Imprinted Bodies." In *Gender and Power in the Japanese Visual Field*, edited by Joshua S. Mostow, Norman Bryson, Maribeth Graybill, 35–48. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Kim, Dong-shik 김동식. 2008. "한국영화에 등장하는 미국 또는 미군의 이미지에 관하여[How Americans are Represented in Korean Films]." 민족문학사연구[*Journal of Korean Literary History*] 36: 338–377.

Kim, Haeng-sun 김행선. 1998. 1970년대 박정희 정권의 문화정책과 문화통제 [*Cultural Policy and Cultural Control of 1970s Park Chung Hee Administration*]. Seoul: Suninbook.

Kitamura, Hiroshi. 2019. "Confronting America: Pigs and Battleships and the Politics of US Bases in Postwar Japan." In *Killers, Clients, and Kindred Sprites*, 41–55. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Koh, Dong-Yeon 고동연. 2009. "전후 한국 영화에 등장하는 주한 미군의 이미지 [Representing American GIs in Postwar Korean Cinema: From the Flower in Hell (1958) to Address Unknown (2001)]." 미국사연구 [*The Korean Journal of American History*] 30, no. 11: 147–175.

Kuwabara, Shisei 桑原史成. 1986. 韓国原影 [*Kankoku gen'ei*]. Edited by Tanaka Shigenori. Tōkyō: San'ichi Shobō.

Kuwabara, Shisei 桑原史成. 2012. 다큐멘터리 사진가: 미나마타 한국 베트남 취재기 [*Documentary Photographer – Report on Minamata, Korea, Vietnam*]. Translated by Seung-gon Kim. Seoul: Nunbit Publishing.

Lee, Chung 이청. 2015. "한국 전쟁 소설의 혼혈 표상 [Mixed-race Representation of Korean War Novels]" 현대문학이론연구 [*The Journal of Modern Literary Theory*] 61: 353–371.

Masuda, Hajimu 益田肇. 2015. *Cold War Crucible: The Korean Conflict and the Postwar World*. Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: Harvard University Press.

Masuda, Hajimu 益田肇. 2019. '人びとのなかの冷戦: 想像がグローバルな現実となるとき [The Cold War Among the Ordinary People: When Imaginations Became the Reality of the World].'立命館国際研究 [*Ritsumei Kokusai Kenkyu*] 31, no. 5, 107–124.

McMahon, Robert J. 2003. *The Cold War: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Moon, Seung-sook. 2010. "Regulating Desire, Managing Empire." In *Over There: Living with the U.S. Military Empire from World War Two to the Present*, edited by Mariah Ho hn and Seungsook Moon, 39–77. Durham N.C.: Duke University Press.

Sandars, Christopher T. 2000. *America's Overseas Garrisons: The Leasehold Empire*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Thomas, Julia Adeney. 2014. "History and Biology in the Anthropocene: Problems of Scale, Problems of Value" *The American Historical Review* 119, no. 5 (2014): 1587–1607.

Uanswered Question 그것이 알고 싶다, episode 1008, 몽키하우스와 비밀의 방 [*Monkey House and Secret Room*]. Directed by Jeong- cheol Won, Aired November 7, 2015, on SBS. https://programs.sbs.co.kr/culture/unansweredquestions/vod/4020/22000148461

Yoshida, Akira 吉田啓. 2020. 日本「米軍基地」列島映畵に描かれた基地 [*Japan, a Chain of Islands of the US Bases: The Scenes Depicted in the Movies*]. Tokyo: Otowa Shuppan.

About the Author

Ji Hye Han *(Ph.D., Sophia University) is a Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Fellow at Sainsbury Institute for the Study of Japanese Arts and Cultures. Han specializes in the study of postwar Japanese photography in a transnational context. Her work in specific explores various cultural expressions of Japanese' and Koreans' imaginaries and perceptions of the Americans during the Cold War.*