

**The Propaganda of Protection: Korean Women and the Moral Language of U.S.
Intervention in the Korean War**

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1. Introduction

By the armistice in 1953, the United States had dropped more than 2.4 billion propaganda leaflets across the Korean peninsula.¹ The Korean War was fought not only with troops and weapons but also with persuasive information and images. Before open war began in June 1950, Korea had already become one of many sites of the cultural Cold War, and the outbreak of war only intensified earlier struggles over public opinion and U.S. legitimacy.² The conflict quickly became a major Cold War confrontation, involving North Korea, South Korea, the United States, China, and the United Nations.³ Psychological warfare became central to how the war was conducted and how it was understood.⁴ During the war, U.S. and South Korean wartime propaganda did not simply depict Korean suffering, but used it to argue that anti-Communist intervention was humane and necessary. Korean women became central to that effort as wartime propaganda depicted them as mothers, patients, and civilians in danger. Those images made foreign military intervention appear protective by tying it to the care of vulnerable civilians. However, the same wartime order that portrayed women as people to be saved also exposed them to violence and placed strict restrictions on women's roles and autonomy. Wartime propaganda turned women into evidence to justify foreign intervention while obscuring the unequal and violent conditions in which they actually lived. During the Korean War, U.S.-aligned propaganda used images of Korean women as patients, mothers, and family figures to present anti-Communist intervention as humane and protective, but women's actual experiences of

¹Anchi Hoh, "Korean War Propaganda Leaflet Collection at the Library of Congress," Library of Congress (blog), September 26, 2017, <https://blogs.loc.gov/international-collections/2017/09/korean-war-propaganda-leaflet-collection-at-the-library-of-congress/#:~:text=How%20many%20ppira%20were%20dropped,69>.

² Charles K. Armstrong, "The Cultural Cold War in Korea, 1945–1950," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 62, no. 1 (2003): 71–73, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3096136>

³Britannica Editors, "Korean War," in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, last modified April 5, 2026, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Korean-War>.

⁴Britannica Editors, "Psychological Warfare," in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, last modified April 3, 2026, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/psychological-warfare>.

sexual exploitation and violence at the hands of U.S. forces during the war exposed the hypocrisy of that supposedly benevolent U.S. intervention in Korea.

2. Psychological Warfare and Wartime Strategy

Official U.S. government documents declared propaganda to be central to the war effort. In March 1950, NSC 59/1 placed foreign information in peacetime and psychological warfare in wartime within the same policy framework and directed both towards “the achievement of national aims.”⁵ To justify anti-Communist intervention, the United States had to present itself as a benevolent superpower that was helping less fortunate nations protect themselves from Communism.⁶ To achieve this ideological aim, the United States called for coordination among overt psychological warfare, covert operations, censorship, and domestic information, showing how the control of information was understood as part of the war.⁷ The 1953 report of the President’s Committee on International Information Activities also supported that aim by stating that “the dissemination of truth [was] not enough,” and arguing that U.S. information programs had to produce “maximum psychological effect” by persuading foreign audiences that American policies served their interests as well as American ones.⁸ This showed the U.S. government’s deployment of psychological warfare as a carefully utilized and directed tool to not simply spread information but to exert the “maximum” possible influence on foreign nations’ acceptance of U.S. ideology. . A Defense Department film called “Psychological Warfare: A Combat Weapon in Korea” also reflected the same approach by presenting leaflets, loudspeakers, radios, and other

⁵ National Security Council, "NSC 59/1: The Foreign Information Program and Psychological Warfare Planning," Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950–1955, The Intelligence Community, 1950–1955, last modified March 9, 1950, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1950-55Intel/d2>.

⁶ Susie Woo, *Framed by War : Korean Children and Women at the Crossroads of US Empire* (New York University Press, 2019), 1-22.

⁷ National Security Council, "NSC 59/1," Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950–1955, The Intelligence Community, 1950–1955.

⁸ "Report to the President by the President's Committee on International Information Activities," Office of the Historian, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952–1954, National Security Affairs, Volume II, Part 2, last modified June 30, 1953, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v02p2/d370>.

methods of spreading media as integral parts of combat.⁹ However, many American officers regarded propaganda as weak compared to conventional weapons and dismissed it as little more than “paper bullets.”¹⁰ Although some officials dismissed propaganda using this term, the word “bullets” implied that, despite its soft, “paper” nature, propaganda had a tangible impact as a weapon to inflict damage upon opposing forces. Many of the personnel who were creating and spreading propaganda lacked knowledge of Korean customs and “the role of women in society.”¹¹ Those limits pushed U.S.-created propaganda to rely on figures that broad audiences could recognize quickly, especially women vulnerable to wartime pressures: mothers taking care of children, patients receiving medical care, or victims of violence.¹² Psychological warfare helped to create conditions in which Korean women’s bodies became political evidence through which foreign intervention was justified as humane.

3. Humanitarian Aid in U.S.-Created Propaganda

⁹ “Psychological Warfare: A Combat Weapon in Korea,” National Archives Catalogue, Record Group 330: Records of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/140105160>.

¹⁰ Mark R. Jacobson, “Minds then hearts: U.S. political and psychological warfare during the Korean War” (PhD diss, Ohio State University, 2005), 95-100, https://etd.ohiolink.edu/acprod/odb_etd/etd/r/1501/10?clear=10&p10_accession_num=osu1108407385.

¹¹ Jacobson, “Minds then hearts,” 95-100.

¹² Jacobson, “Minds then hearts,” 95-100.



Figure 1. *Anti-Morale - Medical Aid*. Leaflet by the Psychological Warfare Section, United States Army, 8th Army. Korea, ca. 1950-1953. Digital Horizons, North Dakota State University Archives.

That effort to present anti-Communist intervention as protective was visible in a U.S.-created leaflet titled “Medical Aid,” which centered on an image of women. The front of the leaflet centered on a Korean woman holding a child while UN medical personnel stand on either side of her (See Figure 1).¹³ This scene portrayed U.S. and UN intervention as beneficial to civilians rather than as forceful. The back side of the leaflet contrasted UN concern for Korean health with disease in the North, ending with the message: “COMMUNISM MEANS DEATH—DEATH MEANS COMMUNISM. HELP THE UN HELP KOREA. FREEDOM DAY IS COMING.”¹⁴ The same text also stated that Koreans desire “food, shelter, and a happy family

¹³ *Anti-Morale - Medical Aid* (United States Army, 8th Army, Korea, Psychological Warfare Section., 195-?), 1, <https://digitalhorizonsonline.org/digital/collection/nds-korea/id/240/>.

¹⁴ *Anti-Morale - Medical Aid*, 2. Full text (English translation provided by the source): “The welfare of all Korean people is of primary concern to the UN. In Southern Korea disease and disasters are held to a minimum by the hard-working UN authorities and Korean civilian officials. On the other hand, the Communists have given Northern Korea over to the Russians and the Chinese. They have allowed diseases to run rampant in Northern Korea. They do not think of the Korean people who wish for food, shelter, and a happy family life. COMMUNISM

life.” The phrase “happy family life” equated family stability with necessities for survival, such as food and shelter, presenting it as essential for survival. This broadened the meaning of intervention, as the UN's medical aid would not only preserve individuals' health but also restore the everyday life and social order that communism supposedly threatened. Historian Paul S. Cha argues that Korean War aid campaigns had to make Koreans appear as deserving recipients of compassion while also showing that they could not survive without outside assistance.¹⁵ As women were often perceived as innocent, helpless individuals rather than politically active and potentially threatening ones, propaganda utilized images of women so that foreign aid could be presented as benevolent rather than an exercise of power.¹⁶ Both American and Korean cultures perceived men as having greater physical and political autonomy than women, so having the pamphlet centered around a woman contributed to a sense of humanitarian mission in which the UN worked to help those who supposedly could not help themselves. The front side grounded the leaflet's claim on physical care and health, while the reverse side turned that care into an ideological contrast between UN protection and communist neglect. In leaflets such as this, U.S.-produced propaganda depicted women as individuals without political autonomy, and as recipients of care through whom foreign power could present itself as humane.

4. Traditional Gender Roles and Family Life in U.S.-Created Propaganda

MEANS DEATH—DEATH MEANS COMMUNISM. HELP THE UN HELP KOREA. FREEDOM DAY IS COMING.”

¹⁵ Paul S. Cha, "People like You and Me': The Korean War, Humanitarian Aid, and Creating Compassion," *Journal of Korean Studies* 26, no. 1 (2021): 95-96, <https://doi.org/10.1215/07311613-8747733>.

¹⁶ Cha, "People like," 95-96.

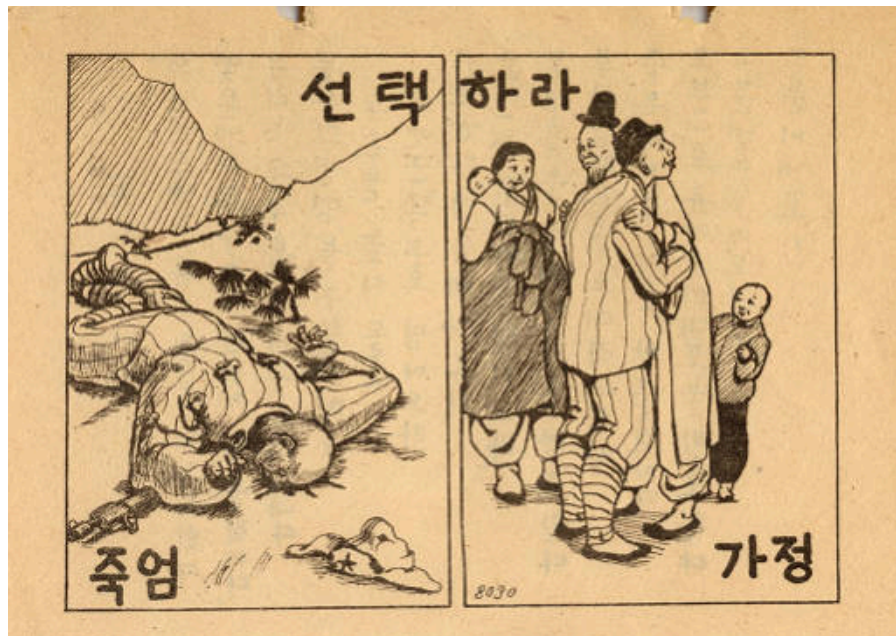


Figure 2. *Anti-Morale and Surrender*. Leaflet by the Psychological Warfare Section, United States Army, 8th Army, Korea, ca. 195-?. Digital Horizons, North Dakota State University Archives.

That same instrumentalization of women appeared in a second U.S. propaganda leaflet urging North Korean soldiers' surrender. It presented North Korean surrender as a simple decision, using traditional family imagery to equate surrender with peace. It divided the page into two options: "USELESS DEATH" on the left, "REUNION WITH YOUR FAMILY" on the right.¹⁷ The box marked "family" illustrated two men hugging, and a woman in their background, with a child on her back. The leaflet did not mention ideology, class, political divisions, or the future of the peninsula. Military surrender, an inherently political action, was presented in moral and domestic terms. In this leaflet, "family" was not seen through physical objects such as a house, town, or flag, but through the lens of traditional family and gender hierarchies. By doing so, the leaflet presented peace as the recovery of household order threatened by the war, characterized by women in traditional gender roles, such as caregiving.

¹⁷ *Anti-Morale and Surrender* (United States. Army. Army, 8th. Korea. Psychological Warfare Section, 195-?), <https://digitalhorizonsonline.org/digital/collection/ndsu-korea/id/20/rec/22>.

Family imagery carried unusual force during the Korean War as the war tore Korean families apart on an unprecedented scale. Eui Hang Shin noted that millions of Korean families experienced separation due to refugee flight, military divisions, and the hardening border between the North and the South.¹⁸ Many refugees left spouses, children, parents, and siblings behind, expecting the separation to be temporary, only to remain divided for decades.¹⁹ In that context, “REUNION WITH YOUR FAMILY” was not a general emotional appeal. The phrase targeted one of the war’s most devastating consequences and presented surrender as the recovery of kinship: the network of familial obligations and belonging that the war had torn apart.²⁰ That appeal would have been amplified in Korea as Confucianism had long shaped Korean social values through its emphasis on filial piety, generational duty, and ordered family relationships.²¹ In that Confucian framework, family symbolized the restoration of the proper social order disrupted by the war.²² By using images of family life, U.S. propaganda took advantage of wartime social instability in order to make propaganda resonate with the Korean people.

¹⁸ Eui Hang Shin, "Effects of the Korean War on Social Structures of the Republic of Korea," *International Journal of Korean Studies*, Spring/Summer 2001, 133-135, https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/journals/ijoks/v5i1/f_0013339_10835.pdf.

¹⁹ Shin, "Effects of the Korean," 134-135.

²⁰ Shin, "Effects of the Korean," 134-135.

²¹ Kevin N. Cawley, "Korean Confucianism," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, last modified November 24, 2021, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/korean-confucianism/>.

²² Woo, *Framed by War*, 22-24.



5. Counter-Example: Appeal for a New Social Hierarchy in North Korean Propaganda

Figure 3. *North Korean propaganda leaflet aimed at the South Korean army*. Leaflet, ca. Korean War period. Korean War Propaganda Leaflet Collection at the Library of Congress.

The political use of women's suffering was not limited to U.S. propaganda. A North Korean leaflet aimed at the South Korean army also used the image of a vulnerable woman, but it did so for a different purpose. Although it showed a vulnerable woman lying on the ground, while children cried beside her, she was not associated with something that could be saved, and there was no appeal to return to times and gender orders of the past.²³ Here, the female body was

²³ *North Korean propaganda leaflet aimed at the South Korean army* (Korean War Propaganda Leaflet Collection at the Library of Congress., n.d.), <https://blogs.loc.gov/international-collections/2017/09/korean-war-propaganda-leaflet-collection-at-the-library-of-congress/3-north-to-south/>. Full text (English translation generated with Google Lens and lightly edited by author): Main Title: "Do you hear that sound!!!" Sub-title: "Whose fault is this disaster?" Body Text: "Here is the tearful cry of a girl desperately calling for her brother who went to the army. 'I will not cry even if I am hungry and cannot eat. But if my sick mother passes away, the three of us siblings cannot live. Please save our mother. Please let my brother in the army come home...' The three siblings in this story are the younger siblings of Private Choi Byung-yeon of the 9513 Unit of the National Army. Oh, soldiers of the National Army! Where is the reason to defend this resentment-filled society where poor citizens cannot live no matter how hard they try to survive, and must die without proper medical treatment even when sick? Isn't it the rightful stance of you, who come from commoner backgrounds, to fight for a new democratic society where everything is subservient to people, rather than a world

used to argue for a different political future.²⁴ The text on the side described the story of a sergeant whose sick mother could not receive proper medical treatment and asked why soldiers from ordinary backgrounds should defend a society in which poor citizens “must die without proper medical treatment even when sick.”²⁵ The unnamed, voiceless woman’s suffering condemned the South Korean state’s failure to protect its own people. The leaflet aimed to weaken South Korean soldiers’ morale by showing that the state they served could not protect their families. This North Korean pamphlet utilized an image of a passively suffering woman in order to draw an emotional reaction of pity and sympathy in service of their political aims, similar to how women were depicted in the U.S.-created pamphlets.

However, despite the similar gendered approach and objectification of women’s bodies as in previous leaflets, the text did not appeal to a return to domestic life or traditional gender order, as in the leaflet “Anti-Morale and Surrender.” Instead, the text urged soldiers to fight for “a new democratic society where everything is subservient to people, rather than a world where people’s fates are dictated by money and power.”²⁶ By ending with a call to a new social order, the leaflet showed that the implications of portrayals of women as vulnerable were not fixed. While U.S. leaflets associated women’s bodies with larger meanings of care, traditional family order, and moral legitimacy for intervention, this North Korean leaflet tied the woman’s suffering body to the promise of a new political order in which “everything is subservient to the people.”²⁷ Although U.S. and North Korean propaganda both utilized similar images of women that stripped them of autonomy, these images advanced completely different political goals.

where people’s fates are dictated by money and power?” Closing: “Patriotic Soldiers Association of the National Army”

²⁴ *North Korean propaganda leaflet.*

²⁵ *North Korean propaganda leaflet.*

²⁶ *North Korean propaganda leaflet.*

²⁷ *North Korean propaganda leaflet.*

6. Women's Roles in Wartime and the Limits of Visibility

Across both U.S. and North Korean propaganda, women appeared as symbols of care, suffering, and threatened social order. Outside those representations, however, wartime reality was more complex. Despite women's lack of autonomy in wartime media, women were central to the Korean War beyond their representations. Women served as soldiers, clerks, laborers, educators, and information workers during the war.²⁸ The Volunteer Troops of Women was full of women who worked in military troop information and education, poster production, broadcasting, public meetings, newspaper publication, the aerial dispersal of surrender leaflets, and some were trained in firearms.²⁹ In fact, a testimony from a woman serving as a reportorial officer described her dispersing surrender leaflets from a plane over enemy territory with "[her] mind prepared for death."³⁰ Women were not merely utilized as part of wartime mobilization, but were active participants in producing and circulating propaganda.³¹ Wartime reality depicts how women were not passive but rather politically active, and were crucial participants in maintaining Korean society.

Still, the wartime system that relied on women's labor defined their role as secondary. Newspaper stories wrote about girls writing letters in blood and enclosing cut fingers in messages to soldiers to show their sacrifice to the soldiers and mobilize them. Women harmed their own bodies to encourage men on the warfront, showing how women's suffering was subservient to the needs of men.³² Headlines such as "Reflect on Yourself, Cowardly Men!"

²⁸ Lee Im Ha, "The Korean War and the Role of Women," *The Review of Korean Studies* 9, no.2 (June 2006): 89-90, 96, <https://accesson.kr/rks/assets/pdf/7566/journal-9-2-89.pdf>.

²⁹ Ha, "The Korean War," 93-95.

³⁰ Dept. of Military Affairs, Headquarters of Army, 2000, quoted in Ha, "The Korean War," 95.

³¹ Ha, "The Korean War," 95-96.

³² Ha, "The Korean War," 92.

reflected similar ideas in which women's voices were used to mobilize male soldiers.³³ This was reflected in the main object of the Volunteer Troops of Women, as to "serve the country by taking the place of male soldiers," which defined women's service as supportive rather than as political participation with equal weight.³⁴ Women were visible and active in the war effort, but their work was defined in relation to men rather than as political participation in its own right.

7. Sexual Prostitution, Violence, and Limited Protection

The objectification of women's bodies and their labor extended into civilian life. Sexual crimes involving U.S. and UN soldiers became rampant during the war, and newspapers issued warnings such as "In case of going out, girl students should not go out alone except with school permission," and "At night, women should not [go] out alone if possible."³⁵ The same foreign presence represented in propaganda as protective instead exposed Korean women to danger. However, rather than directly confronting the conduct of allied forces on which it depended, the South Korean state moved to regulate the violence via the establishment of "comfort houses for the allied forces" and dance halls.³⁶ A document titled "The Method of Comforting U.N. soldiers," created by The Direction of the President's Secretariat, stated that these establishments were created "solely for foreigners," and were an "inevitable and temporary step" to "[prevent] harm to public safety."³⁷ The phrase "inevitable and temporary step" presented organized prostitution as a necessity for public order to protect everyday women. Part of this regulation separated the women working in those establishments from "ordinary" women who were wives and mothers. The establishments themselves were built separately from the houses of civilians,

³³ *Pusan Ilbo*, August 27, 1950, quoted in Ha, "The Korean War," 92.

³⁴ *Pusan Ilbo*, August 12, 1950, quoted in Ha, "The Korean War," 98.

³⁵ *Pusan Ilbo*, August 11, 1950 quoted in Ha, "The Korean War," 98; *Pusan Ilbo*, August 12, 1950 quoted in Ha, "The Korean War," 98.

³⁶ Katharine H. S. Moon, *Sex among Allies: Military Prostitution in U.S.-Korea Relations* (Columbia University Press, 1997), <https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/book/moon/index.html>.

³⁷ "The Method of Comforting U.N. soldiers," quoted in Moon, *Sex among Allies*.

and the women working at these establishments were granted “special passes” to distinguish them from “common women” who were not prostitutes.³⁸

A different perspective on Korean women’s suffering appeared in a 1951 report produced by the Women’s International Democratic Federation, after an international delegation visited Korea and collected testimony about the wartime atrocities they witnessed.³⁹ The report did not simply collect testimonies about what was occurring in Korea. Instead, the report intended to prove that “the people of Korea [were] subjected by American occupants to a merciless and methodical campaign of extermination” and argued that those responsible “must be charged as war criminals.” The report demanded “that the war in Korea be brought to an end without delay and that the invading foreign troops be immediately withdrawn from Korea,” calling for “immediate help for the Korean people.”⁴⁰ The document indicted the violence committed by U.S. and allied forces and highlighted the rape, murder, and destruction of homes to argue that foreign military power had not rescued Koreans, but brutalized them instead. Specifically, it described civilians trying to put out fires after bombings, then being machine-gunned as they fled, before turning to women’s testimonies about relatives and children killed in the destruction.⁴¹ When discussing sexual violence in Pyongyang, the report explicitly stated that American forces turned civilian spaces into “Army-brothel[s]” and took women and girls by force.⁴² The report also included testimony detailing how a woman was led naked through the streets and killed with a red-hot iron bar inserted into her genitals.⁴³ These testimonies highlighted the extensive sexual violence and cruelty inflicted upon Korean women. Contrary to

³⁸ Moon, *Sex among Allies*.

³⁹ *We Accuse: Report of the Committee of the Women's International Democratic Federation in Korea, May 16-27, 1951*, <https://archive.org/details/pdfy-1KgDIKSWqRifyuBa>.

⁴⁰ *We Accuse*, 29-3.

⁴¹ *We Accuse*, 29-4--29-5.

⁴² *We Accuse*, 29-7.

⁴³ *We Accuse*, 29-7.

the protection shown in propaganda leaflets, the report documented foreign forces as attackers of women. This showed the hypocritical nature of the U.S. foreign policy of containment, which presented U.S. military forces as a moral force in the world even while they committed violence against civilians, including women.⁴⁴

8. Postwar Impacts

The 1953 armistice and the establishment of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) did not end the structures that had made Korean women vulnerable. Instead, the war carried those structures into the postwar alliance and solidified the system of imposed vulnerability.⁴⁵ The 1954 U.S.-ROK Mutual Defense Treaty created a permanent military alliance between the United States and South Korea, allowing for the long-term stationing of U.S. troops.⁴⁶ The comfort houses developed during the war evolved into more widespread camptown prostitution, as war, poverty, displacement, and separation of families left many women with few ways to survive outside of the camptown 'economy'.

The impact of continued U.S. military presence on everyday life in Korea, especially for women living in the camptown economy, appeared in postwar media such as *The Flower in Hell* (지옥화), a 1958 Korean film directed by Shin-Sang-ok.⁴⁷ The film was set directly after the war, and followed the story of Sonya, a camptown prostitute. In one scene of a base party, American soldiers ate, drank, and watched Korean women dance. At the same time, Koreans stole military supplies to sell outside. This contrast visually demonstrated how military bases concentrated goods, leisure, and security while Koreans living around them often lived through conditions of

⁴⁴ Woo, *Framed by War*, 18-22.

⁴⁵ Woo, *Framed by War*, 18-22.

⁴⁶ "Korean War," *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

⁴⁷ Sang-Ok Shin, dir., *지옥화(1958) / The Flower in Hell (Ji-ok-hwa)*, 1958, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CP5-eOOSCog>.

poverty.⁴⁸ In other words, the film showed the unstable nature of the Korean economy and society in the aftermath of the war. Sonya also reflected the structure of social inequality between Korean citizens and U.S. soldiers. As a camptown woman, she did not have a secure home or family and survived through sexualized labor. This contrasted with the promises of protection made by U.S. propaganda to protect and care for Korean women, as Sonya was shown as dependent and financially insecure. Sonya's lack of security demonstrated that intervention did not guarantee stabilization or protection of 'vulnerable' Korean women. Instead, foreign intervention helped sustain a postwar order characterized by exploitation.

The unequal postwar order also shaped the institutions through which Korean cinema represented U.S. military presence. After the Korean War, American cultural influence in Korea continued through film institutions as well as through official propaganda.⁴⁹ The Asia Foundation, which was later revealed to have received CIA funding, clandestinely supported anti-Communist motion-picture projects across Asia, including networks connected to Asia Pictures and the Korean Motion Picture Cultural Association. In Korea, this helped create a regional film network that promoted anti-Communist and pro-Western media production.⁵⁰ Dependent on U.S. support for reconstruction, the South Korean government also censored direct criticism. In that context, Dongyeon Koh argued that *The Flower in Hell* was not a direct critique of U.S. military presence, but a film that reflected the unequal postwar world formed around American military power and aid in Korea. Despite this, films such as *The Flower in Hell* and others produced in the following decades, such as the 1991 film *The Silver Stallion Will Never*

⁴⁸ Dongyeon Koh, "Representing American GIs in Postwar Korean Cinema: From *The Flower in Hell* (1958) to *Address Unknown* (2001)," *The Korean Journal of American History* 30 (2009): 147-175, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/363371822_Representing_American_GIs_in_Postwar_Korean_Cinema_From_The_Flower_in_Hell_1958_to_Address_Unknown2001.

⁴⁹ Sangjoon Lee, "Creating an Anti-Communist Motion Picture Producers' Network in Asia: The Asia Foundation, Asia Pictures, and the Korean Motion Picture Cultural Association," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 37, no. 3 (2016): 517-538, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01439685.2016.1157292>.

⁵⁰ Lee, "Creating an Anti-Communist," 517-538.

Return (은마는 오지 않는다) and 2001 film *Address Unknown* (수취인불명), served to expose the impacts of U.S. military presence on Korean civilians, camptown women, and the unequal postwar social order created around American bases.⁵¹

9. Conclusion

The media history of the Korean War cannot be separated from its gendered history. Wartime propaganda used Korean women to make foreign intervention seem necessary and humane, as vulnerable women made the moral case for a foreign military presence. However, women's actual wartime and postwar experiences were extremely different from those presented in propaganda: women were mobilized for labor, exposed to sexual violence from allied forces, and drawn into systems of regulated prostitution that long outlived the war. This disparity revealed the hypocrisy of U.S. foreign relations during the Cold War, in which self-interested national aims were disguised as moral obligations towards other countries. Propaganda representations of gender were central to the Korean War as women became a key medium through which intervention was understood. By the time the billions of leaflets had fallen across Korea, they had done more than spread information: they had made protection visible while obscuring the violence beneath it.

⁵¹ Koh, "Representing American," 147-175.

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