

# People's Tribunal on War Crimes by South Korean Troops during the Vietnam War

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It has been almost twenty years since allegations of war crimes committed by South Korean troops during the Vietnam War were first featured in South Korean media in the 1990s.<sup>1</sup> The public discussion that followed decades later was formed around the issue of “truth and reconciliation,”<sup>2</sup> which, reverberated around the 2018 People's Tribunal on War Crimes by South Korean Troops during the Vietnam War.



**South Korean soldiers in the Vietnam War**

A People's Tribunal was held between April 21 and 22, 2018 at the Oil Tank Culture Park in Seoul, in conjunction with an academic conference a day earlier organized around the theme of what it means to be a perpetrator of atrocities. In light of the fact that no meaningful action had been taken by the South Korean government in the past twenty years, the People's Tribunal aimed to re-publicize the issue of massacres committed by South Korean troops during the Vietnam War and to urge the South Korean government to take meaningful reparatory actions for the survivors in legal

terms. The year 2018 marked not only the 50th anniversary of massacres committed in Phong Nhị, Phong Nhất and Hà My hamlets of Vietnam, but also the 70th anniversary of the Jeju uprising, bolstering the felt necessity of coming to terms with the nation's unresolved past.

To contextualize the People's Tribunal and assess the significance of its contribution, this paper attempts to trace not only the course of the People's Tribunal but also the contours of academic literature and public discussion around South Korea's “Vietnam question”, leading up to the People's Tribunal. A small but significant step forward in grasping the full measure of this issue between the two nations, the People's Tribunal's accomplishment would not be properly appreciated without examining previous contributions on this subject.

## Publicization of the Vietnam Question in South Korea

South Korea's “Vietnam question”, like America's My Lai, was introduced to Western readers by Charles K. Armstrong's “America's Korea, Korea's Vietnam”<sup>3</sup> following reportage in South Korea led by the progressive daily newspaper *Hankyoreh* and its sister weekly *Hankyoreh 21*, which began treating this issue in 1999 drawing on the research of Ku Su-jeong<sup>4</sup>, a graduate student then writing a thesis on the South Korean legacy during the Vietnam War at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City. Initially, the *Hankyoreh* articles

drew primarily on official documents available in socialist Vietnam—to which even Ku and other Vietnamese scholars had very limited access, as her then-advisor Hà Minh Hồng testified<sup>5</sup>—complemented by eyewitness accounts of massacres from both Vietnam War veterans in South Korea and Vietnamese survivors. These were documented not only by *Hankyoreh* but also by a number of social activist groups—Nawauri being the best known.<sup>6</sup>

As many of their titles indicate, much of *Hankyoreh*'s work pertaining to the Vietnam question was done in the style of exposé. In the era when various projects under the banner of “truth and reconciliation” proliferated,<sup>7</sup> *Hankyoreh*'s approach seemed effective in attracting public attention to the Vietnam question. One of their most remarkable moments was in April 2000 when they published several articles based on the testimonies given by Kim Ki-tae, the former commander of the Seventh Company, Second Battalion, “Blue Dragon” ROK Marine Brigade. The report described how Kim, on November 15, 1966, oversaw the murder of twenty nine unarmed Vietnamese men, who, according to his testimony, probably “were just farmers”. It also reported that sixty eight residents, including women and children, of Binh Tai village in Phuoc Binh district were massacred on October 9, 1966.<sup>8</sup> Confirmed by *Hankyoreh*'s on-site investigation in Phuoc Binh, this report, according to Armstrong, was the “most sensational and extensively detailed,” a watershed moment that foresaw numerous similar testimonies from other veterans.<sup>9</sup>

Another momentous work, titled “Chamjadŏn chinshil 30nyŏnmane kkaeŏnada [Hidden Truth, Revealed at Last after 30 Years]”, was published in the 334th issue of *Hankyoreh* 21 on November 15, 2000. It was based on U.S. military reports declassified in June 2000 and made available at the National Archives at College Park, Maryland.<sup>10</sup> The reports contained

detailed accounts and, most importantly for *Hankyoreh*'s purpose, photographic documentation of the Phong Nhị and Phong Nhất massacres, collected and compiled by the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), Inspector General's Office. The reports provided some of the most compelling evidence of South Korean atrocities to date, along with the American Friends Service Committee's *America's Rented Troops: South Koreans in Vietnam*.<sup>11</sup> The cover image of the aforementioned issue of *Hankyoreh* 21 was a photograph of a dying Vietnamese victim who had her breasts cut out and was left to die after being shot by South Korean soldiers. In addition to the shocking visuals, the article presented a compelling account of how the South Korean marines swept through the hamlets killing seventy four women, children, and elders, as well as their livestock, and set their houses on fire. The article also revealed that William Westmoreland, the commanding officer of the Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV), forwarded the inquiry concerning the massacres to Chae Myung-shin, then-commander of ROK Forces in Vietnam, who responded with a report which concluded that the casualties were caused by “Viet Congs disguised in [ROK] camouflaged uniforms.”<sup>12</sup> Hard-pressed by the ostensible absurdity of this report and concrete evidence that suggested otherwise, Chae Myung-shin, who had remained silent to this point, agreed to an interview in which he admitted that he had received a letter from Westmoreland, but repeated the conclusion of his report.<sup>13</sup>

*Hankyoreh*'s extensive coverage, together with the efforts of various social activists who organized reconciliation campaigns and peace camps,<sup>14</sup> garnered not only public attention but scholarly interest as well. In disciplines ranging from anthropology, sociology and history to political science, both within and outside of South Korea, a number of scholars began addressing the issues. Detailed accounts of political and historical context were provided in

Han Hongkoo and Kwak Tae Yang's papers.<sup>15</sup> Of particular interest to the South Korean academic community, however, was the theme of contested memories concerning South Korean participation in the Vietnam War as taken up by numerous scholars including Park Tae Gyun, Shim Juhung and Yoon Chung Ro, especially given the fact that Vietnam War veterans themselves were unable to have their voice recorded until the South Korean military dictatorship came to an end in the early 90s.<sup>16</sup> Heonik Kwon, in his influential book *After the Massacre: Commemoration and Consolation in Ha Mi and My Lai*, wrote on the commemoration and the massacre that took place in Hà My hamlet, where, on February 25, 1968, ROK marines killed 135 women, children and elders, and bulldozed and burned their bodies.<sup>17</sup>

However, even to this date, no comprehensive investigation and analysis of the massacres has taken place. The South Korean Ministry of National Defense and the National Intelligence Service still refuse to allow researchers access to the relevant documents, making it virtually impossible for scholars or activists to fully document the massacre.<sup>18</sup> Unlike, for example, Bernd Greiner's *War Without Front: The USA in Vietnam*, which makes extensive use of various records, including the de-classified records of the Vietnam War Crimes Working Group, to produce a comprehensive and detailed account of the war crimes committed by U.S. troops during the Vietnam War<sup>19</sup>, much of the literature pertaining to the South Korean atrocities in Vietnam does not provide a comprehensive account of the subject, and instead covers specific topics such as the politics of memory around the wartime massacres.

## The People's Tribunal

The two consecutive conservative presidencies

from 2007 to 2016 saw the development of political tendencies that put aside the history of atrocities committed by the authoritarian and colonial regimes while highlighting South Korea's linear developmentalist narrative. These tendencies to erase "unpleasant" history from the public memory were best exemplified by the issue of history textbook selection, in which both the Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye administrations produced a revised Korean history textbook by a conservative New Right organization and pressured school principals to adopt the textbook.<sup>20</sup> The issue of South Korean atrocities during the Vietnam War was nowhere to be found in the new textbooks, or in the permanent exhibitions on South Korean participation in the Vietnam War at the National Museum of Korean Contemporary History or the War Memorial of Korea. Only the economic gains from the war and sentimental aspects of Korean participation were emphasized.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, according to the list compiled by Lawyers for a Democratic Society (Minbyun) on Korean public media pertaining to South Korean atrocities in Vietnam, the number dwindled significantly after 2007, indeed, no such article was published between June 2007 and September 2013.<sup>22</sup>

In spite of the unfavorable political climate, several members of Minbyun's Asian Human Rights Team participated in the 2015 Korea-Vietnam peace camp led by Ku Su-jeong, after which they proposed to Minbyun a project to demand a thorough investigation and proper reparations from the South Korean government. After over a year of gathering materials, holding seminars and conducting site visits, Minbyun held a tribunal, in collaboration with the Korea-Vietnam Peace Foundation, where Ku Su-jeong was a board member, and Medics for Vietnam and Peace, a non-profit organization that has provided dental and traditional Korean medicinal treatment in areas affected by the Vietnam War since 2001. They organized a preparatory committee and began recruiting participants.

Although not legally binding, tribunals are a format frequently employed by social activist groups in South Korea to publicize important social and political issues. While examples range from the 2002 Tribunal on Chosun Daily's Anti-Reunification Activities and 2004 Tribunal on Chosen Daily's Collaborationist Activities to a 2004 Tribunal on Bush-Blair-Roh's War Crimes in Iraq, the Minbyun members were particularly inspired by the Women's International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan's Military Sexual Slavery held in Tokyo between December 8 and 12, 200. During the presentation by the preparatory committee on September 22, 2017, the presenter from Minbyun highlighted the facts that (1) the Women's International War Crimes Tribunal was held for the sake of the victims; (2) the final judgment was completely up to the judges; (3) the tribunal's format and procedures adhered as strictly as possible to that of an actual trial; and (4) it maintained a very high standard for the quality of final statement, as the organizers hoped that it would be widely cited in international law.<sup>23</sup> To meet these conditions, the preparatory committee undertook an extensive legal examination of the existing evidence as well as acquisition of new evidence, following the approach of the Women's International War Crimes Tribunal that had an investigation team collecting and discovering relevant materials, which were then sorted out by the legal team.

As the investigation team was being recruited, the committee, which was restructured into the executive committee of the People's Tribunal, consisting of legal, IR and PR teams, decided to focus exclusively on the two cases on which substantial resources were publicly available: the Phong Nhị and Phong Nhất massacre, and the Hà My massacre. These resources were waiting to be assessed in terms of legal validity. Furthermore, Ku and her fellow activists had already built strong relations with the surviving villagers. As for Hà My, the same applied in terms of Ku's fieldwork, and the incident has

received a fair amount of academic treatment.<sup>24</sup> In June 2017 and February 2018 the committee organized on-site investigations at Phong Nhị, Phong Nhất and Hà My hamlets to secure plaintiffs for the People's Tribunal and to cross-check testimonies from the survivors to ensure their legal efficacy.

The investigation team for the People's Tribunal was recruited around November 2017. An interesting feature of the team is that it consisted mainly of young researchers and activists who had experience in working on "comfort women" issues. Consequently, most of them were familiar with the limits of relying on legal approaches that inevitably emphasized structural state-level violence and exploitation of the "comfort women" by downplaying their individual agency.<sup>25</sup> The People's Tribunal was held in conjunction with the academic conference.

The People's Tribunal was held on April 21 and 22, 2018 as a civil court in which the plaintiffs and their legal representatives filed a state compensation suit—albeit non-binding—against the South Korean government.<sup>26</sup> The plaintiffs were two survivors who, coincidentally, were both named Nguyễn Thị Thành. Nguyễn Thị Thành from Phong Nhị was eight years old at the time of the massacre, where she received a bullet wound in her lower abdomen and lost her family members. The other Nguyễn Thị Thành was ten years old at the time of the Hà My massacre. Her left leg and ear were injured and she also lost her family. Their live testimonies in Vietnamese, often emotional and heartbreaking, were translated by the tribunal interpreter, who at times could not help shedding tears. The testimonies of other survivors who could not make it to Seoul were presented as video clips, including one given by a former ROK marine who witnessed the Phong Nhị and Phong Nhất massacre. The judges were Kim Young-ran, a former Supreme Court Justice, Yang Hyunah, a former prosecutor of the North-South Korea joint team



at the International Women's Tribunal, and Lee Seog-tae, a current Justice of the Constitutional Court. On April 22, the judges pronounced the final judgment in which they demanded that the South Korean government compensate for the plaintiffs' losses, launch an investigation into South Korean atrocities committed between 1964 and 1973, and correct all forms of public memorial pertaining to South Korean participation in the Vietnam War, especially the exhibition at the War Memorial of Korea.

## Aftermath

Despite lacking legal authority, the People's Tribunal garnered public attention, its proceedings and findings being covered by almost all of the major Korean TV channels including KBS, SBS, MBC, JTBC, YTN, as well as news outlets, both digital and print, such as *Hankyoreh*, *Kyunghyang*, *Pressian*, *Sisain* and *Ohmynews*. *Ohmynews* live-streamed the entire tribunal online.

The People's Tribunal was most significant in launching a series of legal battles that could prompt governmental actions to expand the scope of further research and legal actions. These two—further research and legal battles—are inseparable, especially since the validity and the quantity of evidence provided at the People's Tribunal still seemed insufficient for winning an actual trial. Most important was the testimony from eyewitnesses and victims of the Phong Nhị and Phong Nhất massacres, which illuminated the South Korean documents, especially the heavily censored classified reports of the Korean Central Intelligence Agency in 1969.<sup>27</sup> The ongoing legal battles for information disclosure against the Ministry of National Defense and National Intelligence Service, made possible by the publicity from the People's Tribunal, opens the possibility for further research whose scope and size might be comparable to that of the scholarship on the My Lai massacre.

To that end, it is unfortunate that no funds were allotted for research trips to the National Archive at College Park, Maryland, even though the investigation team contacted some researchers there. Furthermore, interaction was rare between the investigation team's young members and the senior members who started the movement in South Korea in the late 90s. As a result, not much significant commentary or assessment of information secured in the early phase of researching the "Vietnam question" was transmitted. Rather, the investigation team spent most of its time and resources re-analyzing the existing data.

The lack of interaction between the Tribunal's new investigators and their predecessors led to an interesting divide. As the title of the conference suggested, the investigation team focused on a very different set of problems than that of their predecessors, whose contributions relied mostly on sensationalism and style of exposé. Pivoting on the theme of what it means to be the perpetrator, Fujii introduced the case of the Association of Returnees from China to Japan as a possibility that the South Korean people as "perpetrators" could learn from in their lifelong efforts to make known the nature of Japanese military atrocities in the years 1931-45.<sup>28</sup> Interestingly, whereas people in the 2000s often invoked the Nogunri massacre by US forces during the Korean War,<sup>29</sup> a number of people who attended the conference alluded more frequently to the "comfort women" issue when they tried to relate to the issue of South Korean atrocities in Vietnam. The collective experience of coming to terms with the nation's colonial and authoritarian past developed in interesting ways.

In Shim's presentation on Vietnam's post-war generations and their "memory-scape" of the war, I was reminded of the lack of interaction between South Korean and Vietnamese activists<sup>30</sup> when he pointed to the dangers in approaching the issue of South Korean atrocities without considering the

contemporary nature of Vietnamese society and the radical changes that have occurred over the past fifty years. Without proper understanding of how this issue may be addressed in contemporary Vietnamese society, the movement in South Korea runs the risk of becoming ineffective and self-serving, given the Vietnamese public's very limited exposure to the issue and the divided nature of "memory-scape" of the Vietnam War among different regions and age groups in Vietnam and the Vietnamese diaspora.<sup>31</sup>

In spite of all the Tribunal's shortcomings, the sentencing statement, pronounced by Kim Young-ran, can serve as a crucial reference point for further discussion, and also an important contribution to Minbyun's agenda to file a legally binding lawsuit against the South Korean government on behalf of the survivors. As the tribunal's organizers seek to compel the South Korean government to declassify NIS documents and form an official task force to investigate the matter, the truth and reconciliation efforts into South Korea's "Vietnam question" seem to have just begun.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Voice of the People*, July 1990, 92-99; *Chosen Monthly*, April 1 1992.

<sup>2</sup> The year 2000 saw a proliferation of truth and reconciliation committees attempting to confront and investigate the atrocities committed by various governmental agencies during the colonial era and authoritarian rule such as the Nogunri massacre, the Jeju uprising, the Gwangju Democratic Movement and the “comfort women” issue, culminating in the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2005. See Jae-Jung Suh, “Truth and Reconciliation in South Korea: Confronting War, Colonialism, and Interventions in the Asia-Pacific,” in *Truth and Reconciliation in South Korea: Between the Present and Future of the Korean Wars*, ed. Jae-Jung Suh (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2012), 7-8, especially footnote 15. Unfortunately, these efforts were weakened during Lee Myung-bak's presidency, between 2007 and 2012. See Yeon Cheol Seong, “[Shinjiho ũiwŏn t'rkwagŏsawi t'ongt'pp'yehapt' pŏban parŭi](#)[Shin Ji-ho Proposes Bill to Merge Truth-finding Commissions into One],” *Hankyoreh Sinmun*, November 20, 2008. Shin Ji-ho was a lawmaker from the conservative Grand National Party.

<sup>3</sup> Charles K. Armstrong, “America's Korea, Korea's Vietnam,” *Critical Asian Studies* 33, no. 4 (2001): 527-540. Armstrong's article focused on the emerging public debate around the issue of war crimes committed by the South Korean troops during the Vietnam War. For earlier work on the issue prior to the formation of public discussion in South Korea, see Frank Baldwin, Diane Jones, and Michael Jones, *America's Rented Troops: South Koreans in Vietnam* (American Friends Service Committee, 1975).

<sup>4</sup> Ku then began working as a *Hankyoreh* special correspondent. Three of her articles were published in *Hankyoreh* 21 on September 2, 1999. On the history of *Hankyoreh* and a detailed account of its role in publicizing South Korea's Vietnam question, see Armstrong, “America's Korea, Korea's Vietnam,” 529, 536-7.

<sup>5</sup> See Minh Hồng Hà, “Nogŭlliŭi kiŏgesŏ pet'ŭnam chŏnjaengŭi chinshirŭl saenggak'ada [Contemplating the Truth of the Vietnam War in the Memory of Nogunri],” (presentation, People's Tribunal on War Crimes by South Korean Troops during the Vietnam War Conference, Seoul, South Korea, April 20, 2018).

<sup>6</sup> For detailed information on Nawauri, see Thomas Kern and Sang-hui Nam, “The Korean Comfort Women Movement and the Formation of a Public Sphere in East Asia,” in *Korea Yearbook (2009): Politics, Economy and Society*, ed. Rüdiger Frank, Jim Hoare, Patrick Kölner, and Susan Pares (Brill, 2009), 227-256.

<sup>7</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission, proliferation of literature pertaining to Nogunri, and the Comfort Women issue. See Dong-Choon Kim, “[The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Korea: Uncovering the Hidden Korean War](#),” *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, Vol. 8 Issue 9 No. 5, March 1, 2010. Also, see footnote 2 in Hyun Sook Kim, “Korea's “Vietnam Question”: War



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<sup>8</sup> *Hankyoreh Sinmun*, April 19, 2000, 1; *Hankyoreh* 21, April 27, 2000, 34-37.

<sup>9</sup> See Kyoung Tae Koh, "Haksarül charanghal ttae kyöndil su öpsötta [I Couldn't Bear It When They Bragged About Massacres]," *Hankyoreh* 21, May 11 2000, and Hwang, Sang Chul, "Han k'illöjungdaewönüi ch'amhoe[Confession from One Killer Company Veteran]," *Hankyoreh* 21, June 1, 2000.

<sup>10</sup> Kyoung Tae Koh, "Chamjadön chinshil 30nyönmane kkaeönada," *Hankyoreh* 21, November 15, 2000.

<sup>11</sup> Frank Baldwin, Diane Jones, and Michael Jones. *America's Rented Troops: South Koreans in Vietnam*, (American Friends Service Committee, 1975).

<sup>12</sup> Koh, "Chamjadön chinshil."

<sup>13</sup> Chang Suk Kim, "Han'gukkundo mani tanghaetta [South Korean Soldiers Too Had Their Share]," *Hankyoreh* 21, November 15, 2000.

<sup>14</sup> Examples range from the activities of the I'm Sorry Vietnam movement and the Truth Commission on Civilian Massacres during the Vietnam War to peace camps and exchange programs organized by NawaUri. For detailed assessment of their contribution, see Chung Ro Yoon, "Han'gugüi pet'ünamjönjaeng kiögüi pyönhwawa chaegusöng—1999nyön [han'györe21]k'aemp'ei'gwa kü ihu pyönhwarül chungshimüro [Changes and Reconstruction with the Vietnam War's Memories of Korea: Focused on the Changes with the Campaign of *Hangyere* 21 since 1999]," *Sahoewa yöksa* 105 (2015): 7-40.

<sup>15</sup> See Hongkoo Han, "Han'gukkwa pet'ünamjönjaeng [South Korea and the Vietnam War]," *Naeirül yönün yöksa* 4 (2001. 1): 115-126, and Tae Yang Kwak, "The Anvil of War: The Legacies of Korean Participation in the Vietnam War," PhD diss. (Harvard University, 2006).

<sup>16</sup> See Tae Gyun Park, "Han'gukkunüi pet'ünam ch'amjön [Between Memory and Oblivion: The Dispatch of Korean Combat Troops to Vietnam]" *Yöksabip'yöng* 80 (2007. 8): 288-311; Juhyung Shim, "Pet'ünamjön ch'amjöne taehan kiögüi chöngch'i [The Politics of Memory Surrounding the Participation in the Vietnam War]." Master's thesis (Seoul National University, 2003); and Yoon, "Pet'ünamjönjaeng ch'amjön'guninüi chip'apchök chöngch'esöng hyöngsönggwa chibae ideollogiüi chaesaengsan [Reproduction of the Ruling Ideology and Formation of the Vietnam Veterans' Collective Identities]," *Kyöngjewasahoe* 76 (2007): 196-221, and "Kusurül t'onghae pon pet'ünamjönjaeng -ch'amjön'guninüi chönjaeng kyönghömgwa kiökül chungshimüro- [Vietnam War in Oral Testimonies—Focused on the Experiences and Memories of the War with Veterans]," *Sahoegwahakyön'gu* 17 (2009. 1): 228-263.

<sup>17</sup> Heonik Kwon, *After the Massacre: Commemoration and Consolation in Ha My and My Lai*, (Univ of California Press, 2006), and "[Anatomy of US and South Korean Massacres in the Vietnamese Year of the Monkey, 1968](#)," *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, Vol. 5, Issue 6 (June 4, 2007).

<sup>18</sup> Minbyun initiated a legal battle for access to material on Korean atrocities in Vietnam, against the National Intelligence Service, based on the Information Disclosure Act, and won the initial case in July 2018 and the appeal in November 2018. After the second loss, the NIS again refused to open access to these materials on the basis that they contain personal information.

<sup>19</sup> Bernd Greiner, *War without Fronts: the USA in Vietnam* (Random House, 2010).

<sup>20</sup> See Bruce Cumings, interview by *Hankyoreh*, “[Lee Administration is Trying to ‘Bury All the New History We Have Learned: Bruce Cumings.’](#)” November 26, 2008; and Sang-Hun Choe, “[South Korea’s New Leader Abolishes State-Issued History Textbooks](#)”, *The New York Times*, May 12, 2017. These attempts to suppress information were halted when the Democratic Party seized power with the election of Moon Jae-in in 2017.

<sup>21</sup> See Aram Kim, “Sŏngjangshinhwae kach'in pangmulgwan—che3, 4chŏnshishil(1961nyŏn ihu) [Museum Caught in the Developmentalist Myth—The Exhibition Room 3 and 4 (After 1961)],” *Yŏksabip’yŏng* 104 (2013): 174-192, and the War Memorial of Korea’s special exhibition on overseas deployment.

<sup>22</sup> This is based on the unpublished archive produced by Minbyun’s Vietnam War Study Group, which contains a list of articles published in South Korea on the subject of civilian massacres during the Vietnam War.

<sup>23</sup> For a detailed account of the Women’s International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan’s Military Sexual Slavery, see Rumi Sakamoto, “The Women’s International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan’s Military Sexual Slavery: A Legal and Feminist Approach to the ‘Comfort Women’ Issue.” *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies* 3, no. 1 (2001): 49-58.

<sup>24</sup> For example, Kim, “Korea’s ‘Vietnam Question,’” pp. 623-7; Kwon, *After the Massacre*, pp. 28-59, and Yoon, “Han’gugŭi pet’ŭnamjŏnjaeng kinyŏmgwa kiŏgŭi chŏngch’i [The Politics of Memory and Commemoration of the Vietnam War in Korea],” *Society and History* 86, (2010): 161-8.

<sup>25</sup> For further discussion on the “comfort women” issue of the Japanese imperial army, see Hyunah Yang, “Chŭngŏn’gwa yŏksassŭgi—han’gugin ’kun wianbu’ŭi chuch’esŏng chaehyŏn [Testimony and Writing History: Representing the Subjectivity of Korean ‘Military Comfort Women’],” *Sahoewa yŏksa* 60 (2001. 12): 60-96. Yang also participated as a judge for the Tribunal.

<sup>26</sup> A civil court is rare among tribunals, most of which have adopted the format of a criminal court. Minbyun chose this route because it considered the People’s Tribunal a preparatory step to filing an actual state compensation lawsuit against the South Korean government in the near future.

<sup>27</sup> These types of legal battles to gain access to the Vietnam War crime documents would be crucial not only in Korea but also in the U.S. and Vietnam. For example, in 1969, the Pentagon set up a task force named Vietnam War Crimes Working Group in the wake of My Lai Massacre, which produced “Pentagon’s institutional memory for all war-crime matters” in Vietnam during its four-year activity. These documents were relocated to the public shelves at the National Archive in 1994, but a substantial portion of them became reclassified or were blocked for containing personal information in 2002, before which Nick Turse managed to copy about one third of the whole document and used the material to show how extensive the atrocities were. See Greiner, *War without Fronts*, 11, and Nick Turse, “[A My Lai a Month: How the US Fought the Vietnam War](#),” *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, Vol. 6 Issue 11 (November 1, 2008).

<sup>28</sup> Takeshi Fujii, “Kahae kyŏnghŏmŭl marhandanŭn kŏt: ilbon chunggukkwihwanjayŏllak’oeŭi sarye [Speaking the Experience of the Perpetrator: the Case of Japan’s Association of Returnees from China],” (presentation, the People’s Tribunal on War Crimes by South Korean Troops during the Vietnam War Conference, Seoul, South Korea, April 20, 2018). The Association of Returnees from China, or *Chŭgoku kikansha renrakukai*, consisted of former

Japanese soldiers and officers who were captured in China during WWII and, after re-education, were freed and sent back to Japan after the war. Over subsequent decades, these men gave testimony about their experience of witnessing and committing war crimes such as the Nanjing Massacre and the “comfort women”, criticized Japanese right-wing nationalists and colonial apologists, and created a museum documenting atrocities. For another case in which Japanese people tried to come to terms with their colonial atrocity known as the Hanaoka Incident, see Richard Minear and Franziska Seraphim, “[Hanaoka Monogatari: The Massacre of Chinese Forced Laborers, Summer 1945](#),” *The Asia Pacific Journal*, Vol. 13 Issue 25 (June 29, 2015).

<sup>29</sup> Even Hà Minh Hồng reflected on Nogunri in his opening statement of the conference, “Nogŭlliŭi kiögesö pet’ŭnam.”

<sup>30</sup> In fact, one of the gravest shortcomings of the movement in South Korea has been an utter lack of exchange with any Vietnamese organization formed around this issue, let alone those from the Vietnamese diaspora. Another limitation of the investigation team was that not a single member of the team was fluent in Vietnamese.

<sup>31</sup> Shim, “Pet’ŭnam chŏnjaengŭi tongshidaesöng: pet’ŭnam saeroun sedaeŭi chŏnjaenggiöök [The Contemporaneity of the ‘Vietnam War’: the New Generation’s Memory of War in Vietnam],” (presentation, the People’s Tribunal on War Crimes by South Korean Troops during the Vietnam War Conference, Seoul, South Korea, April 20, 2018).