

THE ISSUE OF "MILITARY COMFORT WOMEN"
AND DEMOCRATIZATION OF ASIA

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To be honest, I find it rather difficult to speak before you. Because I am a man and I am from Japan, a country which has recently been attacked by the international community for what it has done in the past.

The entire responsibility for the creation of "military comfort women" in the number of ~~ten~~¹⁰⁰ or ~~twenty~~²⁰⁰ thousands rested on the Japanese government and military then. It is a gross violation of human rights, and the victims still legally hold the right to receive reparation and compensation.

This is the conclusion drawn from all the related documents found, many testimonies recently made by the victims, and the legal analysis.

Although the Japanese government is being pressured to accept the conclusion from both the outside and the inside the country, it has only been desperately seeking a way to settle the matter with as much limited amount of money as possible. With this intention, the government has tried to have backstage dealings with the governments of the victims.

Such an attitude of the Japanese government apparently seems to be unfair to the people in other countries, and the government is certainly being driven into a corner. However, it is regrettable that majority of Japanese people take the same stand as that of the government. Therefore, I think there will be no solution to the problem of "military comfort women" unless we answer the question of what is making such an attitude to prevail in Japan, and find a way to defeat it.

Only after the World War II, the system to guarantee democracy and human rights was established in Japan, though not efficiently. Following the model of Western imperialism in a worse fashion, Japan invaded Asian countries and committed the collective and systematic violation of human rights along with Germany, resulting in the world's worst crime. I am sure that you have known some of the horrible crimes done by the Japanese military. These include: the forcible hauling or forced labor of over one million people in Asia including the "military comfort women"; massacres in many places including the notorious Nanking Massacre in which 300,000 Chinese were killed; experiments on human bodies done by the 731st Unit in collaboration with the Japanese medical society; use of toxic gas and chemical weapon in the battle. For your information, briefing paper on the 731st Unit is attached. The issue of "military comfort women" is a part of these crimes.

Nevertheless, most of the crimes were not brought to the Tokyo Tribunal held by the Allied Nations right after the World War II. Certainly, 7 Japanese military officers were sentenced to death, and 16 were given life-sentences at the Tribunal for the charges of abusing the prisoners of war of the Allied Powers or starting the war. However, the Tribunal ended with little question on "the crime against humanity" because of the two main reasons: for the convenience of the Far-East strategy of the U.S.A. which initiated the Tribunal; no important seats in the Tribunal given to the Asian countries whose nationals were seriously violated of their human rights. In this light, there should be a clear distinction between the Tokyo Tribunal and the Nurnberg Tribunal where the similar kind of crime was judged, though not quite satisfactorily, opening the possibilities for the victims to claim reparation and compensation.

However, there is one notable exception in the Tokyo Tribunal. The cases of gross human rights violation committed on the Western people were judged at the tribunal as the B- and C-class war crimes, and those responsible were closely examined and given maximum sentences. These include; the case of Dutch "military comfort women"; the case of the medical experimentation using the American p.o.w.s; and the case of the forced labor of the p.o.w.s of the Allied Powers at the construction site of Thaimen Railway between Thailand and Burma. However, the Allied Powers never brought charges of war crimes committed by Japan on the Asian people to the Tribunal, while they knew the number of the Asian victims was hundred or thousand times larger than those Western victims.

After the War, Asian victims of gross human rights violations have asked their home governments and the Japanese government for just and due treatment to the damage they suffered at every opportunity they had. But, all efforts turned out to be fruitless, since there were no democratic systems established in the political structures of these countries. To make the matters worse, the Japanese government offered these governments war reparation in the forms of not only money but also manufacturing plants, ships, bridges, or roads, and helped sustain its control over the countries. On the contrary, no consideration was given to the individual victims who are to be compensated. Absence of democracy and human rights in Asia placed the victims in the worst condition without guarantee of the rights.

However, the tide of democratization cannot be stopped. In the past few years, we have seen Asian victims accusing the Japanese government, spurred by the development of democracy in their home countries. Before, they were not even allowed to leave the country under the state control, but after the collapse of such a system, they finally became able to do so. Victims have started to come to Japan with their resentments that had been kept in their hearts for nearly 50 years. In the form of lawsuit, they are now filing their complains to the Japanese government as well as the Japanese public which has tacitly supported the attitude of the government.

Meanwhile, Japan which was not questioned of its crimes against Asian people sees the unfavorable outcomes today. With no recognition of creation of the "military comfort women" as a crime, the tendency to tolerate the trade of Asian women as sex slaves has still existed. Even today, many Japanese men go to Asia to buy Asian women. The violation of human rights of the Asian women who are traded to Japan as sex slaves are neglected. At the leading medical institutes in Japan, there are professors or researchers who have never accused of their participation in the experimentation on the living Asian persons at the 731st Unit or other occasions. This tolerance has kept a hotbed of corruption in the medical society in Japan. Also, with the recent decision to send the Self-Defence Force to the U.N. Peace Keeping Operation, the aggressive nature of Japan toward the Asia is rising again.

However, examination into the past is gradually starting in the Japanese society. People have started to realize the gross human rights violation done on the Asian people and the necessity to duly compensate them if we really want to change our society. As a result of this development, in December last year, the "International Public Hearing Concerning Post-War Compensation of Japan" was held in Tokyo. To the Hearing, Prof. Theo van Boven, the special rapporteur of the U.N. Sub Commission on Human Rights, and other prominent members of the U.N. NGOs were invited, and from the Asian countries, former "military comfort women" and researchers were invited.

In a sense, this project indicated a small progress of democracy in Japan. The Japanese government has never given sincere response to the complains from the Asian victims, and tried to settle the problem secretly. Concerned over the government's attitude and following the conscience, historians and jurists in Japan worked together on the project to say "no" to the government and to find out the actions to be taken for the Asian victims including the victims of the "military comfort women." While there was no attempt to hold a hearing in the government nor in the Diet, the "International Public Hearing" was realized by the citizens. Many Japanese citizens contributed financial support to the Hearing.

The Hearing was very successful. In addition to the former "military comfort women" from 6 different countries, the victims of forced labor and the researchers also participated and provided us with much valuable information which can be distributed to the inside and outside the country. I have the report and video of the public hearing with me today. In these materials, you will find the best and up-dated information on the issue of "military comfort women" and the post-war treatment of Japan.

After the public hearing, we decided to establish the "Information Center of Japan's War Responsibility" to continue and develop our work with the purposes of collecting documents and testimonies, accumulating the reports of historical and judicial study, and providing them to the U.N, the Diet, the

court, the mass-media, and the educational institutes. This indicates a move in Japan toward conviction of the war crimes and fulfillment of its responsibility. Many young people have willingly offered their voluntary service to the Center showing that among the Japanese, especially among the youth, the awareness is gradually rising.

We are now requesting the government to include the experts of the history and the law into the official fact-finding mission on the issue of "military comfort women." As there is no law to guarantee the freedom of information in Japan, access to the official information on the issue is totally left to the discretion of the government which naturally does not disclose the secret information that works disadvantageously to them. In fact, whilst the government has never taken the matter sincerely and seriously, many official documents relating to the issue have been successively found by others even in the places where the government claimed that they had searched.

At the Center, we have been reviewing the available documents to discover as much information as possible. For this, a joint project with Korean researchers is being planned. We intend to expand this joint project in the whole Asia.

We also appeal to the Japanese government and other concerned governments to pay respect to our research work, participate in the research, accept whatever conclusion that will be made, and use it as the basis of their policy-making.

The attempt to solve the problem of Japan's post-war treatment including the issue of "military comfort women" means an attempt to overcome the limitations of the Tokyo Tribunal. In other words, those who are responsible for the gross violation of human rights should be punished, while providing the victims with reparation and compensation. In order to realize this, we request the Western countries to discard the double standards on the human rights that they held at the Tokyo Tribunal and to respect the human rights of the Asian victims in the same way as they do for the Western people. Secondly, we encourage the Asian people to actively participate in the second Tokyo Tribunal, that has virtually started with the voices raised by the Asian victims. For this, further development of democracy and promotion of the human rights in the Asian countries are essential.

Solution to the "military comfort women" issue relies on the establishment of democracy and human rights in every nation in the world.