

The Politics of Redress for the “Comfort Women” Issue: What Did the Asian Women’s Fund Do in Reality?

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The “comfort women” survivors have demanded official apology and national compensation by the Japanese government for the damage from being forced into sexual slavery for the Imperial Japanese Army since the 1990s. However, these demands have not been realized so far. The purpose of this study is to analyze approaches to resolving this issue, examining the reasons why the Japanese government has failed, focusing on activities of the Asian Women’s Fund (AWF) to offer the survivors donation from Japanese citizens instead of national compensation from 1995 to 2007. By analyzing the responses of the survivors to the AWF, this study found that the decision of whether or not to receive it depended on each survivor’s situation that varied by country, society, family relations, or damage situation when they were forced to be “comfort women” during a war. That is to say, not every woman made a decision based on personal choice. Based on these findings, this study suggests that future approaches need to acknowledge injustice that the survivors had experienced, to formulate policies based on their needs, to involve them in the policy process, and to consider their continued suffering up until today from the perspective of post-colonialism.

Keywords: “comfort women” issue, post-war compensation, gender, violence against women, Japan

Introduction*

A Korean survivor said at a rally on the “comfort women” issue held in Japan,

A lot of tears flow and my throat hurts because I have so many *han* (bitterness). I do not understand why the Japanese government has put off resolving this issue even though you (supporters) as Japanese have worked on the issue for us with difficulty. (Kan, 2011, p. 115)

We can see, as suggested in this extract, how exasperated and tired these survivors are due to the attitude of the Japanese government and society toward the “comfort women” not having changed.

There has been tension over this issue for years between Japan and Korea. Korea’s president, Park Geun-hye, has placed a high priority on resolving this issue in diplomatic relations with Japan. However, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who justifies aggression against other Asian countries and the colonization of Korea, has not attempted to resolve the issue, although the survivors have continued to die one after the other¹. What is even worse, the circumstances in Japan surrounding the issue have deteriorated, becoming intertwined with

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¹ The number of survivors certified as “comfort women” by the government in Korea was 48 in July 2015 (Heo, 2015).

other controversial issues between Japan and Korea, for example, the issue of forced labor during World War II, territorial matters, and cultural heritage related to history. It seems to me that the survivors have been left behind in the situation that exists today.

The Japanese government has insisted that the “Government of Japan, with a view to fulfilling its moral responsibility, provided all possible assistance for the AWF” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2015, para. 2). However, the fact that the issue is currently still contested means that the AWF did not achieve a solution. This poses the question, what did the fund do? The AWF, which existed from 1995 to 2007, implemented the “Atonement Project” as follows: (1) It provided the survivors with “atonement money” instead of national compensation, which was two million yen per person and which was donated by the Japanese people; (2) It sponsored a “medical and welfare support project”, which was the equivalent of three million yen per recipient and which was funded by the government; (3) It delivered a letter to the survivors from the Japanese prime minister and the president of the fund in which the Japanese government stated that it recognized its “moral responsibility”, not “legal responsibility”, for establishing the “comfort women” system and for violating for the human rights of many women and girls during the war.

The survivors and movements that have demanded an official apology and national compensation by the Japanese government for the damage these women experienced from being forced into sexual slavery for benefit of the Imperial Japanese Army have appropriately criticized the AWF because they maintain that the government has avoided its responsibility. They believed the fund could not restore their dignity. However, 364 former “comfort women” accepted the “Atonement Project” of the AWF. Next, the question to be considered is why the fund was established even though the survivors opposed the idea strongly, and how the fund was perceived by both the survivors who refused and those who accepted the fund’s project. Moreover, what about the “resolution” of this issue?

This study aims to analyze approaches to resolve this issue by examining the AWF’s actions. This study shows that the AWF did not have a perspective of providing “redress”, which means providing compensation by acknowledging the injustice that the survivors experienced. This study divides the process that took place from the establishment to the dissolution of the AWF into three periods to clarify the politics of the stakeholders on this issue, that is to say, the period leading to the establishment of the fund, the period of implementation of the project by the fund, and the post-AWF period.

In the next section, this study reviews existing studies on reparations for the survivors of violence against women in armed conflict. Based on the insights gained from them, this study then examines the AWF, focusing on the three periods mentioned above. Finally, this study extracts a lesson from the efforts of the fund to render justice to the few surviving victims among the “comfort women”.

Reparations for the Survivors of Violence Against Women in Armed Conflict

Violence against women, which has been treated as “personal” matter, emerged as a common issue for international society during the United Nations Decade for Women (1976-1985). In particular, violence against women in armed conflict became an important theme in both academia and feminist movements starting in the 1990s because of the “comfort women” issue (Inose, 2007). In feminist legal studies, Gardam and Jarvis (2001) indicated that international humanitarian law that is centered on the Geneva Convention (1949) has not focused on women’s experience in armed conflict. They criticized this form of law for establishing rules on the

“special” protection of women, but simultaneously reproducing gender and enhancing the stereotypical image of women as characterized by “weakness”, “modesty”, “pregnancy”, and “childbirth” (Gardam & Jarvis, 2001).

Radhika Coomaraswamy (1998), as UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes, and consequences, and Gay J. McDougall (1998), as UN Special Rapporteur on the issue of systematic rape and sexual slavery practices in armed conflict, also observed, from the perspective of a feminist international legal approach, that the Geneva Convention defined rape not as a war crime but as injuring “honor”, which did not mean women’s honor but men’s. This criticism produced, consequently, an explicit provision recognizing sexual and gender-based crimes as war crimes or crimes against humanity in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

The subject of reparations has been researched since the 1990s. For example, Theo van Boven has comprehensively studied reparations for victims of gross violations of human rights. He proposed forms of restitution such as material compensation, verification of the facts and full and public disclosure of the truth, apology, the bringing to justice of the persons responsible for the violation (Theo van Boven, 1993). Studies on reparations for the victims of violence against women in armed conflict, especially rape, have likewise employed this guideline by Boven. Coomaraswamy (1998) emphasized the necessity of punishment, saying, “By using the honor paradigm, linked as it is to concepts of chastity, purity, and virginity, stereotypical concepts of femininity have been formally enshrined in humanitarian law. Thus, criminal sexual assault, in both national and international law, is linked to the morality of the victim” (Coomaraswamy, 1998). Therefore, she insisted on the end of impunity for perpetrators of rape in armed conflict. In the addendum report on the “comfort women” issue submitted to the Commission on Human Rights in 1996, she recommended that the Japanese government acknowledge that it had violated its obligations under international law, accept legal responsibility for that violation, pay compensation, disclose documents and materials on this issue, issue a public apology, raise awareness on this subject, and identify and punish the perpetrators involved in the “comfort women” system (Coomaraswamy, 1996).

As mentioned above, material compensation is only one form of reparations, although it is definitely important for the survivors, who were deprived of an economic basis due to the violence perpetrated against them. However, placing great emphasis on compensation can lead to critical problems. Walker made several important statements concerning reparations for massive human rights violations. She indicated that it has been recognized generally that reparations do not only comprise material compensation. Compensation is subject to implementation from the perspective of not “justice” but rather “charity” or “tolerance”. She said that when the person responsible for the act of injustice provides compensation out of a sense not of an obligation to justice but out of charity, it is not atonement. Worse still, it may be regarded as an insult (Walker, 2010, pp. 17-18).

Minow also considered the downside of compensation: “Money remains incommensurable with what was lost. Even as an ideal, and certainly in practice, reparations fall short of repairing victims or social relationships after violence. This inevitable shortfall makes me wonder about the assumption that the most obvious need of victims is for compensation” (Minow, 1998, p. 103). Saying “no market measures exist for the value of living an ordinary life, without nightmares or survivor guilt” (Minow, 1998, p. 103), Minow referred to the AWF as a case in which “a sense of inappropriateness of putting a value on losses from mass atrocity may lead some to resist the exercise” (Minow, 1998, pp. 104-105).

Considering the limitations of compensation, then, as a symbolic dimension of reparations, acknowledgment by the public becomes important. Nishino discussed the need for a perspective on “redress”, citing the example of the US internment of Japanese Americans during World War II (Nishino, 2013). The redress for Japanese Americans was characterized by the US government’s acknowledging its mistake in relocating them through providing compensation (Tsuchida, 2006). Nishino likewise indicated that in the case of the “comfort women”, it was impossible to restore the survivors’ dignity without conceding and correcting the injustice done to them.

However, the AWF did not meet the conditions described above necessary for providing reparations for the survivors: The fund was not established based on the recognition that the “comfort women” system was an act of injustice and a war crime. The “atonement money” was a donation from the Japanese people, not compensation by the Japanese government. In addition, the letter from the Japanese prime minister was not an official apology to all the survivors because only those who received funds from the project” were eligible to be sent the letter. Then, why did some survivors receive the project? Why was the AWF established even though the survivors opposed it in the first place?

Most of the existing studies express critical views about the AWF as an entity for providing atonement (Oshima, Kim, & Arimitsu, 1996; Chung, 2008; Nishino, 2008; Suzuki, 2002). There is no disagreement on the point that the “comfort women” issue was not resolved by the AWF, but that leaves the above questions unanswered. Therefore, first, this study examines the process by which the fund was established. Second, it considers the meaning of the fund for the survivors, focusing on the individual level. Finally, based on the situation of the survivors today, this study extracts a lesson from the events related to the fund.

Data and Method

To investigate these issues, this study analyzes the statements and behaviors of the stakeholders in the AWF, who were mainly in Japan, including the Japanese government, bureaucrats, survivors, members of support group, scholars, and conservative politicians. Data was obtained through qualitative interviews, observations of the interactions between the survivors and a Japanese support group, as well as pre-existing publications. The fieldwork took place in Tokyo, Quezon City in the Philippines, Seoul, Gyeonggi Province, South Chungcheong Province, and North Jeolla Province in Korea between November 2005 and May 2015. In the interviews with the survivors, this study focused on the two countries of Korea and the Philippines, because there are noticeable differences in the situation of survivors during and after the war depending on whether the country was colonized or invaded by the Empire of Japan².

This study had the cooperation of support groups in the Philippines, Korean and Japan to meet and interview individual survivors. They were all in their 1980s and varied in material status and family relationships. Although all of them came forward, not all participated in demonstrations or rallies in public for the reason that some were too weak to go out or worried that they might cause their families and relatives trouble. The interviews lasted for about one hour.

The interviews produced fairly in-depth data. Since it was sometimes difficult to communicate with them due to old age, this study analyzed interview data from members of support groups and examined various publications in which these women’s statements appear to supplement the interview data.

² The AWF implemented projects in the Philippines, Korea, Taiwan, Indonesia, and the Netherlands that had the survivors who expressed their intention to accept the project, with cooperation of each government or support groups.

Results

The Logic behind the Establishment and Promotion of the AWF

Political compromise. The “comfort women” issue became a political topic in Japan through the Korean women’s movement, which had worked on this issue since the 1970s. In October 1990, they demanded that the Japanese government acknowledge that women were forced to be “comfort women” against their will, provide an official apology, reveal the truth about the “comfort women”, build a memorial, provide compensation, and record this issue in history textbooks to restore the survivors’ dignity and resolve the issue (Yun et al., 1992). The movement surged because an environment existed in which war victims, including ex-“comfort women”, were making individual protests about their suffering against the Japanese government through the democratization process in Korea. The period in which the movement related to the “comfort women” issue arose, represented a political opportunity to settle the various compensation issues that had lingered since the war. The so-called “55 system”, which was the era in which a single party, the conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), dominated Japanese politics starting in 1955, collapsed in 1993 when the LDP became the opposition party 38 years to the day that it was launched. Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa of the Japan New Party made a statement at his first news conference while in office acknowledging that Japan had waged a war of aggression during World War II. With the growing movement for compensation and the positive attitude of the Japanese government on the issue, a poll published by the newspaper *Asahi Shimbun* in 1993 showed that more than 50% of approximately 2,400 respondents supported the government in giving compensation to the survivors who had been “comfort women” (Asahi Shimbunsha Sengohoshōmondai Shuzaihan, 1994, p. 142). In the so-called Kono Statement³, in 1993, which acknowledged that the Imperial Japanese Army had forced women to be “comfort women”, the Japanese government promised to take steps toward resolving the issue. The inauguration of the cabinet in 1994, which was headed by Tomiichi Murayama of the Japan Socialist Party (JSP) and which had made attempts to settle the compensation matter since the war ended, created a window of opportunity for dealing with the issue. The problem was that the Murayama cabinet was formed from a coalition that included the LDP and the New Party Sakigake. The JSP could not independently make a decision because almost all the main cabinet ministers were LDP members. Moreover, the conservatives in the Diet who denied any wartime responsibility of the Japanese government had organized themselves as a group starting in 1993 and been able to reinforce their influence on this issue. As a result of their offensive, compensation for the survivors was off the table because the JSP was forced to compromise with the LDP’s demands that the government not offer them money. The Murayama cabinet also continued with the preceding government’s position that the issues of reparations, material restitution, and the right to claim compensation for events during the war had already been dealt with by the San Francisco Peace Treaty, bilateral treaties, and other relevant accords. Therefore, the cabinet expressed an “apology” to war victims in the Asia Pacific region as part of the so-called Murayama Statement⁴, while it was decided to cope with the “comfort women” issue separately. Consequently, the government launched a fund project that was the product of a compromise between the JSP and the LDP, and the Asian Women’s Fund, to offer the survivors “atonement money” donated by the Japanese people, to create a “medical and welfare support project” funded by the government,

³ Statement by the chief cabinet secretary, Yohei Kono, on the results of the study on the issue of “comfort women”, August 4, 1993.

⁴ Statement by Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama “On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the war’s end”, August 15, 1995.

and to deliver a letter to them from the Japanese prime minister and the president of the fund.

Window of opportunity toward resolution of the issue. Prime Minister Murayama asked the Japanese people and feminist and other social movements which worked on the issue in Japan to understand the fund as emphasizing the “wide participation of Japanese people” and “the need for a quick resolution” (Zaidan Hōjin Joseinotameno Heiwa Kokumin Kikin, 2004, p. 14) because the survivors were aging. Some individuals and groups who had sought to help victims of the war, including ex-“comfort women”, obtained compensation from the government, decided to participate in the fund to seize a political opportunity. Haruki Wada, who worked on the issue of colonial rule by Japan and later became a member of the board of directors of the AWF, described the political situation at that time as being such that the “door of an elevator with conservatives on board had almost closed” (Wada & Nishino, 2005, p. 73). Yasuaki Onuma, who, like Wada, had focused on the compensation issue and later became a member of the fund’s board of directors, stressed the historical significance of the inauguration of the Murayama cabinet (Onuma, 2007, pp. 16-17). Kenichi Takagi, who was chief of the defense team for the Filipino survivors during the war compensation trial, claimed that there was a need to give an “answer” to them while they were still on earth (Takagi, 1995, p. 24). A group that supported the war compensation trial of the Korean survivors, Nihon no Sengosekinin wo Hakkirisaseru Kai (The group for making clear the wartime responsibility of the Japanese government), sent a member of the group to the AWF as a watchdog to monitor whether the fund responded to the requests of the survivors supported by this group who decided to receive the project from the fund (Usuki, Amano, & Oka, 1998, pp. 62-64).

The survivors and their support groups throughout the world opposed the fund plan. In particular, it was strongly criticized in Korea. The Taiwanese and Korean governments expressed opposition to the fund as the contents of the project became clear. However, there was little space for the survivors and support groups to participate in the policymaking process on the issue. Government officials took counsel with and heard opinions from the support groups when the government decided the fund plan (Zainichi no Ianfu Saiban wo Sasaeru Kai, August 1994). A member of a support group said,

A bureaucrat who was concerned told me that they listened to the opinions of the movements, but they went in one ear and out the other. They threw petitions submitted by the movements in the trash after the counsel with them. They said that was the way it is. (Activist Ms. O, personal communication, March 26, 2013)

The Japanese government proceeded with the fund plan as an alternative to compensation by the state in disregard of the wishes of the survivors and the various movements. Consequently, the establishment of the fund was promoted not only by the government but also by some influential scholars, lawyers, who did not want to miss the favorable timing, even though most survivors strongly opposed the idea.

Response of the Survivors to the AWF and the Context

The Case of the Philippines

The money can’t compensate for our hurt. How can we understand why 367 survivors received the project offered by the fund despite criticism by many survivors and movements? We have to listen to the voices of both the survivors who refused and those who received the project to understand their hurt and suffering as a next step following the dissolution of the AWF.

In the Philippines, some survivors opposed the AWF and consequently did not accept the money because “my pain would not go away if you [the Japanese government] gave me a lot of money. The money can’t

compensate for our hurt” (Oshima, Kim, & Arimitsu, 1996, p. 72).

Onuma said that the AWF became “markedly successful” because it provided the survivors with “much better life circumstances spiritually and financially” (Onuma, 2007, p. 139). It is true that the Filipino survivors have been poor. In fact, the Filipino government has not provided financial support for them. A Filipino survivor said, “I read in the paper that the Korean survivors received financial, housing, and medical support from the Korean government. We lived in different circumstances from them” [“Watashi wa Toshiyori Mou Matenai Shushō no Shazai wa Totemo Taisetsu” (I am Old, I Cannot Wait, Apology from the Prime Minister Is Very Important), June 3, 1996]. It cannot be denied that the Filipino survivors decided to receive the project provided by the fund due to their poverty, as these women accounted for the largest number of recipients of the project [“Tanfu Tsugunaikin: Kankokujin Jyuryō 3warijaku Moto Kikin Kanbu Shōgen” (Comfort Women, Atonement Money: Korean Recipients Were a Little under 30% of All Korean Survivors, Ex-Exec of the Fund Testified). February 27, 2014]. However, words of protest such as “the money can’t compensate for our hurt” suggest that some survivors resisted looking at their lifetime of misery, which would be necessary to accept the money. Rumiko Nishino, joint representative of the Violence Against Women in War Network Japan (VAWW-NET Japan)⁵, expressed criticism of Onuma, saying that “he recognized the damage to the survivors in the form of poverty, and thus lacked a perspective on ‘restoration of the dignity of the survivors’” (Nishino, 2008, p. 44). It is possible that the “Atonement Project” did not necessarily mean “atonement” if it provided the survivors with “much better life circumstances spiritually and financially”, as Onuma said.

The means for living independently. An evaluation report with interviews of 98 recipients that was compiled by the Department of Social Welfare and Development of the Republic of the Philippines concluded that the “Atonement Project” improved the situation of the recipients (Department of Social Welfare and Development, Republic of the Philippines, March 2002). Enhancing their living circumstances, for example, it enabled them to obtain better housing, get recreational devices (e.g., television and radio), and assistive devices (e.g., eyeglasses and walking cane), visit friends and relatives, and pay utility bills on time (Department of Social Welfare and Development, Republic of the Philippines, March 2002).

Almost all the recipients used the economic support provided by the “atonement money” for their close relatives with whom they live (Department of Social Welfare and Development, Republic of the Philippines, March 2002). They said that they wanted to “provide livelihood support to our children” (Zaidan Hōjin Joseinotameno Asia Heiwa Kokumin Kikin, August 30, 1996, p. 2) and “take care of our children” (Zaidan Hōjin Joseinotameno Asia Heiwa Kokumin Kikin, August 30, 1996, p. 2) using “atonement money”. It may be that the “Atonement Project” was a means of allowing the survivors to live independently who had been unable to take care of themselves and others through contributing to close relatives, such as a mother or grandmother.

The means for continuing the fight for justice. The late Ms. F, who died at 86 year-old in Province of Rizal in 2013, talked about why she received the project, stating, “I thought I could fight for justice even though I received it” (Ms. F, personal communication, November 23, 2006)⁶. Another survivor, who was one of first recipients of the project in the Philippines, said that when she heard about the establishment of the fund in 1995, “I

⁵ VAWW-NET Japan was the core of the movements that worked on the “comfort women” issue in Japan. It was organized as the Violence Against Women in War Research Action Center in 2011.

⁶ The Japanese government articulated the official opinion “that atonement money from the Asian Women’s Fund is a matter which is set apart from legal issues and that the acceptance of atonement money does not prevent that individual from instigating a lawsuit or demanding a decision with regard to that issue in a Japanese court of law”. Retrieved from Asian Women’s Fund <http://www.awf.or.jp/e6/statement-16.html>

wanted to receive the compensation money, if any” (Zaidan Hōjin Joseinotameno Asia Heiwa Kokumin Kikin, August 30, 1996, p. 2) because she thought that she could then obtain medical treatment for heart disease. She said, “To take care of my body, I did not go to demos and rallies since I could restore my honor. But I continue to fight for justice” (Zaidan Hōjin Joseinotameno Asia Heiwa Kokumin Kikin, August 30, 1996, p. 2).

It can be said that the “Atonement Project” meant a “struggle fund” for survivors like these women. Assigning a meaning to the project in such a way suggests that they did not receive the project through a compromise and that they had power in determining its meaning. The episode described above by the survivor, in which she returned the letter from the Japanese prime minister, emphasizes her power.

The Case of Korea

Preventing the breakup of family relationships. A member of a support group for Korean survivors brought up an episode in which a survivor gave her daughter all the money that she received as a donation from Korean citizens because the daughter was kind to her when she gave her the money (Hanafusa, 2012, p. 45). Therefore, she decided to accept the “Atonement Project” to give her daughter money. This suggests that she tried to heal a troubled relationship with the daughter due to her experience as a “comfort woman” and reveals her wish to be treated nicely for the short time that was left of her life. It is noteworthy that 67% of the recipients in the Philippines live with family members (Zaidan Hōjin Joseinotameno Asia Heiwa Kokumin Kikin, August 30, 1996, pp. 15, 27), while almost all the survivors in Korea (whether they received the project or not) experienced the breakup of their marriage (Kankoku Teishintai Mondai Taisakku Kyōgikai and Teishintai Kenkyū Kai, 1993, pp. 35-36)⁷. Moreover, 67% of Filipino recipients answered in the evaluation report that their families knew about their past as “comfort women” (Department of Social Welfare and Development, Republic of the Philippines, 2002, p. 8). In other words, these families supported the survivors even after learning about their experiences during the war. However, there were exceptions, such as a Korean survivor’s son who was abusive toward her, saying, “I became sick because I came out of an ass of dirty dog”. “I’ll kill you” (Kankoku Teishintai Mondai Taisakku Kyōgikai and Teishintai Kenkyū Kai, 1993, p. 284). He became mentally ill due to a disease his mother had contracted in the “comfort station” during the war. He might have been angry at her because he was going to lose his life. This example shows that a woman’s experience as a “comfort woman” has an impact on not only the survivor’s life but also that of her family. In such cases, it is very difficult for these women to receive support from their close relatives. It is thought that whether the survivors receive the family’s support or not can be attributed to the differences between the Philippines and Korea on matters such as the family culture, sexual norms, and public awareness of the “comfort women”.

I don’t need a reward. A survivor said, “aigo (oh my god), I feel that I got insulted. They (the Japanese government) were happy to give money to us. But aigo, I got insulted” (Yun, 2013, p. 99). Another survivor complained,

I don’t know how long I can live in the future. How on earth can I receive a reward from the Japanese government because I am poor? I don’t need the reward, but I need an apology from the government necessarily. I cannot have a peaceful death without it. (Chung, 2008, p. 57)

⁷ According to an investigation by the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan in 1993, 6 out of 19 survivors got married after the war. However, all were divorced after that. Five survivors remained single. At the time of the investigation, 15 survivors lived on their own (Kankoku Teishintai Mondai Taisakku Kyōgikai and Teishintai Kenkyū Kai, 1993, p. 284).

As Walker (2010) indicated, providing compensation not out of a sense of an obligation to justice but as charity is regarded as an insult. These survivors defined the “atonement money” without apology as money that the Japanese government rewarded them for their “service” as “comfort women”.

After the Dissolution of the AWF: The Case of Korea

Eight years have passed since the AWF was dissolved. The Japanese government has not taken any further measures to help the survivors. How have these survivors been living since then?

In Korea, the “Wednesday Demonstration” has continued every Wednesday in front of the Japanese embassy in Seoul.⁸ Despite their advanced age, some survivors attend the demonstration regardless of the weather. Some testify in their own voice about their experience and appeal for a resolution to this issue and talk about making a world without war as “human rights activists” in the United States and Europe (Yun, 2009).

However, not all the survivors are such activists. Those who came forward in public account for only a handful of all survivors. Most of these women live in fear of prejudice in many countries and do not have enough strength left to fight for resolution of the issue in Korea, the six survivors whom I met and with whom I did participant observation in 2013 and 2015 were barely able to walk, and two of them were confined to bed. They are far from well off and live a restricted life, even though they are given a variety of forms of support from the Korean government and some received the “Atonement Project” from the AWF. Even if the project did provide the survivors with “much better life circumstances spiritually and financially” (Onuma, 2007, p. 139), it would have been only temporary. It is important to improve the difficult lives that these women have as a result of their experience as “comfort women”, but it is far more imperative to restore their honor. Ms. H, who was 87 year-old, lived in Gyeonggi Province, and recently came forward, and has been treated with contempt by her son-in-law’s family (Ms. H, personal communication, May 5, 2013). Another survivor, Ms. S, is in her eighties, lived in South Chungcheong Province, and bedridden, and her daughter and son-in-law were preoccupied with caring for her. They manage a store and are considering putting her in a nursing home, but they are worried that she might be exposed as an ex-“comfort woman” in public (Ms. S, personal communication, May 24, 2015). It is obvious that the issue of prejudice against ex-“comfort women” can never be settled with money.

The problem of nursing care is serious today for aging survivors. Ms. Y, who was 83 year-old, lived in Seoul, has stick-thin legs, and receives care from her daughter. The daughter explained that it was very difficult to take care of her mother (Ms. Y, personal communication, May 21, 2015). All the women except Ms. Y live alone because their families reside far away or are busy at work. Ms. M in Seoul, 88 year-old, is confined to bed and passes the daytime hours with a nursing-care helper, but spends the night and part of the morning alone with a mobile phone by her bed (Ms. M, personal communication, May 21, 2015). The late Ms. K, who died at 87 year-old in the North Jeolla Province, did not have any relatives to depend on and lived in homes for the elderly, and cried tears of joy when looking at the faces of members of the Japanese support group (Ms. K, personal communication, May 9, 2013).

Given that few survivors came forward when the “comfort women” issue emerged, it can be assumed that most of them are in a similar situation to that described above. Therefore, the meaning of a survivor’s critical remarks against the AWF, “the money can’t compensate for our hurt”, as I noted earlier, are very important

⁸ On September 16, 2015, this demonstration marked the 1,196th time it was held. Retrieved from The Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan. Retrieved from <https://www.womenandwar.net/contents/home/home.nx>

now that the fund has been dissolved. In order for the survivors, who are close to the end of their lives, to live with some peace of mind or to die in peace, there is a compelling need to establish a firm consciousness regarding the “comfort women” issue by providing them with a sincere apology, which cannot be achieved through material measures or through a victim’s own power.

Discussion and Conclusion

While these survivors are referred to as “comfort women”, their situations differ according to their country, society, family relationships, and so on. Each survivor’s response to the AWF was also different. The existing studies have tended to focus on those who rejected the “Atonement Project”. Nonetheless, a wide range of circumstances surrounding the survivors has emerged from examining both those who refused and those who received the financial compensation.

This study discussed the cases of the Philippines and Korea. There were some survivors who expressed a positive view of the project in the Philippines, while there were no such survivors in Korea in this research. How can we interpret this difference? And why did the Filipino survivors accept the project more than the Korean survivors? This study approaches this issue from two levels—the country and the social. First, the Filipino survivors have not received financial support from the government contrary to the Korean survivors described earlier. Therefore, it is possible that the Filipino survivors decided to receive the project due to their poverty.

Second, almost all Filipino survivors live with their family members. Moreover, almost all the survivors in Korea experienced the breakup of their marriage. Thus, it is thought that the one of the reason of receiving the project for the Filipino survivors meant reconstruction of identity as a mother or a grandmother through contributing to close relatives.

Third, we may say that whether the survivors obtain family supports and public understanding or not is related to sexual norms. The Korean survivors often say that it was the most important for women to keep their virginity before marriage at the time (Active Museum “Onnatachino Sensō to Heiwa Siryōkan” ed., 2006; Doi, 2015). Therefore, almost all Korean survivors have lived alone as marginalized women who were deviated from such sexual norms.

Additionally, the Korean society and government opposed the fund, while the Philippine government supported it. We can say that the attitudes of governments and public awareness are linked to historical relationship with Japan from colonial or occupation age to post-war era. The Philippines accused Japan of war crimes against Filipinos, including sexual assaults, at the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE) after the war, while Korea was not allowed to participate in the IMTFE because Korea at that time was considered part of Japan (Yoshimi supervising ed., 2011, pp. 18-19). Therefore, sexual violence against Korean women, including them being forced to be “comfort women”, was not investigated. Considering that issues related to Japan’s colonial rule have continued to be a source of controversy between Japan and Korea, it is natural that not only Korean survivors but also Korean society was strongly opposed to the AWF, which was ambiguous in conveying Japan’s responsibility for the “comfort women” issue.

Finally, there were significant differences in the form of damage between the Filipino survivors and the Korean survivors. In the Philippines, there were numerous rapes in the form of occasional and sporadic violence against women during punitive expeditions by soldiers of the Imperial Japanese Army (Yoshimi supervising ed., 2011, p. 20), while women who were forced to become “comfort women” had to do so for

periods of one month to three years, such as is found in the testimony of the survivors who filed a complaint in Tokyo District Court⁹. It has been said that there were no cases of Filipino women being forced into “comfort stations” abroad (Taiwan no Moto-Ianfu Saiban wo Shiensuru Kai, May 25, 2000). In contrast, Korean women were taken from the battle front abroad against their will and forced to be “comfort women” as “Japanese” for a long period of time under colonial rule, for example, three to seven years (Active Museum “Onnatachino Sensō to Heiwa Siryōkan” ed., 2006). It is not that the damage to the survivors should be estimated according to the form of rape, the period of time, and so on, but that one possibility is to assume that the women’s attitudes toward the “Atonement Project” varied based on their experiences, with the Filipino survivors having been raped and forced to be “comfort women” in the Philippines, and the Korean survivors having been carted off to the battle fronts abroad and forced to be “comfort women” as “Japanese women” (Yang, 2008, p. 73), or as a “stable source”¹⁰ of “comfort women” (VAWW-NET Japan, 2002, p. 38), and then left at the battlefield after the war.

The other level to explain the factors of different response of the survivors to the AWF is a personal one. Some survivors knew the existence of the fund through newspaper advertisements, support groups or between survivors because they were getting in touch with each other. However, some learned of it after the dissolution of the fund. That is to say, the acceptance or refusal of the project depended on the way of access to the fund¹¹. Personal relationships among survivors, supporters, and people involved in the AWF also played a part. Some women told about why she decided to accept it because a member of the fund often came to see her (Jeong, 2010). Another survivor said that she was opposed to the fund because the movement organization that she was part of told her to do so (Doi, 2015, p.168).

The important point here is that all the women did not decide to accept or refuse it on their own will. In other words, the decision was defined by complex contexts and circumstances surrounding each survivor. This is a different matter than justice. It will be clear from the response of the survivors to the AWF described above that it is difficult to provide each survivor with the same project without ample consideration of their circumstances. And it is needed for a perspective of “redress” in measures for atonement, which means correcting injustice, in order that women will be able to accept it on their own will without concern or worry.

Whether the survivors receive measures to express “atonement” from Japan or not is basically a matter of personal choice. However, it does not mean that the “comfort women” issue can remain as a personal issue. Their choices are inevitably influenced by family, society, and the country. The results of this study show that not only the survivors but also their families suffer the “after effects” of the survivors’ experiences as “comfort women”. Considering these complex contexts and circumstances surrounding each survivor on the decision to accept or refuse the project offered by the AWF, it does not follow that the fund could respond to a request for justice.

⁹ All the survivors who filed suit against the Japanese government in Japanese courts from 1991 through 2010 lost their cases (Tsubokawa & Omori, 2011).

¹⁰ Yoshiaki Yoshimi explains the predominant reasons why Korean women were forced to be “comfort women” as follows: One reason is that the Korean population was several fold the Taiwanese population. The other is that it was more desirable for the Empire of Japan to force Korean women to be “comfort women” rather than Taiwanese women, who were of the same ethnicity as the Chinese in order to remove the resistance of the Chinese in China as a key battlefield (Yoshimi, 1995, p. 166).

¹¹ Almost all Japanese support groups in Japan cooperate with local groups or movements in the countries where the survivors live. In Korea, however, some Japanese groups support the survivors without closely coordinating with the local movements due to differences related to the position on movement strategy, the AWF, and so on, like Nihon no Sengosekinin wo Hakkirisaseru Kai. Some women knew the existence of the fund through this group, which showed some understanding of the fund.

The survivors cannot by themselves eliminate their struggle in life that has stemmed from this experience. Therefore, it is necessary to redress these wrongs—by positioning the “comfort women” as not a personal responsibility but a state responsibility of Japan—in order that they and their families might be able to walk with dignity. This is one reason why the survivors have demanded an official apology from the Japanese government. The AWF suggested that this was needed for “atonement”, to reestablish the social relations surrounding these women by restoring their honor.

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