SEEKING ACCOUNTABILITY AND PREVENTING REOCCURRENCE: ADDRESSING CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL SLAVERY THROUGH THE WOMEN, PEACE, AND SECURITY AGENDA

CASE STUDY: CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL SLAVERY DURING WORLD WAR TWO IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC
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List of Acronyms

AWF: Asian Women’s Fund
CAT: Convention against Torture
CEDAW: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
DPP: Democratic Progressive Party
ICCPR: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ICERD: International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
ICC: International Criminal Court
KMT: Kuomintang
LDP: Liberal Democratic Party of Japan (Jimintō)
NAP: National Action Plan
NGOs: Non-Governmental Organizations
ODA: Official Development Assistances
TWRF: Taipei Women’s Rescue Foundation
UNPKO: United Nations Peacekeeping Operations
WPS: Women, Peace and Security
1. Executive Summary

The “comfort women” are victims of the most well-known occurrence of military sexual slavery. Hundreds of thousands of Korean, Taiwanese, Chinese, Filipino, and Dutch women, among others, in Asia and the Pacific were subjected to sexual slavery at the hands of the Japanese Imperial Army within their annexed or occupied territories during World War Two as part of a widespread military war crimes system. Since the horrors experienced by the “comfort women” were first brought to the public by Korean feminist activists in the late 1980s, civil society actors and survivors of Japanese military sexual slavery across the world have worked together to publicize this issue, in order to restore their honor and dignity and get reparations.

This research aims to trace the movements for justice and reparations for survivors of Japanese military sexual slavery over the last 30 years, including the achievements and challenges they faced. Notably, this research highlights the voices of civil society actors who have led the movement for over three decades. By situating their vivid voices and experiences in the history of the movement, this research examines how the dynamic movements to address Japanese military sexual slavery have evolved.

This study argues that civil society movements on the issue of Japanese military sexual slavery have evolved within the context of the colonial history and Cold War strategy that have influenced international politics of East and Southeast Asia. This research reveals that although the historical, social and political-economic context of each country varies, the government’s general attitude and approach towards the issue of the Japanese military sexual slavery has been either indifference or reluctance due to the politically sensitive nature of the issue, depending on the country’s own geopolitical context. Under these circumstances, civil society actors could not expect States to provide compensation, recovery and justice for survivors of the gross violations of sexual slavery system.

In the face of such challenges, civil society actors have worked in mobilizing and organizing grassroots movements and local level activities to garner support from the public. Such national and local level activities included lawsuits against the Japanese government, advocacy campaigns, and the establishment of museums across the nation, amongst others. Further, from the beginning of the movement, civil society actors have sought international solidarity from the global feminist movement to frame the Japanese military sexual slavery issue as a transnational women’s rights issue.

This research also suggests that movements on Japanese military sexual slavery should extend to encompass the topic of sexual violence (including sexual slavery) in contemporary conflict settings from the perspective of gender justice and human security. Faced with the reality that the remaining survivors of Japanese military sexual slavery will soon perish, this research calls for international stakeholders and communities to take stronger and more responsible actions to address military sexual slavery committed by Japan and to continue to fight against conflict-related sexual slavery, which is still recurring in many different forms.
2. Research Methods and Approaches

This case study adopted two research methods, namely literature review and semi-structured interviews with civil society movement leaders and scholars. First, the purpose of the desk review was to understand the historical context of World War Two and the implication of advocacy activities of civil society at the national and international level. Second, this research also included semi-structured interviews with civil society leaders and scholars from Korea, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Japan.¹ The purpose of the interviews was to understand the history and experiences civil society actors and scholars across different countries involved in the movement for advocacy, justice, and reparations. By capturing their dynamic experiences as well as the difficulties and challenges they faced, the interviews aim to contextualize their activities within the global gender justice activism and transnational feminist movements.

The 12 interviewees were selected based on their long history of activism and research on sexual slavery and knowledge of Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) in Korea, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Japan. Senior level activists (from national and local civil society organizations) and scholars (with various disciplinary backgrounds such as history, international politics, law, and sociology) were consulted. Many interviewees were or are also actively engaged in transnational feminist movements.

For the literature review, secondary resources were analyzed, such as academic books, journal articles, news articles, testimony books, archive materials, official documents and reports of the UN bodies, etc. This research reviewed a wide range of resources produced since the 1990s to the present, around the keywords such as "sexual slavery," "comfort women," "World War Two," "Japanese military," "colonialism," "civil society," "women and peace movement" and "WPS agenda," mainly through web-based research.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the research team conducted virtual meetings with the interviewees. Before the interviews, the research team informed the interviewees about the purpose of the research and circulated a list of questions in a written document. The interviews were conducted between September and October 2020. At the beginning of each interview, the research team obtained a verbal approval for recording from interviewees. The interviews were structured as casual conversations, with a list of pre-shared guiding questions. Given that the research team itself is composed of feminists and activists who are involved in gender and peace activism, this kind of interview method was particularly important for both the researchers and the interviewees. The interviews provided a platform for mutual exchange among interviewees and interviewers, where they could expand on their ideas and perspectives, sharing reflections and thoughts about the movement they have been participating. In this regard, the interviews built solidarity beyond the main objective of the research.

¹ Although it is important to conduct interviews with survivors, our research team decided not to have interviews with the survivors. Given that most of them are over 90 years of age and in hospital beds, interviews are either impossible nor desirable. Their testimonies were already published in fair amounts, and hence our research team used published testimony books and other written materials to include the voices of survivors instead of having an actual interview with them. We thank the activists and civil society leaders in Korea, Japan, Taiwan and the Philippines who generously accepted our request for key informant interviews.
Qualitative methods were used to analyze interview transcripts for this research. The research team paid close attention to interviewees’ personal history and their perspectives on conflict-related sexual slavery and the WPS agenda. By situating the interviewee’s own interpretation and experiences in the broad range of activism, this research aims to deliver various voices of civil society actors who have been involved in movements to address sexual slavery over decades.


A decade before and during World War Two, from 1931 until 1945, much of the Asian and Pacific region became a battlefield for the Japanese Imperial Army. The system of sexual slavery during World War Two was established and operated to meet the needs and whims of the powerful Japanese military, who controlled the state apparatus in the service of imperialistic expansion. As a part of its wartime strategy, the Japanese army set up comfort stations in occupied territories wherever their soldiers were. The girls and women recruited for sexual slavery were mainly from the colonized and occupied countries and territories. These included Korea, China, Philippines, Taiwan, Indonesia (including the present Timor-Leste), Myanmar (Burma), as well as Dutch girls and women who were living in the then Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia). In the military “comfort stations,” the victims of sexual slavery were gang-raped, tortured, and assaulted. In fact, a UN expert described the “comfort stations” as “rape centers” in her report on Japanese sexual slavery. Such sexual exploitation was often accompanied by brutal physical violence, murder, and suicide.

When World War Two ended in 1945, many survivors of sexual slavery became prisoners of war along with the very troops that had exploited them. When they were not imprisoned, survivors found themselves far from their own country, having been displaced, dispersed and isolated in comfort stations across Asia and the Pacific. Furthermore, the negative stigma towards “comfort women” in their home countries made survivors hesitant to attempt to return to their home villages or even to their countries. Those who were fortunate enough to make the many months long trip home could not tell their family what they had been through. Shame and stigma made them even more invisible and silenced their voices.

The issue of sexual slavery committed during World War Two in Asia and the Pacific and the subsequent civil society movements for justice, accountability, and adequate reparations are situated in the context of post-colonial international relations and history. After World War Two, in the midst of battles between the Cold War ideologies of the United States (U.S.) and the former Soviet Union, the U.S approached Japan as a strategic partner and a buffer zone to prevent the spread of communism across Asia. Due to recovery assistance from the U.S. and American indifference towards accountability for the war crimes of Japan, Japan’s economy flourished after

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World War Two. After Korea regained independence from Japan at the end of World War Two, the U.S. and the Soviet Union divided the Peninsula into two Koreas (i.e. South and North) and governed the respective territories through trusteeship. Since the Korean War in 1950, the notable presence of U.S. military bases across South Korea influenced the prostitution industry in South Korean society. During the Cold War era, the U.S. military bases expanded across Asia and Pacific in former colonies and the territories recovered from Japan. In this way, American military occupation across Asian countries rendered a regional prostitution industry, not only in South Korea but also in Okinawa, Japan, Vietnam, Thailand, and the Philippines. This post-colonial geopolitical landscape and the operation of a regional prostitution industry across Asia and the Pacific offers a historical background for global civil society activism on the Japanese military sexual slavery issue.

Cold War geopolitics and colonial history influenced each State’s interpretation of and response to the incidence of Japanese military sexual slavery, depending on its ideology or political interests. Civil society movements have also evolved in response to such global political dynamics. Specifically, when civil society actors attempted to initiate the adoption of legislation for the survivors of the military sexual slavery or sought financial assistance from the government, the response they elicited from the government depended on its political stance and position within the regional geopolitical arena. For instance, in Taiwan, the civil society movement for survivors of the Japanese military sexual slavery was influenced by the ruling party’s political stance and the overall social atmosphere towards Japan and China. A movement leader in Taiwan recalled that there were changes in the government’s relationship with Japan when the ruling party changed from KMT (Kuomintang) to DPP (Democratic Progressive Party) around 2000, and added that;

So, after that, we saw different perceptions of what Japan had done to Taiwan during the Second World War. And the general sentiments influenced Ama issues a lot. [The government had] more friendly attitude towards Japan compared to the 1990s. The government had more collaboration with the Japanese government at all levels. And especially, at this time, Taiwan tried to re-enter the so-called the international community.

This change in the ruling party and attempts to re-establish Taiwan’s position in the global political arena affected public sentiments and remembrance of Japanese colonialization. The national political context influenced the civil society movement for survivors of the Japanese sexual slavery in terms of the public support they received. A Taiwanese scholar explained:

In the early 1990s, the social atmosphere in Taiwan was still very much anti-Japan, because the KMT government was in power. Also, the people who lived through the Second World War had a strong sentiment against Japan at that time. So, we (civil society actors who led the movement) had a lot of actions for charity to raise funds for Amas, and we had more support and small donations from the society for these Amas. But, in this century, it seems that China has more become the Taiwanese adversary instead of Japan. So, the attention

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4. Ama means grandmother in Taiwanese Hokkien; but in this context, the term refers to Taiwanese “comfort women” here.
5. Interview conducted by Dr. Heisoo Shin and Jihyun Kim with a Taiwanese scholar conducted on 2 October, 2020.
shifted towards China. And a lot of political persecution (about) when KMT was in absolute power back in the 1960s and early 1970s, were highlighted, and a transition and justice practices were demanded. So in this situation, Japan and its colonial rule came to be seen as a symbol of the good days for most of the Taiwanese.\(^8\)

In addition to the dynamics of national politics, the political-economic status of the State also affected its response to the issue of Japanese military sexual slavery. For instance, Japan’s bilateral Official Development Assistances (ODA) is a significant source of revenue for the development of infrastructure in the Philippines.\(^9\) Thus, the political-economic relations between the two States is an important variable to be considered in the Philippines’ efforts to address conflict-related sexual slavery. As a Filipino activist highlighted:

[B]ecause Japan is a major donor to many of the flagship projects in the Philippines over the past years and even for the current Filipino government, the government is in a very weak position. And Japan has been using development assistance as a bargaining chip for the agenda of the memorialization of the comfort women issue.\(^10\)

South Korea’s geopolitical context is also complex. South Korea upholds a ceasefire with North Korea; and the U.S. has been a strategic ally of South Korea since World War Two. At the same time, international trade with Japan has been a significant source of revenue for South Korea. In this context, since the first public survivor testimony in 1991, the South Korean government’s approach to the issue of the Japanese military sexual slavery has been passive. Although a law to provide basic livelihood to survivors was enacted in 1993 in response to the demands of Korean civil society, the government did not push the issue forward. Instead, then President Kim Young-sam declared that the South Korean government will not ask for financial compensation from the Japanese government for military sexual slavery committed during World War Two. This declaration negatively affected the civil society movement seeking compensation, restitution, and justice for survivors from the Japanese government.

Although the historical, social and political-economic context of each country varies, the government’s general attitude and approach towards the issue of Japanese military sexual slavery has been either indifferent or politically cautious. In these circumstances, civil society actors could not expect the State to seek compensation, recovery services, and justice for survivors. Rather, the State’s response to the issue of Japanese military sexual slavery often conflicted with the perspectives and actions of civil society actors.

Consequently, as we will see in the section that follows, civil society actors have led the movement for justice, accountability, and recovery services for survivors of Japanese military sexual slavery at local and national levels. Civil society actors have had to face, negotiate and overcome difficulties and challenges while working with government sectors.

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\(^8\) Interview conducted by Dr. Heisoo Shin and Jihyun Kim with a Taiwanese scholar conducted on 2 October, 2020.

\(^9\) As per OECD’s development co-operation profiles, the Philippines is the top fifth recipient country of Japan’s bilateral ODA in 2018.

\(^10\) Interview conducted by Dr. Heisoo Shin and Jihyun Kim with a Filipino activist conducted on 9 October, 2020.
4. Civil Society Movements for Justice at National and Local Levels

Since the beginning of the movement, civil society actors have mobilized for justice for survivors of Japanese military sexual slavery, rather than depending on government actions. In South Korea, following the first public survivor testimony in 1991, the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan set up a hotline for survivors to call in and formed a research team to collect their testimonies and find the historical truth. Similarly, a Taiwanese feminist non-profit organization, Taipei Women’s Rescue Foundation (TWRF), initiated a hotline service to find victims and survivors who were silenced hitherto. Given that survivors had broken the silence more than forty years after World War Two, most were of advanced age and suffered from economic hardships. A researcher recalled:

When I first met with a survivor to collect data, she was living in a house near a water tank in the middle of the field in the countryside. Her health was not good. I was unsure whether or not she could eat proper meals in such an isolated countryside. She was very tiny and thin. So, we thought that it was urgent to set up shelters to protect and take care of survivors.

Therefore, the movement first prioritized support for victims through welfare schemes from the government and fundraising from the general public. However, when the Korean activists firstly publicized this issue in the early 1990s, reactions were divided. Many Koreans did not welcome the campaign because the existence of survivors of the Japanese military sexual slavery reminded them of their “shameful” colonial history. A Korean scholar explained:

In the early 1990s, even the concept of sexual violence was not widely accepted in the Korean society back at that time. South Korea even had a law that punished the prostitutes but not the buyers of sex, which was abolished in 2004. In this situation, while the activists received hotline calls from victims of military sexual slavery, they also received so many obscene calls of profanity that humiliated the victims. And, at the beginning of the movement, even when we held the Wednesday demonstration, passerby hurled abuse at both activists and survivors saying that it is shameful to speak out such story in public and Korea is too weak, something like that.

In the midst of an unwelcome social atmosphere, the Korean Council demanded that the government of Japan: 1) recognize the Japanese military sexual slavery system as a war crime; 2) disclose official documents; 3) deliver an official apology; 4) pay reparations to the victims; 5) punish those responsible; 6) record the sexual slavery system in history textbooks; and 7) erect a memorial monument and build an archive. The issues of reparations and justice for the survivors emerged as a major priority of civil society advocacy. In particular, arguments surrounding the Asia

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11 Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan was established by 37 feminist organizations in 1990, then the organization was incorporated into the Korean Council for Justice and Remembrance for the Issues of Military Sexual Slavery by Japan in 2018.
13 Interview conducted by Dr. Heisoo Shin and Jihyun Kim with a Korean scholar conducted on 25 September, 2020.
14 Interview conducted by Dr. Heisoo Shin and Jihyun Kim with a Korean scholar conducted on 9 October 2020. The sentence in bold is the author’s own emphasis.
15 The Korean Council’s website, at http://womenandwar.net/kr/history-of-the-movement/
Women’s Fund (AWF)—which the Japanese government proposed in 1995—and the legal battles brought by survivors in Japanese courts were at the center of advocacy concerns.

Initially, the Japanese government flatly denied any involvement in the sexual slavery system and its legal responsibility. However, as historical records were made public by a prominent Japanese historian as well as by the Korean feminist activists' movement, international attention to sexual slavery during World War Two grew at the United Nations and globally. As a result, the Japanese government began to change its official stance. To express their sense of remorse, the Japanese government established the AWF for victims of Japanese military sexual slavery in South Korea, the Philippines, Taiwan, the Netherlands, and Indonesia in 1995. Denying any State responsibility and trying to avoid any obligation to compensate the victims, the AWF was set up as a “private fund” to be funded with donations from the private sector and individual citizens. The AWF was strongly criticized by the women’s movement organizations and civil society in South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines and Japan, calling it “sorry money” rather than official compensation. Civil society actors pointed out that through the AWF, the Japanese government framed military sexual slavery as a "humanitarian" issue, therefore bypassing their legal and political responsibility for colonial and wartime human rights violations. In fact, regarding Indonesia, the AWF was delivered to the government, who spent it to build a facility for the elderly, which had nothing to do with the victims of sexual slavery. While many of the survivors received money from the AWF, some survivors firmly refused, saying that “I cannot receive the money, because it is neither an apology nor compensation.”

It is important to note that diverse voices and perspectives emerged among survivors and civil society activists in evaluation of the fund. A Filipino activist recalled:

The discussion for this issue within the movement in the Philippines was divided around the two questions. First, is it real atonement money? The second question is that if you receive the money, does that mean giving up the fight? It is something unfortunate, but many of the comfort women came from poor, working-class families. Being poor in the Philippines is a bit different from being poor in Korea. Here is a dirt poor. The survivors might think that I am going to die in a few years, and I just want to leave a few something for my family. Many of the victims never really got to be employed, so they never lived a stable life, they became informal workers for the rest of the lives. So, they claimed that they had decided to accept the money but they made it clear that they were not looking [at] it as atonement money simply because the official and formal public apology from the Japanese government has not yet come. What came was individual and a personal apology from the head of the State. But the personal apology is something that can be easily reversed and not a State policy. And, it really happened when Shinzo Abe took over. So I think the comfort women who did accept the money became very clear about their position. And as actual records show that the fight for justice has continued up until now.\(^\text{18}\)

\(^{16}\) The initial position that the mobilization of the ‘comfort women’ was done by private entrepreneurs was changed and acknowledged that there was some involvement of the Japanese Army but without force, and then eventually also acknowledged that there was some force involved.

\(^{17}\) Interview conducted by Dr. Heisoo Shin and Jihyun Kim with a Korean scholar conducted 9 October, 2020.

\(^{18}\) Interview conducted by Dr. Heisoo Shin and Jihyun Kim with Filipino activist conducted 9 October, 2020. The sentence in bold is the author’s own emphasis.
It is notable that the survivors’ understanding the purpose of the AWF differed from that of the Japanese government. In the mind of survivors and activists, financial compensation without legal and political responsibility by the Japanese government was not an adequate resolution to the issue of sexual slavery during World War Two.

One of the primary focuses of civil society actors was to hold the Japanese government legally responsible for their wartime military sexual slavery. In December 1991, Kim Hak-soon and others filed a lawsuit against Japan at the Tokyo District Court for damages and other compensation. In 1992, the Busan Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan also supported the lawsuits by survivors against the Japanese government at the Shimonoseki District Court. The Shimonoseki District Court admitted some of the claims in 1998, but the Supreme Court finally dismissed the appeal in 2003. In a series of lawsuits against the Japanese government, progressive civil society actors in Japan played a significant role in supporting survivors. A Korean scholar stated:

There were almost 100 lawsuit cases that the Korean, the Chinese, the Filipino, the Dutch, and the Taiwanese have raised against the Japanese government about the Second World War including the forced mobilization. Among them, there were about 50 cases raised by Koreans. If you look closely, you would see that Japanese citizens who sympathized with the Korean survivors initiated the movement for support. They asked the lawyers for legal advice and the Japanese lawyers collected testimonies from the survivors. In this way, the Japanese citizens formed the civil organizations, and lawyers formed the legal advocacy groups to support the survivors. Due to such collective efforts by the Japanese citizens, over 40 lawsuit cases in Japan were possible until now.

Among attempts to achieve legal gender justice, the Women’s International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan’s Military Sexual Slavery held in Tokyo in 2000 is a significant milestone. This Tribunal was organized by concerted efforts of ten countries: nine victimized countries, together with Japan, the aggressor country. The suggestion came from a Japanese feminist leader, Yayori Matsui, in April 1998, who declared that “we cannot greet the New Millennium without solving the Japanese military sexual slavery issue.” Her proposal was formally decided at the fifth Asian Solidarity Forum held in Seoul in April 1998. For two and a half years, women’s civil society prepared for the organization of the Tribunal, together with the global women’s and human rights community. National groups of prosecutors prepared an indictment on crimes against women in each country, while the prosecutors of North and South Koreas prepared a joint indictment. The survivors testified at the tribunal, some in person and some through video. Two legal experts functioned as the international prosecutors and a panel of judges composed of renowned human rights and legal experts delivered the verdict against the ten defendants who were responsible for the crime of sexual slavery. It stated that the then Japanese Emperor Hirohito and nine commanders were guilty of crimes against humanity; and that the Japanese government has a responsibility for the wartime sexual slavery. The tribunal

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20. Interview conducted by Dr. Heisoo Shin and Jihyun Kim with a Korean scholar conducted on 26 September, 2020.
brought momentum to activate the grassroots movement for survivors of the military sexual slavery in Japanese society. The final judgment was issued in The Hague one year later in Dec. 2001. A Japanese activist who attended the tribunal recalled:

In the past, the trials for post-war compensation and its movement were mainly male-dominated. However, the Women’s International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan’s Military Sexual Slavery provided an opportunity to women survivors who had limited access to the post-war compensation so that these survivors can actively participate in the movement for [the] comfort women issue.24

From the global perspective, the Women’s International War Crimes Tribunal in Tokyo was an important culmination of women’s human rights movements, which had been influencing global discussions on peace, security, and justice, as described in more detail in section 6.1 below. Moreover, the two International Tribunals for the Former Yugoslavia and Rwanda also reflected the concerns of the global women’s movements. Thus for the first time in history, individuals who raped and enslaved women during conflict were convicted of crimes against humanity and/or war crimes. The tribunals also officially recognizing rape as genocide during conflict. Critically, this led to the inclusion of conflict-related sexual slavery in the provisions of the Rome Statute as war crimes and crimes against humanity.

This newly set international standard could not be applied to the crimes of Japanese military sexual slavery due to ratione temporis. Thus, the Women’s International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan in 2000 was an initiative by women’s movements to publicly deliver verdicts that determined that the then Japanese Emperor Hirohito and his commanders in charge were guilty of crimes against humanity or war crimes. The Tribunal provided a sense of relief and liberation to the 66 survivors and the more than a thousand participants who gathered at the venue in Tokyo. Although it was not legally binding, the Tribunal was a public proclamation that the crime of conflict-related sexual slavery during should be condemned, and the perpetrators should be held legally accountable. Reflecting on the 20th anniversary of the Tribunal, its verdict has never been more relevant. Conflict-related sexual slavery continues to occur in a vast variety of contemporary contexts—perpetrated by governments, state-sponsored militias, non-state armed groups, and violent extremist groups alike.

After the Tribunal, movements to seek justice and reparations continued with parliamentary support from other countries. In 2007, the U.S. House of Congress adopted a resolution on Japan’s sexual enslavement. This motivated Japanese grassroots movements to submit a resolution to their own government at the local level. Finally, the Japanese saw the issue of military sexual slavery as their own. There was also a change in strategy in the Japanese women’s movement, from Tokyo-centered movements to local, provincial or district level grassroots movements. The movement to submit a resolution on military sexual slavery at the grassroots level was active between 2009 to 2010. With changes in the national political landscape, Japanese civil society actors who led the movement expected that the movement would lead to meaningful results in legislation on military sexual slavery. A Japanese activist reflected:

24 Interview conducted by Dr. Heisoo Shin and Jihyun Kim with a Japanese activist conducted 29 September, 2020.
When the ruling party changed from the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan (Jimintō)\textsuperscript{25} to the Democratic Party of Japan (Minshutō)\textsuperscript{26} through the general election in 2009, civil society actors had some expectations toward the Democratic Party because it had led the legislation movement for the survivors of the Japanese military sexual slavery. After the Democratic Party became the ruling party from the opposition party, however, they changed their stance by saying that the ruling party can submit only feasible law. Although we were doing many formal and informal lobbying activities for the Democratic Party, it ended as the Korea-Japan Agreement on the Issue of "Comfort Women" Victims in 2015. Of course, I think the legislative movement should be continued politically. So, even after the Korea-Japan agreement, Japanese organizations have continued to make requests to the government and conduct such activities. However, after the legislation movement over several decades, we have learnt that it is almost impossible to make legislation in Japan in reality. Personally, I myself cannot expect anything more from the Japanese government.\textsuperscript{27}

It was a bitter realization that the government would not bring about any of the meaningful changes that civil society actors had hoped for. Rather, the government often acted to counter the achievements and advocacy of civil society activists. The joint agreement between the governments of South Korea and Japan, which was announced abruptly in December 2015, serves as an example.\textsuperscript{28} While the agreement stated that the Government of Japan acknowledged its responsibility for having injured the honor and dignity of the “comfort women” and Prime Minister Abe expressed his sincere apologies and remorse to all those suffered for their pain and wounds, it also included unacceptable language. For instance, the agreement stated that “this issue will be finally and irreversibly” resolved, if the Government of Japan faithfully implemented it. The agreement also reflected acceptance of Japanese concern with “the memorial statue in front of the Japanese embassy in Korea.”\textsuperscript{29} Both governments committed to “refrain from mutual reprobation and criticism in international forums, including at the United Nations.”\textsuperscript{30} The agreement between the two governments did not reflect the efforts of civil society movements, instead misrepresenting their advocacy achievements. Feminist activists and civil society actors in South Korea and Japan immediately opposed this agreement. An interviewee remarked that “the purpose of the agreement was to eliminate the existence of survivors from history.”\textsuperscript{31}

Despite the frustrations caused by the governments’ actions, civil society continued to build strong solidarity with the survivors and the general public, thereby empowering survivors and reviving their agency in the process of the movement:

The survivors changed a lot. At the beginning of the movement, the survivors probably did not know well how the movement would go. But survivors who suffered from serious human rights violations for the first time came out to the world and shared their stories to the

\textsuperscript{25} The Liberal Democratic Party of Japan (Jimintō) is politically conservative. Since the party has been established in 1955, except the only two periods- 1993-1994, and 2009-2012- the party has been a ruling party in Japan.

\textsuperscript{26} The Democratic Party of Japan (Minshutō) was politically centrist. The party was founded in 1998 but dissolved in 2016.

\textsuperscript{27} Interview conducted by Dr. Heisoo Shin and Jihyun Kim with a Japanese activist conducted on 29 September, 2020. The sentence in bold is the author’s own emphasis.


\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{31} Interview conducted by Dr. Heisoo Shin and Jihyun Kim with a Korean scholar conducted on 26 September, 2020.
public. I think that was the first step for the survivors to recover their honor. And, the citizens heard their stories. This motivated other survivors to come out, and they were assured that their stories were accepted by many people. **In such a chain of the process, the survivors could heal their wounds in hearts. I saw that the victims became survivors, and human rights activists and peace activists.**

As this research has emphasized, government response to the issue of conflict-related sexual slavery often conflicted with the priorities and recommendations of survivors and the civil society actors who supported them. Government approaches fluctuated with ever-changing international and national geopolitical dynamics. Nevertheless, civil society actors who became deeply frustrated by governments’ ineffective and weak responses, emphasized the importance of the grassroots movements and local level activities to build public support. They organized advocacy campaigns, produced documentaries, performed theater dramas, and established history museums. For instance, the Taiwanese “comfort women” museum or “Ama house” opened in Taiwan in 2016. The Ama House displays 5,042 materials, such as videos and books related to survivors’ experiences during World War Two and their personal belongings. This museum also organized seminars and cultural exchange events by inviting survivors from other countries. A Women’s Active Museum in Tokyo was established, along with several museums in Korea and Shanghai, China.

In particular, South Korea has vibrant civil society movements in Seoul, Gwangju (Gyeonggi Province), Busan, Daegu, Tongyoung, and Changwon areas. There are four museums established across South Korea. In Seoul, the Korean Council for Justice and Remembrance for the Issues of Military Sexual Slavery by Japan has led the organization of the well-known “Wednesday Demonstration” in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul from 8 January 1992 onwards. For more than 28 years, the demonstration has been a venue for solidarity building, where the survivors not only share their experiences of sexual slavery but also their thoughts and feelings with other citizens who participate in the protest. In 2012, the Korean Council established “the War and Women’s Human Rights Museum” in Seoul, which has been visited by students and citizens to learn about and honor the survivors of Japanese military sexual slavery.

To overcome financial difficulties, the civil society movement in Daegu mobilized local artists and directors of media and theatre to produce documentaries and plays on the issue of military sexual slavery. By using local cultural infrastructure, they held local documentary and theater festivals to publicize the issue and fundraise. To provide direct support for the survivors living in the region, they conducted a class on making pressed flowers, which serves as a form of psycho-social, trauma-healing therapy. A group of university students commercialized these pressed flowers as artwork through the brand “Heeum” in 2012. It became a non-profit venture to financially sustain the movement. All earnings were used to fund the movement and operation of “the Museum of Military

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32 Interview conducted by Dr. Heisoo Shin and Jihyun Kim with a Japanese activist conducted on 29 September, 2020. The sentence in bold is the author’s own emphasis.
33 The official website for the Ama house, available at: https://www.amamuseum.org.tw/tw/
34 The museums about the Japanese military sexual slavery across the world as follow. Cited from https://www.sisain.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idno=28880
35 The official website for this NGO, available at: http://womenandwar.net/kr/
36 Online archive for the Wednesday Demonstration, available at: http://www.archivecenter.net/wednesdaydemo
Sexual Slavery by Japan or “Heeum” museum, which they established. In addition, the organization also published autobiographical books on the lives of individual survivors.

To establish the museum, the Daegu civil organization also sought financial support and cooperation from the local government. In their engagement with local government officials, local activists faced many challenges, such as the bureaucratic system of the government, the apathetic attitude of local politicians, and their limited awareness of military sexual slavery. A local movement leader recalled:

By persuading the municipal council, we finally created an ordinance for survivors. However, due to the low level of knowledge on gender amongst municipal officials, they kept trying to intervene in our events and to manipulate the events to suit their taste…We applied for funding from the women’s project. However, the local government official in charge of the project said that the Japanese military sexual slavery issue is not a women’s issue, thus your organization cannot apply for this women’s project. It shows the degree of misunderstanding and misperception amongst local governments on the military sexual slavery issue.

Thus, the limited awareness of women’s rights, gender equality, and human rights amongst local government officials and politicians were highlighted as a primary challenge for activists.

5. Transnational Solidarity and Activism around Justice, Accountability, and Reparations for Japanese Military Sexual Slavery

Feminist leaders raised the issue of the conflict-related sexual slavery committed by Japan in global forums such as the United Nations Human Rights bodies. In their advocacy around the UN, they built solidarity and sought cooperation from the global feminist movement and international NGOs. The issue of Japanese military sexual slavery was presented by activists as one concerning global women’s rights during armed conflict. Their activism at the international level resulted in several achievements. First, activists contributed to setting new international standards to counter the incidence of conflict-related sexual slavery. Second, feminist leaders, working together with survivors of sexual slavery during World War Two, built regional and global networks of survivors, thereby empowering survivors to become human rights activists.

5.1. Setting new international standards on sexual slavery in conflicts

40 Interview conducted by Dr. Heisoo Shin and Jhyun Kim with a Korean activist conducted on 22 September, 2020
Throughout the 1990s, South Korean and Asian women’s activism brought the issue of military sexual slavery committed by Japan during World War Two to international attention. Several fact-finding missions on the issue were conducted. The mission reports were published, notably by the International Commission of Jurists and by the two special rapporteurs of the UN Commission on Human Rights and its Sub-Commission on Protection and Promotion of Human Rights. These reports all concluded that the sexual slavery committed by the Japanese Imperial Army could be classified as war crimes and crimes against humanity, in violation of the human rights of girls and women.41

Activists advocating for justice for conflict-related sexual slavery joined forces with global feminist movements to call for stronger international and national mechanisms to preserve and protect women’s human rights and gender equality. At the two UN global conferences in the 1990s (the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights in 1993 and the Beijing World Conference on Women in 1995), global feminist groups formed a women’s human rights caucus and organized tribunals on women’s human rights violations and raised awareness of the realities of women’s and girls’ lives. The survivors of the Japanese military sexual slavery testified at tribunals at both conferences. The advocacy of the women’s human rights caucus through well-organized tribunals resulted in inclusion of strong language on women’s rights in the official documents adopted at these two conferences. Thus, the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action42, in paragraph 38, recognized that “violations of the human rights of women in situations of armed conflict are violations of the fundamental principles of international human rights and humanitarian law” and required that “all violations of this kind, including in particular murder, systematic rape, sexual slavery, and forced pregnancy require a particularly effective response.”43 The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action further strengthened international standards on women’s rights and gender equality in the context of armed conflict. The recommendations to the governments, in paragraph 145, included actions to “uphold and reinforce standards set out in international humanitarian law and international human rights instruments to prevent all acts of violence against women in situations of armed and other conflicts; undertake a full investigation of all acts of violence against women committed during war, including rape, in particular systematic rape, forced prostitution and other forms of indecent assault and sexual slavery; prosecute all criminals responsible for war crimes against women and provide full redress to women victims.”44 Thus, the international norms and standards were upgraded, calling for a full investigation into incidences of conflict-related sexual slavery, prosecution of all criminals, and adequate reparations for victims.

Consequently, women’s human rights groups organized themselves in February 1997 as the Women’s Caucus for Gender Justice “to incorporate gender perspectives in the ongoing process of setting up the International Criminal Court (ICC) and other mechanisms” and “to help enable

43 The last sentence of para. 38 in the original draft document was “Violations of this kind, in particular murder ….” The Japanese government, trying to block the inclusion of the sexual slavery by the Japanese military, suggested to all “current.” The Korean Council representative reported this to the participants of the Global Tribunal and successfully lobbied the government representatives to add “all” to violations of this kind, which was later reported in the Japanese newspaper as “Japan’s losing face.”
these institutions and instruments to effectively protect and promote gender justice.” The Women’s Caucus continued its work towards gender justice, in particular campaigning for women to be elected as judges, monitoring and assisting the ICC to fairly and effectively prosecute cases of gender violence.

The advocacy of women’s rights organizations and civil society at national and global level attempted to restore and recover the honor of victims and survivors of sexual slavery by pursuing accountability and legal responsibility through international human rights mechanisms. Their call for the full investigation and prosecution of all crimes committed during armed conflict was firmly reflected in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC). The Rome Statute of the ICC, adopted in July 1998 as a legally-binding new instrument, defined various acts as the crimes against humanity “when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population,” which included the acts of “rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity” (ICC Rome Statute, Article 7). These serious violations are also included in the list of acts considered as war crimes (Article 8).

The Rome Statute also contains expansive mandates concerning the participation and protection of victims and witnesses and the staffing of women on the court as well as experts on sexual and gender violence. However, the Rome Statute applies only to the crimes committed after the ICC’s taking into effect and would therefore exclude the crimes of the military sexual slavery by Japan.

In this context, the Women’s International Tribunal on Military Sexual Slavery by Japan, held in Tokyo in December 2000, represents a landmark achievement of civil society organizations in demanding justice and legal accountability for the crimes of sexual slavery during World War Two in Asia and the Pacific. Although it was a people’s court and hence did not have any legal power, the final verdicts delivered by a panel of judges clearly stated that Emperor Hirohito and eight others accused of rape and sexual slavery as a crime against humanity were “guilty of superior and individual responsibility for the crimes committed against the former ‘comfort women”’. The final Judgement also specified the state responsibility, required reparations for the victims and called on the government of Japan to provide remedial measures. The Judgement of this Tokyo Tribunal was then used as a critical resource and advocacy tool for feminist scholars, legal clinics and law students.

The decades-long advocacy efforts on Japan’s military sexual slavery, together with global feminist activism, have contributed to the development new international standards and norms on women’s rights and gender equality. This transformation in international attitudes and condemnation of conflict-related gender-based and sexual violence was summed up accurately by the former Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Ms. Coomaraswamy, at the end of her mandate. She

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46 After the establishment of ICC and the first election of the judges, the Women’s Caucus concluded its work, and in 2004, Women’s Initiatives for Gender Justice started to monitor the Court and advocate for gender inclusive justice through the ICC and implementation of the Rome Statute. http://www.iccwomen.org/aboutus/history.html.
48 Ibid., Article 7 Crimes against humanity.
49 Ibid
reflected that rape and other forms of violence against women during wartime used to be considered unavoidable or inevitable at the end of World War Two, as evidenced by the treatment of the “comfort women.” However, with the establishment of progressive international standards on gender equality, these very same war crimes are now punishable and prohibited.51

UN treaty monitoring bodies were also an important venue for advocacy on accountability and reparations for sexual slavery during World War Two. Japan is a State Party to various international human rights treaties, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and Committee Against Torture (CAT), among others. Consequently, Japan is obliged to submit reports on implementation to each of these treaty monitoring bodies. The Korean Council and organizations in Japan and the Philippines submitted NGO parallel/shadow reports when Japan was under review by various treaty bodies. As a result, the relevant treaty body included the sexual slavery issue in its concluding observations. Most recently, the issue of military sexual slavery by Japan was raised in August 2018 by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination52. The Committee recommended the State of Japan to “ensure a lasting solution to the issue of comfort women with a victim-centered approach, inclusive of comfort women of all nationalities, accepting responsibility for its role in the violation of the human rights of these women.”53 The CEDAW Committee was critical of the Korea-Japan Agreement of December 2015 and recommended that Korea “ensure that the rights to truth, justice and redress of the victims/survivors and their families are fully upheld, including through rehabilitation and fair and adequate compensation to be afforded without delay” during its review of the report of the Republic of Korea in February 2018.54

In conclusion, the advocacy efforts of women’s rights organizations and civil society ushered remarkable progress in making the crimes of sexual slavery in conflict visible and specified as punishable crimes, notably in the Rome Statute of ICC. Although the recommendations from UN human rights mechanisms, such as the Special Procedures and the treaty bodies, are not enforceable, they are particularly notable for their recognition of the unresolved nature of sexual slavery during World War Two and the inadequate responses of governments thus far.

51 Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy was appointed as the first Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, in 1994 for a three-year term. She was reappointed for two more terms, so in total she served nine years as the special rapporteur. Her first field mission was on the military sexual slavery by Japan, conducted in 1995 and she published the report of the mission in 1996. The issue of Japanese military sexual slavery was categorized as violence by the State and was included in her progress report on the issue until 2003, when she finished her nine-year mandate. She stated at the conclusion of her mandate that there were notably two achievements during her mandate: establishment of new international standards and consciousness-raising on violence against women.

  http://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FileHandler.axa?enc=27qGB1d%2FPPrRbCghKb7Yhsk5rEDv5HC08MabuZ0CD1Hyo8WgMOKn2u8BC%3BY6Tq89CNamDavPvm5ku7u50w1PPVvKjCvgWogL4Qyo9cCDGB%28Kn85ul26N4monO8MGhOA2zD1RGo3KZc%28HNQ%3D3D


54 Ibid.
5.2. Empowering survivors and building global networks

The “Asian Solidarity Conference for Resolution of the Issue of Military Sexual Slavery by Japan” organized by the Korean Council in 1992 was an important forum that convened survivors, feminist activists, civil society representatives, and citizens from South Korea, North Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, China, Indonesia, East Timor and the Netherlands. The conference has been held 15 times between 1992 and 2018. The resolutions adopted at each conference call for concrete actions from the Japanese government, victimized countries, and other international actors to take legal and political measures to restore the honor for survivors. For instance, the resolutions called for measures such as: disclosing all related government-owned documents that could serve as evidence of the military sexual slavery system; the inclusion of this historical event in textbooks; the commemoration of victims; and the punishment of perpetrators. Such international conferences have created a platform for solidarity building amongst survivors, activists, and citizens, who shared their experience beyond national borders. As a scholar/activist explained:

In the very beginning of the movement, it wasn’t a transnational movement. However, a Korean feminist scholar strongly argued that we should bring out this issue to the global community. After that, we mobilized Korean feminist scholars and activists, and these people have led the solidarity movement between the two Koreas, between South Korea and also globally. The life of survivors itself is a transnational experience as they were forcibly transported to other countries along with the Japanese military troops. Thus, the essence of this issue should not be limited to the national boundary, it should be transnational.

Through their encounter with feminist activists, movement leaders and, in particular, survivors from other countries, survivors were greatly empowered. As they shared their testimonies in public, they transformed into agents of change. For example, the personal memoir of Ms. Jan Ruff O’Herne, a Dutch survivor, was published under the title “Fifty Years of Silence.” The transformation of two South Korean survivors in particular, Kim Bok-dong and Gil Won-ok, was remarkable. They established the “Butterfly Fund” in 2012, together with the Korean Council. Through the Fund, they supported survivors of conflict-related sexual violence in Vietnam, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, thereby building solidarity amongst survivors across borders. A Korean scholar shared:

After the Women’s International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan’s Military Sexual Slavery in 2000, we tried to expand the international solidarity by conceptualizing the military sexual slavery issue as a contemporary issue. As the Butterfly Fund has shown that the survivors of Japanese military sexual slavery reached out to other survivors who have different experiences from them in conflict. By sharing the experiences among the survivors, it is important to pass on their experiences of demanding justice to the next generations. For

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55 For the detailed resolutions of the past 15 times of the Asian Solidarity Conference, available at: http://womenandwar.net/kr/page/1/?s=EC%97%8C%80%ED%9A%8C%EC%9D%8&post_type=post
56 Ibid
57 Interview conducted by Dr. Heisoo Shin and Jihyun Kim with a Korean scholar conducted on 9 October, 2020. The sentence in bold is the author’s own emphasis.
58 She passed away in August 2019 in Australia.
60 For the message from Kim Bok-dong for the Butterfly Fund, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rgE5iiba8t8Q&feature=emb_title
example, the Butterfly Fund includes supporting victims and survivors of sexual violence of the Vietnam war which the South Korea participated in. Reaching out to women in victim country by women from perpetrator country is our self-reflection and apology as a perpetrator country. I was particularly impressed by a conversation between a Filipino survivor, a Korean survivor, and a survivor of Nazi sexual violence at an international seminar. It was a moment that the survivors who were sharing their stories formed solidarity.  

Another Korean scholar added:

At the beginning of the research, we focused on the sexual slavery by the Japanese military, however, through international movement, we have learnt that there should be research into the sexual violence by France or Germany during the second world war. So we have equipped the comparative perceptions through the international movement.

The Korean Council also has been leading a movement titled “Girl’s Statue of Peace” (‘Sonyeosang’) across the world to commemorate survivors of Japanese military sexual slavery. The statue symbolizes a girl who was enslaved at a young age by the military sexual slavery system during World War Two. By erecting the statue across the world, this movement also aims to remind the world about war crimes, which continue to be committed by different perpetrators in contemporary contexts.

Local grassroots activists have also built international solidarity through student exchange programs and history education projects. The Korean group, ”Massan, Changwon, Jinhae Civic Group who Support the Comfort Women,” has held global student exchange programs in Korea since 2016. By inviting middle and high school students from South Korea, the Philippines, Taiwan, Japan and the U.S., the purpose of this program is to highlight the history of conflict-related sexual violence among the next generation and emphasize the need for collective action to address continued and increasing violations of women’s rights in armed conflict. In this regard, the exchange program raised awareness of the incidence of conflict-related sexual slavery during World War Two in Asia and the Pacific amongst young people, which is critical to prevent reoccurrence of the crime. A Korean activist shared:

After the Korea-Japan agreement on the issue of “Comfort Women” victims in 2015, we found that the comfort women issue should be widely known internationally, especially to the young generation. So, since 2016, we invited around 15 students each from the Philippines, Taiwan, Japan, and the U.S. and held history seminar, discussion and workshop for 3 or 4 days. One day, the Taiwanese participants told me that they only saw the comfort women issue through the news and did not know well about the meaning of the issue before they attended the program. However, at the end of the programs, they told me that they would love to continue to publicize for the comfort women issue even after they go

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61 Interview conducted by Dr. Heisoo Shin and Jihyun Kim with a Korean scholar conducted on 9 October, 2020.
62 Interview conducted by Dr. Heisoo Shin and Jihyun Kim with a Korean scholar conducted 25 September, 2020. The sentence in bold is the author’s own emphasis.
63 For the current controversy over the statue in Berlin, refer to: https://www.dw.com/en/comfort-women-memorial-berlin/a-55272887
64 Interview conducted by Dr. Heisoo Shin and Jihyun Kim with a Korean activist conducted 22 September.
back to Taiwan. Indeed, the Ama House in Taiwan held the seminars with these returned students.65

6. Beyond the Victim-Centered Narrative and Towards a Post-Survivor Movement

A survivor-centered approach to conflict-related sexual slavery requires recognition of the agency and leadership of survivors as agents of change. It requires overcoming patriarchal narratives of survivors as passive victims who are blamed and shamed. The diverse voices and experiences of survivors must also be recognized and specifically responded to. Thus, rather than moralizing and homogenizing the voices of survivors, activists argue that the purpose of the movement on military sexual slavery is to problematize unequal power relations and transform the power structure. During an interview, a Korean scholar explained:

I think the key points of the movement is to transform the unjust power relations and structure. The feminist activists of this movement knew very well that the voices of individual survivors vary. But the fundamental problem of Japanese military sexual slavery is that the perpetrator did not take responsibility for their crimes nor gave a proper apology to the victims. And this movement has led to problematize the patriarchal structure and dismantle the unjust power structure. Thus, the essence of the survivor-centered approach is not absolute praise of victims nor hatred towards victims. Victims absolutism and blaming victims are two sides of the same coin because such an approach objectifies victims and render them “Others”. I would like to emphasize that revealing the systems of sexual slavery and transforming its unjust power structure is the survivor-centered approach we are looking for, rather than focusing on an individual victim case.66

By problematizing unequal gender power relations and hierarchical power structure that protect them, the civil society movement for accountability on military sexual slavery has emphasized its intersectionality, with relevance to issues of gender, nation, class, and social systems. Unfortunately, feminists and activists are facing challenges in depoliticizing the issue of military sexual slavery. A Korean scholar stated:

I think that this military sexual slavery issue should be expanded to encompass the class issue. Because most of the victims were poor women. Thus, as a researcher, I have argued that this military sexual slavery issue is the intersectional topic that class, gender and nation are interlocked. However, I am not sure to what extent our society has understood this issue from the intersectional perspective.67

A Taiwanese scholar echoed this sentiment:

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65 Interview conducted by Dr. Heisoo Shin and Jihyun Kim with a Korean activist conducted 22 September, 2020.
66 Interview conducted by Dr. Heisoo Shin and Jihyun Kim with a Korean scholar conducted 9 October, 2020. The sentence in bold is the author’s own emphasis.
67 Interview conducted by Dr. Heisoo Shin and Jihyun Kim with a Korean scholar conducted 25 September, 2020. The sentence in bold is the author’s own emphasis.
In Taiwan, young people tend to say that “we need a multi-cultural interpretation of the Japanese military sexual slavery issue and we accept all the possibilities of the Ama’s narratives.” This kind of Post-modern attitude towards historical facts seems to influence young academics and young intellectuals in Taiwan in a sense. In this context, they believe the Japanese military sexual slavery issue is a women’s issue rather than asking for the Japanese government for an apology. **So, the young independent scholars tend to believe that “maybe some of the Amas were cheated or lied and sent away, but this is just a violence issue and trafficking. It is not wartime slavery sponsored by the State.” So in this way, the military sexual slavery issue becomes trivialized.**

### 6.1. Survivor-centered movement without survivors

As survivors grow older, civil society activists and feminist may be required to revisit their advocacy strategies. It is time for activists to take a new direction for their advocacy in preparation for a survivor-centered movement without living survivors, or a post-survivor movement. The scholars and activists interviewed for this research stressed the urgent need to collect evidence, raise awareness of the issue through historical education to prevent recurrence, and redirect advocacy efforts through the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Agenda (particularly integrating issues of masculinity and trafficking). A Korean scholar reflected:

It is inevitable that we will face the post-survivor movement. Even if the survivors are gone, it does not mean that the survivor-centered principle also disappears. Regardless of whether or not the survivors are alive, the movement should be continued based on the principle of the survivor-centered approach. The principle of the movement will not change but the direction of the movement will need to. **History education to the next generation is really important.** It could be achieved by collecting and analyzing data and disseminating the results through the history education. In order to collect data, international support is necessary to pressure the Japanese government to disclose the document. **Given the historical value of the materials on the Japanese military sexual slavery, these materials are a valuable asset for the international community. So, we need international programs and support to enable excavating historical data.**

Critically, the feminist movement for accountability, justice, and reparations for sexual slavery during World War Two does not adequately address issues of masculinity. Male soldiers were reduced to willing perpetrators, without adequate analysis of the patriarchal context in which their actions were committed. Civil society highlighted challenges in reaching out to perpetrators and convincing them to share their experiences as key issues in furthering this analysis. In this regard, an activist responded that “feminist scholars have understood the male perpetrator in the context of the patriarchal structure. **Thus, more research is needed on how masculinity is constructed through the patriarchal structure. As part of the movement on the military sexual slavery,**

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68 Interview conducted by Dr. Heisoo Shin and Jihyun Kim with a Taiwanese scholar conducted on 1 October, 2020. The sentence in bold is the author’s own emphasis.

69 Interview conducted by Dr. Heisoo Shin and Jihyun Kim with a Korean scholar conducted on 26 September, 2020. The sentence in bold is the author’s own emphasis.
we need to pay attention to masculinity.” To prevent the reoccurrence of conflict-related sexual slavery, it is crucial to address harmful patriarchal gender norms and unequal power structures that are exacerbated during conflict.

Further, the historical incidence of conflict-related sexual slavery during World War Two in Asia and the Pacific must be connected to contemporary occurrences in countries such as Timor-Leste, Uganda, and Iraq. To strengthen the global response to conflict-related sexual slavery, activists must join forces and address the intersections of trafficking, conflict, sexual slavery, and humanitarian emergencies. In particular, increased international migration and forced displacement as a result of armed conflict and natural disasters, have created zones of impunity for organized criminal networks to traffic women and girls for the purpose of sexual slavery. In the case of South Korea, the Korean prostitutes who worked in U.S. military camp towns, were replaced by migrant women from Southeastern and Central Asian countries and Russia as a result of globalization. Given the current resurgence of far-right parties and fundamentalism globally and the increasing backlash against feminism, contemporary forms of gender-based violence are more complex and insidious, demanding a coordinated response from civil society. Regarding the evolution of conflict, an interviewee added,

In the past, war crimes were applied to the conflicts between States. So, the State was the clear subject who should be held accountable for war crimes. However, contemporary conflicts get more complicated. Current wars and conflicts tend to be occurred within the territory of the State by non-state actors, such as ISIS. However, within the current framework of WPS 1325 has limitation to hold the non-state actors responsible for the conflicts and war crimes.

Thus, the changing landscape of armed conflict and contemporary forms of sexual slavery require the civil society movement on military sexual slavery to similarly adapt and expand, encompassing these issues into their movement.

6.2. “Comfort Women” and Women, Peace, and Security

Following the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) in 2000, the Korean government developed its corresponding first National Action Plan (NAP) for the period of 2014 to 2017. In 2018, the Korean government adopted a second iteration of its NAP (2018-2020). Currently, a third iteration of the NAP (2021-2023) is being developed in consultation with civil society actors and the relevant ministries of the Korean government. The WPS Agenda is a critical framework through which the global response to conflict-related sexual slavery can be strengthened.

70 Interview conducted by Dr. Heisoo Shin and Jihyun Kim with a Korean scholar conducted on 7 October, 2020. The sentence in bold is the author’s own emphasis.
72 Interview conducted by Dr. Heisoo Shin and Jihyun Kim with a Korean scholar conducted 29 September, 2020.
73 The first and second NAP of the Korean government can be found here: http://www.mogel.go.kr/engfwleng_lw_f001.do
74 Ibid.
Unlike many countries in which conflict-related sexual slavery occurs, Korea’s first and second NAPs both address the issue of the “comfort women.” The first NAP highlighted the need for recognition and commemoration of survivors, emphasizing history education and museums. It also included relief and recovery services such as livelihood support, nursing care, and medical treatment for survivors of the Japanese military sexual slavery. The second iteration of the NAP pledged to strengthen international cooperation to demand accountability and justice for historical crimes of conflict-related sexual slavery. The incorporation of specific provisions on conflict-related sexual slavery to meet the needs of survivors in the NAP is an achievement of the Korean civil society actors who led the movement to address Japanese military sexual slavery over the past 30 years. More importantly, the incorporation of the issue of “comfort women” into the NAPs situates the incidence of Japanese military sexual slavery into contemporary discussions on conflict-related sexual violence in the WPS Agenda. Thus, movements for accountability, justice, and reparations remain ever relevant.

Despite the inclusion of provisions on conflict-related sexual slavery, interviewees pointed out that the Korean NAP on UNSCR 1325 has not brought meaningful change or a transformative approach to the issue of “comfort women.” Rather, the interviewees critiqued the structural limitations of the UN system and the Korean government in implementing the NAP on UNSCR 1325. First, the implementation of UNSCR 1325 globally is limited by its focus on Member States. It is more challenging to hold non-state actors, who often perpetrate crimes of sexual slavery, accountable for women’s rights and gender equality. Since the WPS resolutions are not binding, implementation of the provisions of the agenda rely on the political will of Member States.

Second, interviewees highlighted the failure of the NAP on UNSCR 1325 to address the structural drivers of conflict-related sexual violence, including sexual slavery. Instead, the NAP focuses on short-term protective measures, such as supporting livelihood programs for victims of the Japanese military sexual slavery or refugees from North Korea. Without adequately addressing the drivers of conflict-related sexual violence, it is impossible to effectively prevent reoccurrence of the crime. Civil society activists and scholars interviewed for this research emphasized the need for the third iteration of the Korean NAP on UNSCR 1325 to respond to ongoing prostitution and trafficking of Southeastern and Central Asian women, along with Russian women, for the purposes of sexual slavery. Further, the NAP lacks due emphasis on the empowerment and meaningful participation of women in peacebuilding process, as evidenced by the low target percentage of women representativeness in high-level political decision-making. In this context, interviewees critiqued the NAP as unable to bring real changes in the empowerment of women in issues of peace, security, and gender equality.

Although the Korean NAP on UNSCR 1325 has fundamental limitations, the interviewees stressed that its inclusion of specific provisions for survivors of conflict-related sexual slavery, and its recognition of sexual slavery as a distinct form of sexual violence should be celebrated. As NAPs are the primary instrument to implement UNSCR 1325, Korea’s actions could inspire other Member States to include similar language to better respond to the needs of survivors and protect women and girls from the reoccurrence of conflict-related sexual slavery. One scholar argues that “[a]lthough the WPS Agenda does not have binding force, once issues related to sexual
slavery are publicized through corresponding NAPs, States have the obligation to act.”

In particular, it should be noted that the Japanese NAP on UNSCR fails to recognize the issue of “comfort women”, despite significant advocacy from Japanese civil society and the Korean government.

In response to the structural limitations in the implementation of the WPS Agenda, the interviewees highlighted the critical role civil society can play in overcoming bureaucracy of the UN and governments. An interviewee explained that Localization of the WPS Agenda could be a key strategy to full and effective implementation of the resolutions:

It is unlikely that the Korean government will implement a feminist foreign policy. The top-down process of implementation has limited the effectiveness of the NAP. In this regard, movement from civil society should be encouraged and expanded to broaden the WPS agenda and its implementation at the grassroots level. For this, the environment should be encouraged and ensured, in which the women organizations and civil society can actively operate.

Pioneered by the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP), Localization of UNSCR 1325 guarantees leadership, ownership, and participation of local communities in full and effective implementation, leading to context-specific, concrete actions that address the devastating impacts of violence conflicts and meet the needs of those most affected. Without effective and supportive local governance, achievements made at the national level in policymaking towards preventing and protecting women and girls from conflict-related sexual slavery may be overturned. Localization also facilitates women’s civil society and survivors’ meaningful participation in local governance by creating increased avenues for coordination and dialogue with government officials on the drafting and implementation of policies and programs on WPS.

Full and effective implementation of the WPS resolutions and corresponding NAPs on UNSCR 1325 requires recognition and investment in civil society leadership and the meaningful participation of women at all levels of decision-making on issues of peace, security, and gender equality.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

Since survivors of Japanese military sexual slavery broke the silence and shared their horrific experiences publicly, survivors themselves, feminist scholars and activists across the world have mobilized through transnational activism to demand justice, accountability, and reparations for the crimes committed. Even though the historical, social and political-economic context of each country varies, most governments’ responses to the issue of military sexual slavery have been swayed by regimes’ political ideology and varying geopolitical landscapes. Although civil society actors elicited some support from their respective governments, adequate and appropriate justice commiserate

75 Interview conducted by Dr. Heisoo Shin and Jihyun Kim with a Korean scholar conducted 29 September, 2020.
76 Interview conducted by Dr. Heisoo Shin and Jihyun Kim with a Korean activist conducted 21 September, 2020. The sentence in bold is the author’s own emphasis.
with the gravity of the crimes is yet to be delivered. Nevertheless, survivors, with support from civil society, have led a global movement for a strengthened response to military sexual slavery committed during World War Two in Asia and the Pacific through a wide range of initiatives. These have included sustained advocacy, lobbying, an international war crimes tribunal, lawsuits against the Japanese government, local and grassroots movements, the establishment of history museums, and continuous demonstration.

The WPS Agenda serves as an important framework to strengthen the global response to historical and contemporary incidences of conflict-related sexual slavery. The Korean NAP on UNSCR 1325 is one of the few in the world that recognizes sexual slavery as a specific crime of sexual violence and addresses the needs of survivors. Feminist scholars and activists who led the transnational movement on the issue of Japanese military sexual slavery have recognized the need to expand their advocacy to encompass contemporary WPS challenges such as trafficking, gender justice, and the reoccurrence of the crime across many countries in a post-survivor movement. The world is yet to learn from the horrific experiences of the “comfort women.” It is critical to prevent reoccurrence of conflict-related sexual slavery and the continued violation of women’s rights by warring parties.

**Recommendations**

**To the Government of Japan, and the relevant countries involved in World War Two:**

- Systematize the inclusion of provisions on conflict-related sexual slavery within National Action Plans (NAPs) on WPS to improve delivery of justice, redress, compensation, or restitution to survivors, and prevent reoccurrence of the crime
- Prioritize full and effective implementation of NAPs on UNSCR 1325 as a critical tool to strengthen the global response to conflict-related sexual slavery.
- Hold the Japanese government accountable for releasing historical records, and government documents related to the incidence of military sexual slavery during World War Two.
- Establish a coordination mechanism to share, preserve, and analyze historical records, government documents, and survivor’s testimonies related to the military sexual slavery during World War Two to strengthen efforts to prevent and protect women and girls from contemporary incidences of the crime.
- Provide reliable, sustainable, timely, long-term, and flexible funding to women’s civil society groups and survivor networks responding to the drivers and impacts of military sexual slavery during World War Two.
- Integrate curriculum on the incidence of military sexual slavery during World War Two, gender equality, women’s rights, and peacebuilding into primary school curriculum and textbooks.

**To the Government of Korea and its relevant Ministries:**

- Prioritize full and effective implementation of its the third NAP on UNSCR 1325 in partnership with women’s civil society groups.
• Provide training on gender, women's rights, gender-responsive peacebuilding, and violence prevention for government officials, UN Peace Keeping Operations (UN PKO) and aid workers.
• Strengthen institutional efforts to prevent gender-based violence committed by the military and the capacity of gender experts to assist victims in a timely, confidential manner.
• Mainstream issues related to sexual violence in conflict in all decision-making on peace and security, including ceasefire talks, peace negotiations, peace agreement implementation, post conflict resolution processes, transitional justice mechanisms, public safety, reunification, emergency preparedness and disaster relief, and preventing violent extremism and countering terrorism, in order to prevent the reoccurrence of such crimes and further outbreaks of violence.
• Strengthen partnership with UN entities and North Korea through the organization of international conferences and provision of financial assistance to implement the WPS resolutions; and expand international cooperation on WPS.
• Ensure that survivors of Japanese military sexual slavery and women's civil society groups meaningfully participate at all levels in the design and implementation of the National Action Plans on UNSCR 1325.
• Promote women's meaningful political, social, and economic participation in decision-making at all levels on conflict prevention, ceasefire negotiations, peace processes, peace agreement implementation, conflict resolution, transitional justice mechanisms, preventing violent extremism and countering terrorism, security sector reform, public safety, reunification, and emergency preparedness and disaster relief.
• Integrate WPS issues in mandatory primary school curriculum to build broad awareness.
• Establish a national archive system for historical records, evidence, data, and survivor testimonies related to the Japanese military sexual slavery.
• Recognize survivors of sexual slavery as victims of armed conflict, and provide appropriate recognition and redress, thereby reducing societal stigma.
• Strengthen government efforts to honor survivors of Japanese military sexual slavery through the expansion of memorial projects, history education, and international cooperation.
• Create coordination mechanisms for regular consultation and partnership with civil society actors for the implementation of the NAP on UNSCR 1325 and other policies on military, diplomacy, public safety, and reunification.
• Institutionalize Localization as an implementation strategy for the WPS resolutions to affect change in conflict-affected communities.
• Improve the gender-responsiveness of humanitarian aid for refugees from North Korea to foster self-reliance.

To the United Nations and INGOs:
• Integrate provisions and language on Japanese military sexual slavery, as a distinct form of conflict-related sexual violence with specific corresponding drivers and impact, within global programs, policies, reports, and related implementation mechanisms corresponding to the WPS Agenda; and encourage its inclusion in NAPs on UNSCR 1325 of all relevant Member States involved in World War Two.
• Uphold and follow the legal precedent of the final judgement of the Women’s International War Crimes Tribunal (2001) which held perpetrators accountable for sexual slavery committed during World War Two in Asia and the Pacific as a crime against humanity and required the provision of adequate redress and reparations to survivors.

• Hold the Japanese government accountable to full and effective implementation of the WPS resolutions and concluding observations on the issue of military sexual slavery during World War Two adopted by UN treaty monitoring bodies after reviewing reports of implementation of ICCPR, ICESCR, ICERD, CEDAW, and CAT.

• Include “comfort women” documents in UNESCO’s Memory of the World Register to acknowledge their experiences and restore the honor of the victims and survivors of military sexual slavery.

• Strengthen transnational solidarity activism for survivors of Japanese military sexual slavery and the implementation of the WPS agenda to prevent reoccurrence of the crime in contemporary contexts.

Cited from https://www.sisain.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=28880

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<td>Daegu, South Korea</td>
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