

Ms. Kimiko Kaneda, former comfort woman from Korea passes away



勝山泰佑写真集「海渡る恨」より



On January 27, 2005, former comfort woman Ms. Kimiko Kaneda (her Japanese pseudonym) passed away after a long period of hospitalization. She was 83 years old. The funeral was held on January 31 and was well attended. Directors and staff attended from the Asian Women's Fund and delivered a letter of condolence from President Tomiichi Murayama. Ms. Kaneda was laid to rest at the cemetery of the Hill of Hope (*kibo no oka*) where people who contributed to Korea and sacrificed their lives for that country are buried.

Ms. Kaneda was born in Tokyo of a Korean father, who later became a pastor, and a Japanese mother. Immediately after she was born she was separated from her real mother. After going to Korea she lived without her family, who were dispersed, and experienced many hardships. She said that she had spent a lonely childhood without the love of her family.

In 1938, when Ms. Kaneda was 16 years old and working as a live-in maid, an acquaintance recommended to her a "good employment opportunity." She was sent to a comfort facility in Zao Qiang in China with women who had been tricked in the same way and put together. She desperately resisted Japanese soldiers who stabbed her chest with their bayonet and mercilessly broke her wrist. Her wounds never completely healed. Ms. Kaneda became addicted to opium, which she had turned to as an escape, was released from work as a comfort woman for medical treatment in 1945, enabling her to survive from the end of the war.

After Ms. Kaneda returned to Japan, she had to have her womb removed, which had been injured from the severe life in the comfort facility. She did her best to conceal her past and lived alone in solitude. However, she could not hold back her anger toward the Japanese government for not admitting to its responsibility for the comfort women issue and finally decided to break her silence in 1991.

When the Asian Women's Fund was founded in 1995, Ms. Kaneda said that the former comfort women could die even that day or the day after and that it would not do any good even if all of Japan were to be presented to them, since they would be dead. This is also what she would tell victims who insisted she should accept nothing but state compensation. She was the first in Korea to announce the acceptance of the Atonement Project, which put the Fund's project in Korea in motion.

In January 1997, Ms. Kaneda became one of the first victims in Korea to accept the Fund's Atonement Project and a letter of apology from the Japanese prime minister. Korean working groups and public opinion in Korea, which opposed the Fund, discriminated against her for having received the atonement fund, even though she was a victim. She was never able to achieve physical or spiritual peace. We have no choice but to admit that the Fund was powerless in this aspect.

Ms. Kaneda's testimony was always consistent and she was loved and trusted by other *harumoni* (meaning "grandmother" in Korean) who called her "sister." When she was still alive she always said, "I took care of dying soldiers. They all died crying for their mothers at the end. We must not wage war."

Ms. Kaneda's presence had an immeasurable significance for the Asian Women's Fund and all those who have sworn not to repeat the mistake inherent in the comfort women issue ever again. We pray with all our hearts that her soul may rest in peace.