

Facing the Situation Surrounding the Victims and their Feelings

Making an Effort so the Victims May Begin to Forgive

Interview with Former Advisory Committee Member, Shigeru Nakajima



Shigeru Nakajima, currently a working member of the ILO Governing Body, acted as a member of the Advisory Committee of the Asian Women's Fund representing *Jichiro* (All-Japan Prefectural & Municipal Workers Union) from when AWF was founded in 1995 until 1999. In what ways was he involved in AWF's activities? How does he view AWF today ten years after it was founded? As AWF was established in response to a request from the government to facilitate the participation of the Japanese people, it is impossible to talk about it without mentioning its history. Labor organizations such as *Rengo* (the Japanese Confederation of Trade Unions) and *Jichiro* played a role in the participation of the Japanese people. Against that background, we asked Mr. Nakajima how he feels when he observes AWF.

--You had a hard time as the person in charge of the Atonement Project in Korea and Taiwan. How do you feel now?

■ The Responsibility for What was Lacking in the Struggle against the Japan-Korea Treaty

Mr. Nakajima: In the end, I'm happy that I was involved. I myself learned a lot. I learned many things about the issue of postwar compensation and the problem of Japanese history, especially Japan's relations with Asian countries including Korea and China, and how we are going to relate to each other into the future.

The influence Ms. Kaneda (Kimiko Kaneda, pseudonym) had on me was particularly strong. She happened to be the same age as my mother. I think about how big a difference there was between their lives simply because one was born on the Korean peninsula and the other in Japan—how Japan in the old days inflicted such deep, horrible wounds on women like Mr. Kaneda.

Later, she said to me, "If I had led an ordinary life, I would have a child about your age." I had indescribable feelings. I felt very strongly that I was being asked how I, who was of her son's generation, could or must cope with the injuries that Ms. Kaneda and other people of her generation were burdened with. That alone was an extremely important

lesson for me.

Originally, I started to become fully involved in social movements around 1964 and 1965. The struggle against the Japan-Korea Treaty was one of the major objectives of the students' movement at that time. In those days, I viewed the problem only from an highly political point of view, which was to oppose the tightening of the Japan-U.S.-Korea anti-communist military alliance. However, neither the students nor the laborers in the movement at that time were barely critical about the fact that the treaty did not include in its processes how Japan was going to take historical responsibility for the emotional scars it had inflicted on the people of the Korean peninsula in the past and the realities of invasion and colonization.

The initiatives taken up as movements in Japan caused us to miss the chance to build a new relationship by opposing the treaty and finalizing postwar compensation. In that sense that the poor positioning of the initiatives created this situation, I thought that as a person involved in the movement, I must take part of the responsibility for the fact that the victims were not fully compensated.

--Around the time AWF was founded, people finally began to direct their attention to the issue of postwar compensation, along which the comfort women issue began to be taken up as a topic.

Nakajima: I became strongly aware of that when Prime Minister Tomiichiro Murayama's administration was established. The time was ripe at the 50th anniversary of the end of the war for Japanese society to do something that it had never been able to do. My position was to address the issue of official postwar compensation as legal redress with renewed determination. Therefore, during the initial stages in which the administration was planning AWF, I was rather critical about it and opposed the plan. I thought that we must not obscure it and that we must officially compensate the victims. However, what should I do to express my atonement in real, specific terms? I came to the conclusion when I met and talked to the Korean victims. Every victim I met had led half of her life under severe conditions. They were seriously injured both mentally and physically. On top of that, they were ageing fast. While pursuing the ideal of paying them state compensation, I thought that the issue must be dealt with in a practical and concrete manner because one aspect of the issue was that we were racing against time while they were still alive. In the end, my basic attitude toward AWF then was to take up a critical point of view.

--The governing party was a coalition of the Liberal Democratic Party, the Social Democratic Party of Japan and the New Party Sakigake. The Ministry of General Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs understood the cabinet's intention and promoted the plan together.

■ “Special Angles” as Additional Measures

Nakajima: In general, everybody exercised good will and demonstrated sincerity. I think that they, as government officials, thought they must take the opportunity of the

50th anniversary of the end of the war to atone for the events that they had not been able to do before. They were afraid that something might or could go wrong in the course the country was charting for the future. They had to try to resolve the matter no matter what.

They were of the same fixed view, which was that they could never compromise their position that everything was legally squared away by the San Francisco Treaty and the bilateral agreements concluded between Japan and other countries that dealt with the conflicts. However, for areas where specific topics could be set up so they could be reasonably discussed from special angles, they had to make an attempt to talk the political parties, particularly the Liberal Democratic Party, into taking special measures for humanitarian reasons. They tried hard as government officials to remove the thorn that might end up being a huge obstacle in the future.

The postwar issues were basically settled by law, but it was possible to take additional measures on humanitarian grounds for, let's say, survivors of the atomic bomb who represent a specific aspect of the war. The second special aspect was dispersed families, in which the repatriation issue from Sakhalin is included.

The third aspect was sex, which is the comfort women issue. Both the soldiers and the comfort women were taken by force, but they were dealt with from different aspects. We were thinking about how we could make comprehensive compensation a reality even using the form of additional measures from special angles. The government officials and we were, in a way, sharing the same bed but having different dreams.

--During the 50 years after the war, many discussions took place about the initiatives taken for postwar compensation.

Nakajima: A half century, it was. It was a turning point for people to look back on the past so they could go forward. It was probably the time that everybody was feeling that it would be the source of trouble if we didn't do it then. In our country, the time happened to be politically right with the advent of a new framework of the coalition party, which we had never had since the war.

People who oppose AWF say that something that was closer to state compensation could have been achieved had all of us worked hand in hand. On the contrary, however, there was overwhelming conservative political power, and in terms of social trends, the general public thought the postwar compensation issue was a thing of the distance past. Stubborn ideas had taken root in some people's minds as well. What can we do in this kind of political environment? When faced with the problem of having to race against time while the surviving victims were still alive and come up with a good outcome very quickly, what did they accomplish by directing all of their energy in opposing AWF without being involved themselves, insisting that the principles be strictly adhered to? I think it is reasonable to argue that AWF's projects could have been augmented from within, or designed to satisfy the victims' emotional and situational needs even better had all of us worked hand in hand.

Let's look at the results. It has now been exactly ten years since AWF started. Many of the surviving victims are dying one after another. Some accepted the Atonement Project and others did not. I still think that it meant a great deal for us to have been able

to communicate our feelings of atonement while they were still alive, instead of having been able to do nothing by observing the principles. I may think this way because I was lucky enough to meet those women in person.



--Action taken by *Jichiro's* Tottori Prefectural Headquarters became a point of contact between the labor movement and the civic movement.

Nakajima: I have the experience of taking a stand against the conclusion of the 1965 Japan-Korea Treaty through my involvement in a labor movement. The chair of the Tottori Headquarters at that time was just as old as I was. Witnessing the activities of the labor movement, he had the same kinds of thoughts as I did.

He was very practical. He thought that there would be no future unless the young union members faced the war victims and talked with them to understand how tragic the war was. As human beings, the young members must understand that they had no choice but be on the side of a wrongdoer and sincerely faced those who were made to be the victims. He implemented a plan in which women who were forced to become comfort women were invited to Tottori to stay with young union members to pass down the stories of their different experiences overnight. Young union members voluntarily massaged the victims' shoulders and feet. The victims stammered out in Japanese their true feelings. Through that kind of exchange, the young union members realized the fact that those good-natured grandmothers were put through the mill by their grandfathers' contemporaries. They all thought about how to face up to the responsibility. Some asked their friends and other union members to take a trip to Korea together, visit the grandmothers and stay with them. Things developed. This initiative was taken by some other groups in addition to the Tottori Prefectural Headquarters. This also was the base for getting involved in the contribution to express the atonement of the Japanese people. Despite the fact that these groups who had met the victims in person and contributed to the development felt critical about AWF

to a certain degree, they became actively involved in the fund-raising campaign, thinking how they could put in practice what they could at that point and communicate their intention in a specific and substantial manner. Although it was a labor movement, the members had exchanges with young activists of the civic movement for the postwar compensation issue in Japan as well as Korean people who were involved in the civic movement, such as Korea's Association of Bereaved Families of the Pacific War Dead. It broadened the movement, and increased the area of interest to include the importance of the human rights issue in particular, which, of course, includes the women's rights issue. Naturally, this led to the areas of movement's involvement becoming enriched both in variety and depth.

--There was a series of discussions in the process of solidifying the activities and

scheme of the Atonement Project. Now, AWF is working on maintaining the scheme.

■ Maintenance to Complete AWF's Project

Nakajima: We argued a lot with the staff from the Asian Region Policy Department of Policies for the Asian Region at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Cabinet Councilors' Office on External Affairs at that time about how to establish the scheme to implement the project. On many occasions it felt like we were about to beat each other up. Now I fondly remember those experiences that continued until two or three in the morning for days at a time. I continued my attempt to convince them by saying, "This is the reality the victims are forced to live with and this is how they feel. The entire project is sure to collapse unless you cover these points." I think it helped them to make an effort in their own way to alter the original scheme to suit the reality and feelings of the victims.

Meanwhile, people like Ms. Kaneda who taught me a great deal passed away, which made me very sad. I think AWF has to make the final effort to increase the propensity of the victims to forgive as much as possible, so that, to quote the slogan, "They can never forget, but at least they feel a little like forgiving." By "the final effort" I mean the task known as "follow-up" or "after care." I think that now is the time when the outcome of AWF's project finally comes under scrutiny. The current situation is that those women who have reached the final phase of their difficult lives are living each day with no choice but to think, "It will be my turn to die next." I think that it is extremely important for us to ensure that they are as willing as possible to forgive.

Therefore, this final task must not be executed as a "clearance project" before closing AWF. It has to be considered as a significant task to complete AWF's project. There is an expression, "the work lacks the finishing touches." With this task, we should attach importance to its basic positioning in taking the initiative.

I really want to thank Mr. Hara (Bunbei), the former President of AWF. When I was active in the student movement, I was often arrested and detained under the name of the Bunbei Hara, Superintendent General of the Metropolitan Police. I certainly never expected to work with him at AWF. He was committed to showing us that he was ready to face the reality of the site, namely the reality of the victims, and focus on the opinions based on their feelings, to which he was ready to pay the highest respect. He asked us to work on the issue according to his commitment, which encouraged us a lot. I was grateful to him.

President Hara was nothing like the image I had of him when I was a student. I certainly do respect his insight and warm personality. I feel that he has taught me so many things. Frankly, I take my hat off to him for the way he listened to and treated Ms. Kaneda and other victims. He would never make them feel that they were discriminated against in any way at all. A majority of the victims came from the most destitute lower classes in the Korean peninsula at that time. Many were illiterate, but they have dignity that they acquired through the tragedy of their lives. I want to say that Mr. Hara faced them as a human being in a true sense. Some people spout lofty words, but their attitude is clearly discriminatory or betrays contempt. Mr. Hara was never like that. I consider myself extremely lucky to have been able to work with him for that period of time.

--In the comfort women issue, what it came down to was that we were asked how we should confront the victims.

■ **Unforgivable Movements and Those Who Used the Victims to Increase Their Political Status**

Nakajima: I suspect that some of the organizations and politicians in Japan used the victims as an excuse not to be involved in the movement or as a means of expressing their political views. There were people and groups that treated them in a lamentable fashion, so I think I had reason for suspecting that. It is unforgivable that some people referred to the victims who had accepted AWF's project as "traitors to their country." This is an opinion commonly shared both in Japan and overseas.

It is fine for such people to be on that level if the problem came down to the logic of the movement or some academic principle that can be discussed only in terms of being right and wrong. However, in this situation, there are victims who have feelings that cannot be disconnected from the reality of their lives, and on top of that, they are driven to the wall in terms of time because they may soon die. When we think about what to do then, the problem cannot be simply judged by a single standard of yes or no. I would certainly like to respond to the reality the victims are faced with and the feelings of each one of them in any way I can.

When I visited the apartments of the women who forced into being comfort women, they had no bathtub. They had a sink and a shower by a toilet bowl. They had a plastic tub in which they had a quick scrub with a basin of water. I imagined how cold it would be in winter and asked Ms. Kaneda when she was born and how old she was. She was the same age as my mother. I was shocked. She suddenly said that if she had not been made a comfort woman she would have a son of my age. It tormented me to think how she must have felt when she said that. I share my feelings with Ms. Kaneda somewhere in my heart. I could not help continuing to feel that I must never forget the way Japan used to be, which created people like her.

--You can't think it is over.

Nakajima: No, I can't. My feelings may not have been awakened if I did not hear such words from her in person. I think it was the year before she passed away when she came to Japan for the last time. People around her said, "Look, Ms. Kaneda, your boyfriend Mr. Nakajima is here. Have your picture taken with him." She said that she couldn't because her hair was messed up and she did not have any makeup on. She is hiding her face in the photo. I remember that she was very charming in some ways.

Kaneda Kimiko (pseudonym): Ms. Kaneda was forced to become a comfort woman licensed by the Japanese military in China. She returned to Korea in 1945. In January 2005, she passed away in the suburbs of Seoul. She was one of the plaintiffs who claimed the postwar compensation with Korea's Association of Bereaved Families of the Pacific War Dead.