

Thoughts on the “Comfort Women Statue” in Berlin

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Introduction

In September 2020, the Korea Verband, a group of Korean Germans, erected a “Comfort Women Statue,” also known as the “Peace Statue,” in central Berlin’s district of Mitte. Although this was the third statue to be erected in Germany, this was the first one to be located in a public place. Thus, it triggered a controversy between Japan and South Korea in Germany.¹

In response to the Japanese government’s objections, the Mayor of Mitte, Stephan Dassel, stated on October 8 that the permit granted to erect the statue would be revoked, and the statue would be removed. The reasons he cited were 1) instead of expressing a universal message against sexual violence, the statue commented only on the actions of the Japanese military, prompting negative reactions both in Japan and Berlin; 2) the statue and its epitaph can be understood as representing political and historical antagonism between Japan and South Korea; 3) Mitte is home to people from over 100 countries around the world. Therefore, to prevent the sense of solidarity in the district—a solidarity that is based on the fact that the district is a place where people are tolerant, open, peaceful, and respect each other—from being adversely affected, Mitte must not side with one party in this complicated bilateral historical conflict.²

Despite this, however, the Korean Verband submitted an objection to the Berlin administrative court and launched a movement against the removal of the statue. Consequently, on December 1, the Mitte District Council passed a resolution, with a majority vote, that requested the district government to create a policy enabling the statue to remain in place permanently.³ The resolution emphasized the significance of the “opportunity to discuss sexual violence in times of military conflict and in times of peace.”

Currently, the statue remains in place. Its removal any time soon would be difficult, and thus, the issue is likely to persist over a long period of time.

In this paper, rather than taking up the highly divisive issue of comfort women, I will focus on the perspectives of the Mayor and District Council of Mitte. I will discuss whether their actions foment the conflict by taking sides or whether the statue contributes to the discussion on sexual violence—the two issues that represent the different perspectives held by the Mayor and the District Council. In doing so, I will consider the debate in Freiburg, Germany, where the same problem was faced previously.

¹ For further information on the history and background of the “Comfort Women Statue” in Berlin, see Norihide Miyoshi, “Kaisetsu: Berurin Ianfuzo-mondai (Commentary: The Issue of the Berlin Comfort Women Statue),” *Yomiuri Shimbun* (newspaper), December 10, 2020.

² See the URL below for the text of the press release issued by the District of Mitte on October 8: <https://www.berlin.de/ba-mitte/aktuelles/pressemitteilungen/2020/pressemitteilung.1001656.php>.

³ See the URL below for the text of the resolution adopted by the Mitte District Council on December 1: <https://www.berlin.de/ba-mitte/politik-und-verwaltung/bezirksverordnetenversammlung/online/vo020.asp?VOLFDNR=10298>

1. Divided Perspectives

Japan and South Korea have been engaged in a long-drawn conflict over the comfort women issue. Even today, they remain divided on the issue.

The first is the matter of initiatives taken in response to the comfort women issue. The Japanese government's stance is that this issue was legally resolved by the Agreement on the Settlement of Problems Concerning Property and Claims and on Economic Co-operation between Japan and the Republic of Korea, which was reached in association with the 1965 Treaty on Basic Relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea. Despite this, however, from the humanitarian perspective of relief for the women who served as "comfort women," the Japanese government paid "atonement money" and delivered a letter of apology from the Prime Minister of Japan based on "Asian Women's Fund," which was launched in July 1995. Moreover, in December 2015, the Foreign Ministers of both Japan and South Korea came to an agreement by which the Japanese government would pay 1 billion yen to the "Reconciliation and Healing Foundation" set up by the South Korean government. At the same time, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe expressed his "heartfelt apology" and feelings of remorse. Based on this, both Japan and South Korea confirmed that the comfort women issue was "resolved finally and irreversibly." This agreement was highly praised and welcomed by the international community, including the then-Secretary-General of the United Nations Ban Ki-moon and the US government.⁴

For example, the US Secretary of State John Forbes Kerry believed that the agreement would promote "healing" and improve relations between Japan and South Korea. He released a statement praising "the Prime Ministers of Japan and South Korea for their courage and vision that led to this agreement" and called for "international support" for the agreement.⁵

As for the South Korean government, the Moon Jae-in administration that came to power in May 2017 examined the Japan-South Korea agreement and concluded that it was not a true resolution to the problem. It officially announced "the dissolution of the Reconciliation and Healing Foundation" in November 2018. Moreover, on January 8, 2021, the Seoul Central District Court ruled that the Japanese government was to pay reparations based on the fact that the actions of the Japanese Empire were "systematic, organized, and widespread inhumane actions," which were therefore in violation of international norms. Thus, the principle of state immunity under international law was inapplicable in this case. This led to a worsening of Japan-South Korean relations that has persisted to this day. The issue of comfort women therefore remains unresolved, and the governments of Japan and South Korea maintain different perspectives on the same.

Next is the matter of perceptions about the "facts" regarding comfort women. The resolution passed by the Mitte District Council stated that "it is a clear historical fact that during World War II, the Japanese military engaged in the systematic sexual exploitation of women in East Asia." However, discussion on the specific details of this "fact" became polarized due to the influence of politics, ideology, and nationalism. Consequently, perceptions even in the academic world suffered major divisions. This led to an unsettled situation.

While the existence of "comfort women" is unquestionable, a variety of views on the number of such women and the details regarding who they were (including whether or not some were minors at the time) exist. There have been varied claims regarding the "facts" about the circumstances related to the comfort women as well as other related issues.

⁴ History Issues Q&A Q5: What is the view of the Government of Japan concerning the comfort women issue? 1. The issue of comfort women between Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK) (https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/q_a/faq16.html).

⁵ *Asahi Shimbun* (newspaper), December 30, 2015.

In South Korea, a “collective memory” that “a large number (some claim 200,000) of girls and women were forcibly abducted by the Japanese government and turned into sexual slaves” has become established. The aforementioned ruling by the Seoul Central District Court was based upon this “collective memory.”

On the other hand, academic circles in Japan are divided, with some objecting to the South Korean claim of a “collective memory.” Naturally, there are some in Japan who have extreme views and trivialize or reject the facts as they are opposed to Japan recognizing its “negative legacy,” and in fact, these people are criticized both within Japan and overseas.

The stance of the Japanese government regarding the recognition of the “facts,” which is based on research conducted by academics in Japan, is that “there are claims that can hardly be said to be based on historical facts, such as the allegations of ‘forceful taking away’ of comfort women and ‘sex slaves’ as well as the figure of ‘200,000’ persons or ‘several hundred thousands’ for the total number of comfort women,” and as a result, Japan’s take differs from South Korea’s based on “collective memory.”⁶

On the other hand, recently in South Korea as well, some people, albeit only few, have begun to criticize the concept of “collective memory.” For example, Lee Young-hoon, former professor at Seoul National University, published his own unique research that differs from the prevailing view in South Korea regarding comfort women and other aspects of colonial rule in South Korea. He published his book *Anti-Japan Tribalism* in 2019, which garnered considerable attention in both Japan and South Korea.⁷

In South Korea, legal action—in the form of defamation suits (alleging the defamation of comfort women) and alleging violations of the National Security Law—has been taken in response to historical narratives that differ from the “collective memory.”

One example is a defamation lawsuit filed against Park Yu-ha, author of the book *Comfort Women of the Empire*, which is referenced in this paper. In response, former Japanese Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama, former speaker of the Japanese House of Representatives Yohei Kono, author Kenzaburo Oe, historian Bruce Comings, and other liberal intellectuals in Japan and the US voiced their protest against the “public authority vested in the (South Korean) Public Prosecutor’s Office being used to suppress academic inquiry and freedom based on a particular historical view” in the wake of a “ruling that was based on conjecture and misunderstanding.”⁸

Johan Galtung, a global authority on peace studies from Norway, indicated that reconciliation is a three-step process: 1) verification of the facts, 2) announcement of an agreement, and 3) future construction. Regarding the issue of perceptions of history in Japan and South Korea, the “verification of the facts” step can be thought of as including mistakes, exaggerations, and falsehoods on the Korean side and mistakes, trivialization, and falsehoods on the Japanese side, and therefore, Galtung advised that there is “a need to distinguish falsehoods from facts” through a process of joint fact verification by Japan and South Korea.⁹

Under these circumstances, the epitaph on the “Comfort Women Statue” erected in Berlin demands further apology from Japan in its statement that “The white butterfly is a symbol of reincarnation and the hope for a sincere apology from those responsible.” It also states that “The cut-off hair indicates the violent abduction of the girls and women. During World War II, the Japanese military abducted countless girls and women from across the Asian-Pacific region

⁶ History Issues Q&A Q5: What is the view of the Government of Japan concerning the comfort women issue? 2. The comfort women issue in the international community (https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/q_a/faq16.html).

⁷ The Japanese language version is: Lee, Young-hoon, author & editor, *Hannichi Shuzoku Shugi: Nikkan Kiki no Kongen* (Anti-Japanese Tribalism: The Root of the Korean Crisis), Bungeishunju, 2019.

⁸ *Mainichi Shimbun* (newspaper) November 27, 2015.

⁹ Johan Galtung (Mitachi Eiji, trans.), *Nihonjin notameno Heiwa-ron* (People’s Peace: Positive Peace in East Asia & Japan’s New Role), Diamond, Inc., 2017, pp. 101-106.

and forced them into sexual slavery.”

The epitaph also states that the statue was donated by the Korean Council for Justice and Remembrance for the Issue of Military Sexual Slavery by Japan (aka the “Korean Council”). It notes that the first statue was established in 2011 to commemorate the one-thousandth instance of the “Wednesday Demonstration” for the Japanese military sexual slavery issue, which has been held each week since January 1992 in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul.

The “Korean Council” is a citizen’s group that was founded in November 1990 under the name “The Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan” for resolving the comfort women issue and providing support to former-comfort women. In July 2018, it changed its name to the Korean Council for Justice and Remembrance for the Issue of Military Sexual Slavery by Japan. It demands that the Japanese government should recognize its “legal responsibility,” pay “public compensation,” and make a “public apology.” This group has had an enormous influence on the South Korean government.

It is for this reason that Sejong University Professor Park Yu-ha, who is both a scholar of modern Japanese literature and thought and who has published works on Japan-South Korean reconciliation and the comfort women issue, has been critical of the fact that the comfort women issue has been used in political movements in South Korea. As a result, the comfort woman statue does not represent the true comfort women but rather is nothing more than a commemoration and manifestation of the movement and the demonstrators. Regarding the perception of “facts,” Park pointed out that the statue deviates from the reality of comfort women, stating, “it cannot be said that the image of the girl that stands in front of the embassy is that of an actual comfort woman,” and it therefore symbolizes a one-sided image of comfort women.¹⁰

As per the agreement between the Foreign Ministers of Japan and South Korea, “the Government of the ROK acknowledged the fact that the Government of Japan is concerned about the statue built in front of the Embassy of Japan in Seoul from the viewpoint of preventing any disturbance of the peace of the mission or impairment of its dignity and will strive to solve this issue in an appropriate manner through taking measures.”

Under these circumstances of differing perspectives regarding apologies and the perceptions of the “facts,” it cannot be denied that the “Comfort Women Statue” in Berlin reflects the claims of the Korean side.

In fact, five years prior, in September 2016, the city of Freiburg, Germany—a university town in the southwest of Germany—shelved plans for the erection of a Comfort Women Statue that was proposed by the city of Suwon, South Korea.

University of Bonn professor Reinhard Erich Zöllner was one of the Germans who criticized plans to erect the statue in Freiburg.¹¹ Zöllner is an authority on Japanese and East Asian history, and he published a book that was translated into Japanese (*Higashiajia no Rekishi: Sono Kochiku* [The History of East Asia and its Structure], translated by Uehara Kumiko, Akashi Shoten, 2009).

Zöllner stated that if the statue were to be erected, “it would offer one-sided support to the South Korean side in the on-going reconciliation process between Japan and South Korea. This would not contribute to reconciliation.” He expressed opposition to the erection of the statue from a neutral position on the grounds that support should not be given to only one side in this confrontation between the two countries. The Mitte District Mayor held the same view.

¹⁰ Park Yu-ha, *Teikoku no Ianfu* (Comfort women of the empire), Asahi Shimbun Publishing, 2014, pp. 153-161.

¹¹ For further information on Zöllner’s criticism, see: “Freiburg und die Trostfrau,” *Deutsche Welle* (21.9.2016) (<https://www.dw.com/de/freiburg-und-die-trostfrau/a-19563885>).

2. Human rights or anti-Japanese nationalism?

Zöllner further stated that although the statue seems at first glance to be in support of peace, the problem lies in the context and background. He stated, “basically it is a moral criticism of Japan (based on his own research into the history of East Asia).” Zöllner pointed out that since as far back as the 15th century, the Korean people have tended to criticize Japan from a position in which they assert their own moral rightness. Zöllner brought up the case of Strathfield, a suburb of Sydney, Australia, which faced the same issue approximately one year prior. The city of Strathfield stated that a Comfort Women Statue would be a “national insult of the Japanese people” and consequently decided to shelve plans for such a statue to be erected in the interest of peace in the community.

In August 2015, ethnic Korean and ethnic Chinese residents of the city of Strathfield sent the city a petition demanding that a Comfort Women Statue be erected in the city. In response, the Strathfield City Council unanimously rejected the proposal based on the results of the hearings held on the issue. The main reason for the rejection was that in a multicultural society made up of many immigrants in Australia, becoming involved in a historical issue regarding a specific ethnic group may provoke divisions in the local community.

This same issue was also raised in Japan. For example, Yasuaki Onuma, professor emeritus at the University of Tokyo, who died three years ago in 2018, took up the issue of comfort women. He stated that “the ‘justice’ that aspires to a resolution of political problems is filled with great danger,” and that “this kind of extreme sense of justice often leads to the creation of self-righteousness and closed-mindedness that does not allow one to recognize any claims but one’s own.” He further criticized the stance taken by citizens’ groups and the media in South Korea, saying in a statement that laid bare his disappointment with South Korea that there was “often a connection to anti-Japanese nationalism.”¹² Onuma’s words and actions are taken extremely seriously based on the fact that he was involved in efforts to deal with problems, such as responsibility for the war and human rights, and he has been actively involved with the comfort women issue as, for example, the Director of “Asian Women’s Fund.”

Some of those involved in the comfort women movement in South Korea have praised the movement itself as well as its significance and achievements. However, at the same time, they have pointed out since the beginning of the movement that its tendency toward nationalism has led it down a path of “ethnic discourse.”¹³ Even as the issue of the U.S. House of Representatives House Resolution and the issue of the erection of Comfort Women Statues in countries around the world increasingly showed that the problem was taking on a global scale, the “strategy of leveraging South Korean domestic nationalism to transform the problem into a global issue” indicated that the issue was becoming a mere shell of its former self. Consequently, the movement was subjected to new criticism that it “has lost sight of the route it should take, which is combining the universal issue of the military and sexual violence, and instead, the issue of comfort women has come to be understood as a phenomenon that was particular to Japan.”¹⁴

The Korea Verband that erected the statue explained that its purpose was to contribute to the effort to eradicate sexual violence from the world by pursuing the issue of sexual violence during wartime. The resolution passed by the Mitte District Council also emphasized the universal significance of the issue in its statement that the statue served as an “opportunity to discuss sexual violence in times of military conflict and in times of peace.”

¹² Yasuaki Onuma, “*Ianfu*”-mondai toha Nandattanoka (What was the comfort women issue?) Chuko-Shinsho, 2007, pp. 210-212.

¹³ For example, see Yone Yamashita, *Nashonarizumu no Hazama kara: “Ianfu”-mondai heno mouhitotsu no Shiza* (From nationalism gap: Another perspective on the issue of comfort women), Akashi Shoten, 2008.

¹⁴ Minoru Iwasaki & Shizue Osa, “*Ianfu*”-mondai ga terashidasu Nihon no Sengo [The comfort women issue in postwar Japan],” in Narita Ryuichi & Yoshida Yutaka, eds. *Kioku to Ninshiki no nakano Ajia • Taiheiyosenso: Iwanamikoza Ajia • Taiheiyosenso Sengohen* (The Asian-Pacific War in memory and perception: Iwanami Series on the Asian-Pacific War – Postwar edition), Iwanami Shoten, 2015, pp. 236-237, 251.

Thus, there are a number of debates regarding the objective and background of the statues of comfort women, including whether the issue they address is sexual violence during wartime or whether they originate in anti-Japanese nationalism.

Galtung stated that, while Japan is culpable, the Japanese have already offered their deepest apologies and have sufficiently compensated the victims. He further mentioned the particular emotions that the South Koreans feel toward Japan as being part of the background of the comfort women issue. He stated that the comfort women issue is “a way for South Korea to exact revenge against Japan” and symbolic of a “simplistic and absolute humiliation” and that as a result, “in spite of the fact that Japan capitulated and the war ended, the South Korean humiliation is endless.”¹⁵

3. The Difficulty of facing the issue of wartime sexual violence

Renowned American historian Charles S. Maier expressed his discomfort with the Holocaust Museum in Washington DC, stating, “Why not a museum of American slavery? Would it not be more appropriate expenditure of national land and funds to remember and make vivid crimes for which our own country must take responsibility rather than those perpetrated by a regime which, in fact, Americans gave their lives to help destroy? Or why not a museum of American Indian suffering from smallpox to Wounded Knee and the alcoholism of reservations?”¹⁶

The resolution passed by the Mitte District Council stated that the erection of the statue should serve as an opportunity for widespread discussion on the issue of sexual violence “against the background of the history of Berlin,” but if that were truly the case, then should not there first and foremost be the discussion on sexual violence as it relates to the history of Berlin?

What first comes to mind is the violence against German women perpetrated by the Soviet Army during the last days of WWII. The number of German girls and women who were victims of violence by the Soviet Army in Berlin is believed to be at least 110,000 (approximately 2 million during the entirety of the Soviet Occupation).¹⁷

A Woman in Berlin, a book containing the diary of a German woman who recorded her tragic experiences—including the violence perpetrated by the Soviet Army—during the fall of Berlin, was published in English translation in 1954 and later in a variety of languages, including Japanese. The German-language edition was finally published by a Swiss publisher in 1959 after a prolonged controversy.

Although the topic was long considered taboo until the end of the Cold War, in 2003, the book was reissued by a German publisher and became a bestseller.¹⁸ In 2008, a film entitled *Anonyma —Eine Frau in Berlin* (Japanese title: ベルリン陥落 1945 [*The Fall of Berlin 1945*]), a joint German/Polish production, was released.

Just as the Japanese experience in the former Manchukuo close to WWII, it has been difficult for German women to talk about the sexual violence they endured. It is a complex issue, as the sexual violence experienced by German women was related to the same violence Germany perpetrated against others, and as a result, there is great difficulty

¹⁵ Galtung, *Nihonjin notameno Heiwa-ron*, pp. 104-105.

¹⁶ Charles S. Maier, “A Surfeit of Memory? Reflections on History, Melancholy and Denial,” *History and Memory* Vol.5-No.2 (Fall-Winter, 1993), p.146.

¹⁷ Helke, Sandar, Barbara, Johr (Akiko Terazaki & Akiko Ito, trans.) *1945nen Berurin Kaiho no Shinjitsu: Senso • Goukan • Kodomo* (1945 The truth of the liberation of Berlin: War, rape, and children), Gendai-shokan, 1996, pp. 72-76. The original title is *Befreier und Befreite: Krieg, Vergewaltigungen, Kinder* (Verlag Antje Kunstmann GmbH: München, 1992).

¹⁸ Anonyma, *Eine Frau in Berlin. Tagesbuchaufzeichnungen vom 20. April bis 22. Juni 1945* (Frankfurt a.M.: Eichborn Verlag, 2003). Japanese-language version: ベルリン終戦日記—ある女性の記録— (*A diary of the end of the war in Berlin: The record of a girl*, Hiroshi Yamamoto, trans., Hakusuisha, 2008).

in facing the issue.¹⁹

In spite of the fact that during WWII, the German Wehrmacht operated over 500 military brothels in the territories it occupied, today this is not made into a political issue through on-going public debate and apologies.²⁰

Research into military brothels and other forms of sexual violence committed by the German Wehrmacht during WWII did not begin in Germany until the 1990s. Regina Mühlhäuser of the Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung (Hamburg Institute for Social Research), who began research based on her experiences in Japan, has pointed out that, with regard to sexual violence during wartime, “there needs to be acknowledgment that the German social initiatives made slow progress. Moreover, the apologies and financial compensation paid by the German nation have never been a problem.”²¹

Although there are numerous monuments dedicated to the Holocaust in Berlin, there is no relation to sexual violence perpetrated by the Soviet Union and Germany during the war.

Therefore, Zöllner was critical of efforts in Germany to erect the Comfort Women Statues, since if this kind of statue were to be erected in Freiburg while Germany continued to deny its own crimes, it would be, as far as he could see, a “Skandal” (scandal).

It is a matter of course that many countries, including Germany and South Korea, are not completely unrelated to the issue of sexual violence on the battlefield. However, as the Mitte District Mayor initially saw as a problematic aspect of the issue, the “Comfort Women Statue” was critical of Japan alone rather than serving as a message against sexual violence during wartime in general.

Zöllner went even further, stating the following²²:

“It is said that Japan should ‘learn from Germany’ regarding taking responsibility for the war, but in this case this advice is wrong. The only aspect of the issue of sexual violence during WWII, which has been systematically and thoroughly discussed in the postwar period, is the Japanese issue of comfort women. Japan has spent much of the last twenty years dealing with this issue.”

When discussing ways of dealing with “the past,” the “learn from Germany theory” is often mentioned and highly praised in East Asia and the rest of the world. However, when people refer to Germany’s ways of dealing with their past, they mainly refer to the Holocaust perpetrated by the Nazis²³, as the circumstances surrounding the issue of comfort women (and colonial rule) differ.

For nearly 30 years since the 1990s, Japan’s efforts to deal with the comfort women issue have not been perfect and have not yet led to reconciliation with South Korea since, as has been quite severely pointed out, there remain

¹⁹ See Akiko Terasaki, “Yakusha Atogaki (Translator’s Afterword)” Sandar, Johr, *1945nen Berurin Kaiho no Shinjitsu* and Atina Grossman, “A Question of Silence: The Rape of German Women by Occupation Soldiers,” *October 72*, (Spring 1995), pp.43-63 (Japanese version is Chinmoku toiu Mondai: Senryogunheishi niyoru Doitsu Josei no Gokan [The problem of silence: The rape of German women by occupation soldiers] , *Shiso* no. 898, April 1999).

²⁰ For further information on the background to the issue of wartime sexual violence by the German Wehrmacht becoming a taboo topic, see Toshiko Himeoka, “The Gendered Limits of Holocaust Memories in Germany” in Kazuo Muta and Beverley Anne Yamamoto, eds. *The Gender Politics of War Memory: Asia-Pacific and Beyond*, Osaka University Press: Osaka, 2012, pp.135-155.

²¹ Regina Mühlhäuser (Toshiko Himeoka, translation supervisor), *Senjo no Sei: Dokusosen kano Doitsuhei to Joseitachi* (Sex on the battlefield: German soldiers and women during the German-Soviet war), Iwanami-Shoten, 2015, pp. v-vi. The original title is *Eroberungen: Sexuell Gewalttaten und intime Beziehungen deutscher Soldaten in der Sowjetunion, 1941-1945* (Hamburger Edition:Hamburg, 2010).

For studies in Japanese translation, see also, for example, Christa Paul (Keiko Ye-Myint, et al., trans.) *Nachizumu to Kyoseibaishun: Kyoseishuyajo-Tokubetsuto no Joseitachi* (Nazism and forced prostitution: The women of the special wards in concentration camps,) Akashi-Shoten, 1996. The original title is *Zwangsprostitution: Staatlich errichtete Bordelle im Nationalsozialismus* (Hentrich Edition: Leiptig,1994).

²² Reinhard Zöllner “I’anfu”-mondai: “Nihon no Meiyokaifuku” niha Nani ga Hitsuyoka (The problem of the Comfort Women: What is required for Japan to restore its reputation?) *Sekai*, February 2015, p. 149.

²³ Junichiro Shoji, “Kako” womeguru Nichidokuhikaku no Muzukashisa: Motomerareru Shinchosa (The difficulty in comparing Japan’s and Germany’s ‘past’: The caution that is required,” in *The Japan Institute of International Affairs: Columns/Reports* (May 29, 2014).

<https://www.jiia.or.jp/column/column-234.html>

problems and issues in the Japanese government and Japanese society.²⁴

Nevertheless, from a global perspective, Japan has been exceptional compared to other countries worldwide, as there are almost no examples of a country apologizing and paying compensation for acts of sexual violence during wartime, including those committed against comfort women, or for colonial rule. While there are a variety of assessments of Japan's behavior, the issues that Japan has dealt with over the years cannot be denied. This fact serves as a reason to praise Japan as one of "the world's leaders" in this regard.²⁵

Naturally, there have been extreme views throughout this process, but—although this seems paradoxical—the mere fact that these issues have not been seen as taboo in Japan has itself created strong opposition to the effort.

In her research on Japanese-South Korean relations over the reconciliation issue, Jennifer Lind, a specialist in East Asian international relations and security studies, pointed out that in general, the issue of apology leads to schisms in domestic public opinion not only in Japan, but elsewhere as well, and that there is a risk of instigating widespread domestic backlash that is not limited to conservatives.²⁶

Thus, although there are major differences in the form of suffering that are based on dissimilarities in the historical background and the circumstances in each country, both Japan and Germany suffer the "negative legacy" of past sexual violence during wartime.

Conclusion

As discussed above, the mayor of Mitte and Zöllner determined that it would not be appropriate for the "Comfort Women Statue" to be displayed in public because—given the divided perspectives regarding apologies, perspectives on the "facts," and the objective of the erection of the statue, and since it represents a one-sided view focused solely on Japan—it is not a neutral presence.

It is only natural that in Berlin—a city with an international character that exceeds that of Freiburg—there were demands that the issue of conflict between nations be given more careful consideration. The city of Strathfield, Australia, which was brought up by Zöllner, abandoned plans to erect such a statue on the grounds that it comprised many immigrants who made up a multicultural society in the city. When the Mayor of Mitte rescinded the permission that had been granted to erect such a statue in his district, he mentioned in his comments that the district was home to people from over 100 nations around the world, and in order to avoid disruptions to its peaceful and tolerant environment of solidarity, the district should not take sides in the debate. The district of Mitte is in a core location in the center of the city of Berlin. It has a population of approximately 380,000, and it is home to the highest number of immigrants and foreign residents in the city of Berlin.

Additionally, although the "Comfort Women Statue" in Berlin is referred to as the "Peace Statue," as subsequent events attested to, it not only had a negative effect on relations between Japan and South Korea, but also had a negative effect on the international relations between Japan and Germany, and it also led to division among the Japanese residents of Berlin. Park Yu-ha has stated that although it is referred to as a "Peace Statue," it represents hostility toward Japan. She critically stated that "for it to be considered a 'Peace Statue,' it should have included the words 'In Memory of Forgiveness and Reconciliation' in addition to the words 'In Memory of a Grudge' in its

²⁴ For comprehensive and well-balanced research on the issue of the changes the comfort women issue has undergone in Japan and the rest of East Asia, see Iwasaki & Osa, "Ianfu"-mondai ga terashidasu Nihon no Sengo."

²⁵ Yasuaki Onuma, Shoko Egawa (interviewer), *Rekishininshiki toha Nanika: Tairitsu no Kozu wo Koete* (What are historical perceptions? Moving beyond the structure of conflict), Chuko-Shinsho, 2015, p. 232.

²⁶ Jennifer Lind, *Sorry States: Apologies in International Politics* (Ithaca & London: Cornell Univ. Press, 2008), pp.181-190.

inscription. The current movement had consistently created discord rather than peace.”²⁷

Galtung, the authority on reconciliation, advised that wartime sexual violence is a problem that exists in all countries rather than just in Japan. Thus, to actively build peace, focus needs to be placed on the problems of wartime sexual violence and war itself. “If we fail to do this,” he says, “the issue of comfort women will remain a problem that simply deepens conflict, and as a result, Japan and South Korea will forever be unable to remove themselves from the current unhealthy and unproductive situation.”²⁸

Sometime after the Berlin “Comfort Women Statue” issue surfaced, two such statues were displayed at the Museum of Saxon Folk Art in Dresden. In order to achieve the “discussion of sexual violence in times of military conflict and in times of peace,” which was indicated in the resolution passed by the Mitte District Council, the debate over such statues needs to adopt a more universal approach rather than relativizing the Japanese comfort women issue or absolving the Japanese of guilt. I believe that this could be achieved in Berlin and Dresden.

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²⁷ Park, *Teikoku no Ianfu*, pp. 154-155, 172.

²⁸ Galtung, *Nihonjin notameno Heiwa-ron*, p. 106.