


RESEARCH ARTICLE

What determines the relative success of different war compensation policies? Comparing three unresolved compensation issues between Japan and South Korea

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Abstract

This article examines three Japan–South Korea postwar compensation cases: the comfort women issue, the Sakhalin Island forced labor issue, and Korean atomic bomb survivor issue. These compensation movements produced vastly different results, even though the basic policy directions for compensation provision in all three cases were similar. Japan’s approach toward the comfort women problem has been a complete failure, while its treatment of the Sakhalin forced labor issue and the atomic bomb issues has been more successful. This article’s explanation of the different outcomes focuses on the character and geographical base of the civic groups leading these compensation movements. In South Korea, women’s rights activists spearheaded the comfort women compensation movement and related victim-relief activities. The Korean non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that assisted the comfort women treated this problem not only as a women’s rights issue, but also as a nationalist issue. In contrast, the Red Cross, a politically neutral international organization, promoted the Sakhalin forced labor and atomic bomb issues. In short, the different receptions accorded to those championing the comfort women issue and those promoting the Sakhalin forced labor and atomic bomb issues depended on the principal agent of each compensation process. This article aims to provide some implications for successfully implementing postwar compensation policies. It suggests that, if successful postwar compensation policy depends on successful perpetrator–victim reconciliation, establishing solidarity between perpetrator and victim countries’ civic groups is important. This can only be facilitated through the depoliticized and transparent operation of leading NGOs both inside and outside the redressal-seeking nation.

Key words: International Red Cross; Japan–South Korea relations; NGOs; postwar compensation

1. Introduction

Since the end of World War II, the postwar settlements of Germany and Japan have often been compared, with Germany usually being praised as a more successful case. Thus, we must ask: what are the preconditions for successful postwar compensation? In general, a vanquished nation is required to undertake a series of postwar settlements, including peace treaties, establishment of military tribunals for war criminals, compensation overtures, and peace education to prevent recurrence (Lee, 2008b: 9). There are several reasons for the positive assessment of the German postwar settlement. Most importantly, the German government’s settlement terms were considered acceptable by the victims and the victimized nations. In contrast, some of the compensation policies offered by the Japanese government have been unacceptable to its wartime victims. Consequently, several reparation cases have remained unresolved, and these have often become sites of conflict between Japan and the affected countries,

especially South Korea. This paper will analyze three such Japan–South Korea postwar compensation cases: the comfort women issue, the Sakhalin Island forced labor issue, and the atomic bomb survivors issue. Through an analysis of these three cases, we will try to explain how differing factors can produce vastly different results, even though the basic compensation policy direction may be similar.

Officially, Japan maintains the position that it has concluded all national and individual level post-war compensations owed to South Korea through the San Francisco Peace Treaty and the 1965 Treaty on Basic Relations between Japan and Korea. Until the 1990s, the South Korean government had concurred with this Japanese position. However, in the late 1980s, as South Korea's non-governmental sectors grew with the democratization of its society, this tacit agreement began to be questioned. The most important turning point in this regard was the opening of certain diplomatic documents that had led to the 1965 Agreement; the contents of these documents were made public after a South Korean non-governmental organization (NGO) filed a lawsuit in 2005. Subsequently, a 'Joint Committee on the Follow-up Measures after the Disclosure of the Korea–Japan Dialog Documents in Korea' confirmed that the 1965 negotiations had not discussed the issues of the comfort women, the Sakhalin forced Korean laborers, and the atomic bomb survivors. Following these developments, the South Korean government officially brought these remaining legal responsibilities to the Japanese government's attention. Despite the South Korean government's assertion of this stance, the Japanese government adamantly continued its official position that it had completed all legal compensations and claimed that it has continued to provide some support to victims based on what it considers an assumption of its 'moral responsibilities.'

However, the results of such Japanese compensation policies, which had been based on assuming 'moral responsibilities,' have greatly differed between the three cases. Most importantly, Japan's approach toward the comfort women problem can be regarded as a complete failure; consequently, this issue has caused many extreme confrontations between South Korea and Japan. Japan, in fact, provided some support for the comfort women victims on two main occasions: through the Asian Women's Fund (AWF) in 1995 and the Korea–Japan Comfort Women Agreement in 2015. However, South Korean society's reception of these efforts was less than warm and even resulted in a widespread boycott of Japanese support. In particular, the Reconciliation and Healing Foundation, which had been established after the 2015 agreement, was effectively nullified after the South Korean government announced that it would replace the fund with its own budget. The foundation was dissolved in 2019. The comfort women case showed that Japan's compensation policy was a failure at a moral level rather than a merely legal one.

In contrast, Japan had relative success in its compensation efforts toward the Sakhalin forced laborers and atomic bomb survivors. The Japanese government continues to support these victims through the Special Fund for Supporting South Korean Residents in Sakhalin and the Fund for Medical Expense Support Program for Overseas Atomic Bomb Survivors, respectively. The details of these efforts are provided in [Table 1](#). The Japanese and Korean Red Cross have established a Joint Corporation Body to support South Korean residents in Sakhalin; its purpose is to aid those who remained in Sakhalin as well as those who left for South Korea. Also, the Japan Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare provides support to the atomic bomb victims through the Korean Red Cross under the rubric of the Fund for Medical Expense Support Program for Overseas Atomic Bomb Survivors.

These efforts starkly contrast with those in the comfort women case; the AWF allocated 2 million yen (19,000 USD) per person as compensation and 3 million yen (28,000 USD) per person to cover medical and welfare costs. Considering that 11 known victims accepted this money, a mere about 55 million yen (530,000 USD) was provided through the AWF. Furthermore, the Japanese government allotted 1 billion yen (9.6 million USD) to the Reconciliation and Healing Foundation to support the comfort women victims; this was carried out in accordance with the Japan–South Korea Comfort Women Agreement of 2015. However, this fund could not be used as planned after the foundation was dissolved. Compared to the funds set aside for the Sakhalin forced labor and atomic bomb victims (more than 60 million USD between 2009 and 2020), Japan's official budget for compensatory efforts toward the comfort women problem was indeed meager.

Table 1. Official budget for the Sakhalin forced labor and atomic bomb issues, which is distributed through the Red Cross by the Japanese government (2009–2020)^a

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
The Fund for Medical Expense Support Program for Overseas Atomic Bomb Survivors	44 (486)	60 (644)	411 (5,059)	463 (6,017)	463 (5,344)	86 (788)	706 (5,888)	567 (5,872)	519 (4,433)	567 (5,029)	514 (4,687)	485 (4,462)
The Special Fund for Supporting South Korean Residents in Sakhalin	265 (2,921)	186 (1,997)	120 (1,477)	118 (1,533)	112 (1,292)	102 (968)	99 (825)	102 (848)	112 (956)	101 (895)	79 (720)	79 (726)
Running Total	309 (3,407)	555 (6,048)	1,086 (12,584)	1,667 (20,134)	2,242 (26,770)	2,430 (28,526)	3,235 (35,239)	3,904 (41,959)	4,535 (47,348)	5,203 (53,272)	5,796 (58,680)	6,360 (63,869)

Units: million JPY (thousand USD).

^aMinistry of Health, Labour, and Welfare of Japan (n.d.) Available at https://www.mhlw.go.jp/jigyo_shiwake/ (accessed 30 January 2022).

While some limitations and resistance have existed with regard to the support provided to the Sakhalin and atomic bomb victims, the continuous influx of public funds has indeed positively affected their livelihood. The efforts toward compensating the Sakhalin forced laborers have attracted particularly high praise not only from the Japanese government, but also from the victimized Sakhalin Koreans themselves (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2018). In short, the victims of the other two issues have accepted Japanese support without much resistance, and these issues have thus not attracted any diplomatic conflicts. This situation raises the question: What accounts for the different responses to these three issues? This study sought to answer this question.

Accordingly, this study focused on NGOs' importance in the implementation of compensation policies in these three disputes. In the comfort women case, the South Korean NGOs approached the issue not only from a women's rights perspective, but also from a nationalist perspective. This approach caused mistrust and disconnect between the Korean and Japanese NGOs, since the latter focused almost exclusively on women's rights. Therefore, the failure of Japan's compensation policy in this case can be attributed to the rupture between the Korean and Japanese NGOs, which had been sparked by the political symbolism invested in the comfort women – the most well-known representations of anti-Japanese nationalism in South Korea. In contrast, the Sakhalin forced labor issue and atomic bomb victims issue were operated by an international organization, the Red Cross, which did not have as much visibility within South Korean society. Furthermore, NGOs in Japan – not Korea – led the activities related to these two problems. In short, the different receptions accorded to the three issues depended on the NGO's geographical base – whether the leading NGO is located in the victim or perpetrator countries – and the organizational character – whether the NGO is led by victims or professional activists – in each compensation process.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. In Section 2, we will develop a hypothesis regarding the factors necessary for implementing successful compensation policies by analyzing previous research. In particular, we will focus on the role played by NGOs in addressing the historical problems between Japan and South Korea and the compensation policies offered by the Japanese government. In Section 3, we will analyze the characteristics and activities of South Korean NGOs and aim to explain the failure of Japan's compensation policy with regard to the comfort women problem. In Section 4, we will identify and analyze the factors responsible for the successful outcome of the Sakhalin forced labor and atomic bomb victim disputes; particular focus will be devoted to the activities of the Red Cross and NGOs in Japan. Finally, using empirical evidence, we will provide some implications for successful implementation of postwar compensation policies. If such success depends on perpetrator–victim reconciliation, NGO leadership in the victimized country may not always bring about positive results. In the end, establishing solidarity between perpetrator and victim countries' civic groups is important; furthermore, it is important to ensure the depoliticized and transparent operation of leading NGOs in both countries.

2. Postwar compensation issue and the role of civil society

Unlike Japan, Germany was relatively successful in implementing its compensation policy. This success can be attributed to several reasons including pressure from global Jewish interest groups and the four allied nations (the USA, the UK, France, and the USSR), the vocal actions of domestic political leaders and civil society groups, and widespread solidarity from international human rights groups (Lee, 2012). Among these reasons, we assume that the different nature of the civic groups was the important aspect that resulted in the different outcomes for the three compensation movements. Based on this assumption, this article focuses on factors that have promoted or impeded the compensation movements spearheaded by civic groups in Japan and Korea.

Much of the literature on reconciliation acknowledges that civic groups play an important role in its attendant processes. This is especially the case in the German context, since civic groups such as churches paved the way for facilitating Brandt's Ostpolitik (Wochnik, 2014: 215). For example, German religious groups such as the civic group The Action Reconciliation Service for Peace actively

participated in the care of war victims in Poland. Furthermore, German groups also initiated numerous bilateral and multilateral cooperative projects (e.g., youth exchange and researcher exchange programs). All these initiatives attested German civil society's incessant efforts, which, in turn, increased the determination of its political leaders with regard to compensation and reconciliation efforts; these initiatives thus played a critical role in advancing historical reconciliation (Asia Peace and History Institute, 2008: 129–163). Horvat argues that 'one lesson that can be drawn from the success of reconciliation in Europe is that the breakthroughs have inevitably come about when non-state actors took a leading role' (Horvat, 2004: 145).

Many scholars have pointed certain weaknesses of East Asian civil societies and compared them to those in Europe while explaining the failure of Japan's reconciliation and compensation policies (Horvat, 2004; He, 2009; Song, 2015). Chinese NGOs are relatively weak *vis-à-vis* their government; Japanese NGOs generally lack national networks; and South Korean NGOs suffer from financial weaknesses. For these reasons, East Asian countries have failed to meaningfully resolve historical disputes (Song, 2015: 201). For example, discussing the China–Japan reconciliation process, He (2009) argues that the most serious problem in China's external exchange programs is the absence of a 'true' NGO, as participants are unable to break official lines and engage freely with their Japanese counterparts (He, 2009). Japanese NGOs also face some problems. According to He, Japanese NGOs are often small in size and have poor finances; consequently, they may sometimes be heavily constrained by the government (He, 2009: 267).

We must thus raise this question: Do the weaknesses of civil society pose major obstacles in the South Korea–Japan compensation issue? What role have NGOs played in resolving postwar reconciliation and compensation problems? Previous studies on this topic have focused on the vulnerability of East Asian NGOs compared to their European counterparts. However, this paper will elucidate the negative dynamics involved in resolving compensation problems by NGOs within the victimized country – a topic that has been under-researched in the literature so far.

Many scholars have pointed out that the development of South Korean civil society began with the country's democratization in 1987 (Lee, 1993; Kim, 1997: 93–115). Koo argues that 'civil society in South Korea has been in existence for a long time, but has been severely constrained and stifled by state repression' under the authoritarian regimes (Koo, 2002: 40). Beginning in the late 1980s, Korean society began to experience a dramatic increase in civil and labor movements and a rapid growth of civil society organizations. Then, civil society began to play an important role in solving social and international problems and thus began to influence government policy (Jung and Kim, 2001: 42). As the importance of civil society increased in South Korean public life, the Korean news media began to extensively cover NGO activities, and these depictions were predominantly supportive (Koo, 2002: 44). The South Korean media's positive attitude toward civil organizations contributed toward heightening public trust in these organizations, and this, in turn, raised their influence within Korean society (Kim, 2013). Thus, civil organizations began to be considered as reliable means of exerting pressure on politicians to reform political processes and related policies (Koo, 2002: 43).

This rapid growth of NGOs, however, raised several questions about the politicization of civil organizations. Kim Dong-no defines the politicization of NGOs when they are 'dominating resistance movements against the government with a strong political bent.' There are also some cases where NGOs willingly entered the political arena and transformed themselves into a political faction; such cases could even be understood as examples of 'over-empowerment of NGOs.' In South Korea, there is an ongoing debate as to whether civil society organizations should engage in political actions and whether their leaders should enter politics. Several scholars have considered the politicization of NGOs in a positive light (Park, 2002; Kim *et al.*, 2013). They argue that dedicated and capable NGO activists have strengthened South Korean civil society and their entry into politics and the bureaucracy has facilitated the implementation of diverse and meaningful policy measures (Kim *et al.*, 2013: 149). Lee Tae-ho argues that the political empowerment of NGOs is a matter that should be considered urgently and that political activities and civic movements are not always mutually exclusive (Lee, 2008a: 140).

On the other hand, several scholars have opposed the politicization of civic groups, arguing that, instead of functioning as instruments of grassroots independence, NGOs have sometimes functioned as vehicles for expanding the influence of political leaders, thus contributing to the maintenance of the status quo (Salamon, 1994: 119). Yamamoto suggests that numerous civil society leaders' participation during the Kim Dae-jung government may have adversely affected the future of Korea's civil society. The participation of the leaders may have led the public to suspect the genuine intentions of such leaders (Jung and Kim, 2001: 62). Furthermore, Koo argues that instead of 'demonstrating tolerance, pluralism, or compromise, South Korea's civic organizations often engage in an exclusive, uncompromising, and maximalist pursuit of their goals' (Koo, 2002: 45). As such, scholars have not reached any consensus regarding this matter. While some have justified the politicization of NGOs, arguing that this process represents the public opinion against the strength of the state (especially in imperfect democratic systems), others have remained critical of this phenomenon and have sounded warnings against the politicization of NGOs.

Special attention must be paid to the deep connection between the politicization of civil organizations and the strategic measures to achieve their goals. South Korean NGOs tend to have a limited influence over state behavior and therefore have traditionally attempted to participate in policymaking processes through non-institutional routes (Park, 2002: 77). Therefore, such civic groups often emphasize the creation of mass-based support through mass media and expertise acquisition (Lee, 1993: 360). These constraints are often manifested through the main modes of NGO activities (e.g., public debates, demonstrations, petitions, and manifestos) (Cho, 2007: 210). Such protests, organizational language, and tactics from civil groups can greatly influence popular perceptions and beliefs. Suh and Linkhart (2011) suggest that 'NGOs in Korea exerted political pressure through the tactics of "symbolic politics" – setting new agendas and framing new discourses, sensitizing the public to them, mobilizing collective actions – and pressured the government on this basis' (Suh and Linkhart, 2011: 197).

Symbolic politics can increase in potency when a civil group's agenda can be related to national identity or honor. Kim Dong-no identifies the instrumental aspect of nationalism, which tends to be utilized for promoting political interests. Nationalism helps to mobilize the public toward achieving a political goal by drawing a boundary between 'us' and 'the other' in an attempt to foster internal unity. South Korean politicians have utilized nationalism, particularly formed through anti-Japanese sentiment, with their power to mobilize the masses (Kim, 2010: 212). Civic groups have also utilized nationalism to achieve their own goals. Any political claim that differs from theirs could trigger vehement accusations of the other party being 'pro-Japanese'; this accusation is often used to threaten any dissenting individual's social status (Kim, 2014). This phenomenon blocks open and multiple approaches to problem-solving, sometimes even excluding the victims' voice. This current article hypothesizes that such conceptual and strategic utilization of nationalism by NGOs could negatively influence the resolution of postwar compensation problems. The remainder of this article will verify this hypothesis by examining some detailed case studies on the comfort women, Sakhalin forced labor, and the atomic bomb victim issues.

3. Comfort women problem at the focal point of domestic and international attention

Figure 1 shows the number of South Korean news reports mentioning the three selected issues since the early 1990s. It is clear that the comfort women problem attracted much more media attention than the other two issues. During the last 10 years, in particular, the number of news reports on comfort women far exceeded the number of reports on the other issues. This trend indicates that the comfort women problem received greater spotlight because of its continuous exposure and relevant activities and consequently sparked social interest; in contrast, the Sakhalin forced labor and atomic bomb victim issues received relatively little attention within South Korean society.

The South Korean and Japanese publics showed similar trends through public opinion surveys. Since 2013, the East Asia Institute and Genron NPO have conducted annual surveys on the Korea–

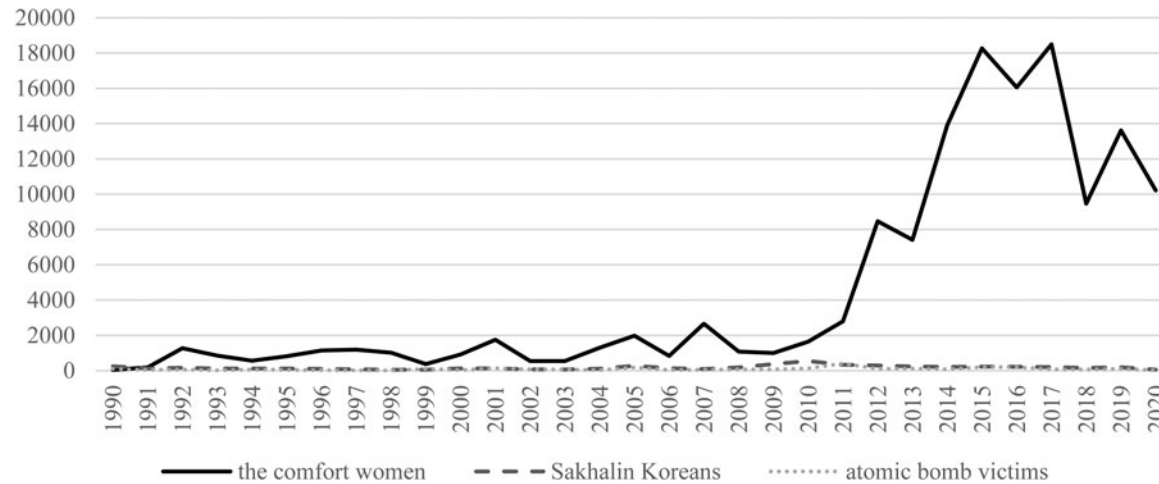


Figure 1. Number of news reports (based on keywords in South Korean newspapers) (1990–August 2020).

Japan relationship. In the 2013 survey, 42% of Koreans chose the ‘comfort women problem’ as the most urgent historical problem between Korea and Japan. In 2014, this number rose significantly to 71.6% (Genron NPO and East Asia Institute, 2013, 2014). Furthermore, the 2019 survey conducted after the dissolution of the Reconciliation and Healing Foundation showed that 37.6% of Japanese and 70.2% of Korean respondents considered the comfort women problem as the most critical historical problem between the two countries (East Asia Institute and The Genron NPO, 2019). It should be noted that none of the surveys inquired about the Sakhalin forced labor or the atomic bomb victim issues; this implicates that these two issues were well outside the mainstream interest of the public.

The comfort women problem has always attracted major controversies not only within South Korea, but also in the broader international community. Since the 1990s, the United Nations (UN) human rights organization and the International Labor Organization (ILO) have called for a resolution of the comfort women problem, pressuring Japan to act in keeping with its global status. Japan continues to receive such external pressure not only from international organizations but also from domestic bodies in various individual nations; for example, in 2007, the US House of Representatives, the parliaments of the Netherlands and Canada, and the European Council adopted similar resolutions (Lee *et al.*, 2009). Despite such overwhelming domestic and international attention, the comfort women problem has not received a satisfactory resolution. To explain why this is so, this section will elucidate the activities of South Korean civil organizations, which have served as prime agents for promoting the comfort women agenda.

For some time after the liberation of South Korea in 1945, the comfort women issue remained outside mainstream news. Until the 1970s, the Japanese and Korean literature acknowledged the existence of comfort women victims, but the issue was hardly even discussed within Japanese and Korean societies (Yasumaru, 2009: 76). The issue only entered into public consciousness as South Korean civil society grew more vocal after the democratization of Korean society in the late 1980s. Against this backdrop, ‘the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan’ (Hanguk Jeongsindae Munje Daechaek Hyeobuihoe; hereafter, Jeongdaehyeop) was at the core of the South Korean comfort women movement. Jeongdaehyeop was established in 1990 as an alliance of 37 organizations, which were led by the Korean Jeongsindae Institute, the Korea Church Women United, and the Korean Women’s Association United. Therefore, Jeongdaehyeop was a leading and comprehensive organization that represented South Korea’s women’s rights movement (Jung, 2016: 110–111). Since its founding, Jeongdaehyeop played diverse roles as an NGO (e.g., excavating historical facts, collecting victims’ testimonies, mobilizing the media and public opinion, forging links with victims in other countries, and publicizing the atrocities to international organizations). It also encouraged the victims to recast themselves as women’s and human rights activists by representing their interests in the media and providing them with legal support (Shamima and David, 2006). In its early years, Jeongdaehyeop allied with Japanese NGOs and successfully publicized the issue not only domestically, but also on the international stage such as UN. The Wednesday Protest, organized by Jeongdaehyeop, continued for almost 30 years, from 1992 until the present, reflecting the widespread public support toward the issue (Jeonguigieogyeon, n.d.). Through these efforts, Jeongdaehyeop gradually emerged as a symbol of South Korea’s social transformation, fighting against the unjust violation of human rights (Kim, 2013: 60).

3.1 Weakening of international solidarity

The strong ties between Japanese and South Korean civil society groups in the initial phases of the comfort women movement provided an important force for compensation movement. The Japanese civic groups were acting out of remorse and a sense of responsibility regarding the postwar settlements. Therefore, they maintained a critical stance regarding the Japanese empire’s violence against Asian women (Jung, 2001: 163–166). In the early 1990s, Japan’s comfort women movement was led by diverse small and new groups as well as large and established groups (e.g., Yong Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) and Asian Women’s Association). Furthermore, several

zainichi Korean organizations (e.g., the Association for the Study of the Korean Comfort Women Issue and Uri Yeoseong Network), Japanese organizations (e.g., the Association to Clarify the Post-war Responsibility of Japan), and Korea–Japan joint organizations also participated in the movement. The *zainichi* organizations retained an inherent sense of nationalism unlike the Japanese organizations, which tended to be more interested in issues regarding postwar settlement, human rights, and peace. Although there were some differences of positions and opinions, the relevant organizations in the two countries were able to find some common ground within their broader spectrum of orientations. The Japanese civic movement shared universal values – reflection on the past, a sense of responsibility for postwar treatment, and women’s rights – and was in solidarity with the Korean civic movement (Jung, 2001: 163–166).

As the movement gained traction within Japan, a large number of intellectuals joined forces, and their activities expanded into the broader issue of postwar compensation. Consequently, there was a rapid increase in the number of lawsuits filed against the Japanese government. Just eight lawsuits had been filed in the 45-year period from 1945 to the late 1980s; this number rose to 23 lawsuits between 1990 and 1993 (Nakayama *et al.*, 2015: 208–209). In October 1993, Jeongdaehyeop’s Yi Mi-kyong (later elected as a member of the National Assembly) called for the punishment of those responsible (Violence against Women in War Research Action, 2013: 136).¹ This call for the punishment of war criminals, however, opened up a schism between the Korean and the Japanese civic organizations. Some Japanese civic groups were concerned that these requests would lead to the incrimination of the Emperor of Japan and shifted toward a conservative stance that accepts the 1965 Japan–South Korea Treaty as the end of legal liability. Consequently, the solidarity between the two countries diminished. Then, the Japanese government announced that it would establish a civilian-funded AWF as a gesture to assume ‘moral responsibility’ in 1995. This act further intensified the fissure among the NGOs (The Asian Women’s Fund, *n.d.*) in the two countries (Shin, 2010: 234). Most Korean civil organizations, including Jeongdaehyeop, considered the AWF as a means for the Japanese government to evade ‘legal responsibility,’ since direct financial compensation for the victims came solely from the donations of Japanese citizens (Kim and Sohn, 2017: 84). Therefore, Jeongdaehyeop persuaded victims to refuse AWF compensation. Japanese civil organizations, who were in agreement with the Jeongdaehyeop against the AWF, formed solidarity organizations such as the ‘Crush AWF Executive Committee’ and joined the opposition. On the other hand, Japanese NGOs including the ‘Association for Clarifying Japan’s Postwar Responsibility’ and ‘Japan Womens’ Council’ tried to participate in the activities of the AWF. Although both of these groups were of the view that the AWF should raise funds from the Japanese government rather than from the civilians (Asia Women’s Fund, 1996: 35, 37), they respected the goodwill of Japanese people who wanted to raise funds and supported the fund’s activities (Tsuchino, 2010: 335). As such, bringing up the issue of punishing war criminals and the establishment of AWF led to a departure of some organizations from the Japan–South Korea solidarity groups, and this eventually led to the disruption of the once united front. Ultimately, the hard-won international solidarity fell apart.

Furthermore, ideological differences had led the solidarity of the comfort women issue to fail. The Korean NGOs’ position was primarily based on anti-Japanese nationalism; thus, they considered the comfort women as victims of Japanese imperialism, which had forcibly colonized Korea. In contrast, Japanese NGOs pursued more universal ideologies such as feminism, human rights, and antiwar pacifism (Choi, 2015: 98–106). Since South Korean civil society could not separate the comfort women issue from nationalism, the issue was a ‘national’ problem that required a ‘nationalist rhetoric’ solution. Some academic discussion on the relationship between feminism and nationalism clearly reflects the criticism against this attitude. For example, Kim Jeong-lan criticized the nationalistic bent of the Korean civic organizations because they oversimplified ‘the multiplicity and complexity of the comfort

¹Regarding the punishment of war crimes, the Women’s International War Crimes Tribunal in 2000 convicted the perpetrators of the comfort women issue, arousing a supportive response from civic groups in Korea and Japan. However, the Tribunal had limitations in that it was not legally binding (Lee, 2021: 130).

women problem into the dichotomy of imperial Japan and colonial Korea' (Kim, 2003: 25–34). Furthermore, Yamashita (2008: 139) argued that the root of the problem was 'oppression against women' and criticized the South Korean NGOs' 'nationalistic trend.' Yamashita claimed, 'There was a need for the Koreans to rally popular support utilizing the nationalist confrontation, since the target of the movement was the Japanese government.'

3.2 Comfort women problem as a political symbol of the anti-Japanese nationalist movement

The Korean NGOs approached the comfort women issue from a 'nationalist' perspective. This was soothing for the victims who often could not voice their horrid experiences within the paternalistic South Korean social framework (Park, 2020: 234–244). These victims had attempted to voice their concerns around the world because they agreed with the position of Korean civil organizations, especially Jeongdaehyeop, that the issue could only be resolved through interactions with Japan. Furthermore, as this position was disseminated within larger Korean society and became a consensus among the public, Jeongdaehyeop pressured the South Korean government and opposed the AWF compensation based on widespread anti-Japanese sentiment. Jeongdaehyeop argued that the AWF's compensation project hurt the pride of the nation by viewing Korea as a target country for relief support (Shin, 2010: 252). The organization lobbied South Korean Ministry of Justice to stop the entry of Japanese officials in order to prevent a meeting between the AWF staff and comfort women victims. In July 1997, the Ministry of Justice denied the AWF's Usuki Keiko a visa, and she was prohibited from entering Korea for 2 years (Yonhapnews, 1997).² Jeongdaehyeop then launched an alternative plan to raise domestic funds to replace the AWF compensation and demanded subsidies from the Korean government. In March 1998, the Korean government decided to allot 4.2 million dollars toward this purpose from the government budget (Kim, 1998).

In particular, the fact that Jeongdaehyeop showed discriminatory behavior toward victims who received the AWF compensation is comparable to cases in other countries. For example, Lila Pilipina, a comfort woman organization in the Philippines, also opposed the AWF compensation in principle in that the compensation is not directly provided through the government budget. However, it acknowledged the victims' rights to receive these funds and did not treat them differently (Wada, 2008: 3). Jeongdaehyeop, in contrast, forced the victims to join a united front for opposing the AWF. The organization stated that receiving AWF compensation would lead to 'the national honor being mocked by the dirty money of Japanese imperialism' (Citizen Forum for Halmuni, 1997). Indeed, seven victims who received AWF compensation in 1997 were unable to receive additional support from Korean funds, the government or South Korean civilians. They were also excluded from Jeongdaehyeop's activities. Furthermore, the organization required all member comfort women victims to sign a consent form, pledge to not accept AWF support, and also to return any funds they may have received in the past. In short, Jeongdaehyeop's policy demonstrated how civic movements with extreme ideological allegiances could marginalize the victims they purported to help and empower the NGOs themselves instead.

Since PM Abe's return to power in 2012, conservatization of Japanese politics has led to the intensification of Korea–Japan conflicts over history issues. The USA judged that the strained relationship between Korea and Japan was making it difficult to respond to the geopolitical risks of China's rise as well as North Korea's military threats. By the end of 2015, the US demand for improvement in Korea–Japan relations had pressured the two countries to reach an agreement on the comfort women. The agreement required the two governments to declare that the comfort women problem had reached a final, irreversible agreement. In Article 2, they agreed to make sincere efforts to resolve the 'comfort women statue' issue (Wada, 2017: 55). Furthermore, the two governments agreed to pay 100 million won (about 8.3 million dollars) per victim from the Japanese government budget. Jeongdaehyeop harshly criticized this agreement, calling it 'a diplomatic collusion ignoring the victims

²Keiko Usuki was the representative of the Japanese civic group 'The Association to Clarify the Post-War Responsibility of Japan' and was tasked with delivering funds to the victims on behalf of AWF.

and the popular sentiment' (Yahoo News, 2016). It also argued that the agreement, which concluded without prior consultation with related civil organization as well as victims, revealed the Japanese government's intention to evade its legal responsibility. The South Korea public widely sympathized with these criticisms, making the agreement unpopular. Similar to its response to the AWF initiative, it argued that 'receiving the Japanese funds is a disgrace to Koreans,' thus pressuring the victims to refuse the support (Kimura, 2015).

In December 2016, the South Korean National Assembly passed a bill to impeach President Park Geun-hye for a corruption scandal involving her close friend. When the president who signed the agreement was impeached, it was difficult to follow through on the agreement. The dispute, which was treated as a sacred symbol of nationalism, was also linked to the 'candlelight spirit,' which had helped to create the new regime. It is understandable that presidential hopeful Moon Jae-in, who was considered most likely to win the election, would have wanted to utilize the bubbling public opinion for his election campaign. Indeed, he had included the 'nullification and renegotiation of the Korea–Japan Comfort Women Agreement of 2015' to his election platform (Democratic Party of Korea, 2017: 283). As mentioned above, this agenda was one of the key goals of Jeongdaehyeop, which had merged with the Foundation for Justice and Remembrance to form the Korean Council for Justice and Remembrance for the Issues of Military Sexual Slavery by Japan (hereafter, the Korean Council). On 6 August 2018, the Korean Council organized a joint press conference with 40 other organizations, in which it criticized the new Moon Jae-in government for not dissolving the Reconciliation and Healing Foundation (Korea Women's Associations United, 2018). Through this act of symbolic politics, the NGO applied indirect pressure with the aim of changing government policy, thus created a new agenda and rhetoric and mobilizing the public (Suh and Linkhart, 2011: 196–198).

In May 2020, Yi Yong-su, one of the few surviving comfort women victims, criticized the Korean Council; this caused some controversy within South Korean society. Yi argued that the Korean Council had failed to represent the interests of the victims, many of whom were growing old and in danger of dying without getting justice; she alleged that the NGO activists were pursuing personal gain, which is why some of them had become career politicians (Lee, 2020). Furthermore, Chun Young-woo, the former chief secretary for foreign affairs and national security in the Lee Myung-bak administration, alleged that the Korean Council did not aim to support the comfort women victims but rather to pursue its own profit. Chun felt that the Korean Council had been acting as if it operated above the law when he had attempted to explain Japan's Saito proposal (a comfort women negotiation proposal) to the NGO leaders during the Noda administration (Toyo, 2020).

These two testimonies illustrated the same context. Why did the comfort women problem remain unresolved after 30 years of civic action by a large number of NGOs? As many civic groups point out, Japan's compensation policies did not properly reflect the victims' voice or position. However, the failure to do so can be partly attributed to the rupture in the solidarity between South Korean and Japanese NGOs. Furthermore, the comfort women issue had been treated as a sacrosanct agenda and the NGOs dealing with it became politicized. The politicization of the NGOs has resulted in a departure from their original purpose of victim-centered approach. In order to resolve the issue, South Korean civil society will have to seek solutions that are aligned with the victim's wishes, allow them to voice their own concerns, and remain vigilant regarding the essential problem of violation of women's rights.

4. Sakhalin forced labor and atomic bomb victim issues

Unlike the comfort women issue, where nationalistic organizations tended to control the agenda, an international organization, the Red Cross, played a major role in dealing with the Sakhalin forced labor issue and the Korean atomic bomb victims issue. In these cases, the Japanese government has been providing public funds to the Red Cross, and the funds have been distributed to the victims without much controversy. Because of its known principles of humanity and neutrality, the Red Cross has

remained relatively free from the effects of the political and historical conflicts between South Korea and Japan. This international organization's depoliticized nature has served as a strong background for securing realistic support and, consequently, successfully meeting victims' needs (interview with Japanese diplomat, 5 November). Furthermore, it is worth noting that Japanese (not South Korean) civic organizations have been more active in resolving these problems. This section will examine why the compensation for Sakhalin Koreans and Korean atomic bomb victims was more successful than that for the comfort women issue. Furthermore, it will evaluate the role of the Red Cross in the compensation process and the characteristics and activities of related civic organizations in both Japan and South Korea.

4.1 Role of the International Red Cross in the Sakhalin forced Korean labor issue

The Japanese government's activities toward financially supporting the Korean victims of the Sakhalin forced labor programs (henceforth, Sakhalin forced labor) began with the opening of a Special Welfare Center under the South Korean Red Cross in 1989. Japan's support was not meant to be legal compensation; rather, it was to be treated as a humanitarian effort to help the Sakhalin Koreans, who were in distress. Initially, the Red Cross became involved in this humanitarian effort because the Sakhalin Koreans were in danger of becoming refugees. They had come to be known as 'the last refugees of World War II' (Kyunghyang Shinmun, 1976; Kyunghyang Shinmun, 1986) or 'the only refugees of World War II,' as they were displaced people who could not return to their homeland after the war (Park, 1986). According to Resolution 17 of the 25th International Conference of the Red Cross, support activities for the welfare of 'refugees' and 'displaced people' should be directed by governments or NGOs such as the UNHCR (International Committee of the Red Cross, 1986). Therefore, the Sakhalin Koreans, who were considered as 'displaced people,' were eligible for Red Cross support.

When Korea was liberated from Japanese colonial rule in August 1945, more than 43,000 Koreans were residing in Sakhalin. The relocation of this large population group to Japan and/or Korea would have caused a massive refugee problem (Hui, 1967). Therefore, when the repatriation of these Sakhalin Koreans was first discussed, the Japanese government refused to grant citizenship to these victims, and the Korean government lacked a proper system for granting citizenship. Consequently, the Red Cross organizations in both countries set about tackling this issue. The Korean and Japanese Red Cross subsequently established a Joint Cooperation Body to Support South Korean Residents in Sakhalin (hereafter, Joint Cooperation Body); this organization supported the permanent return of the Sakhalin Koreans to Korea, with the aim of preventing them from becoming refugees. Since then, the Korean Red Cross has taken all responsibility for coordinating the process of helping the Sakhalin Koreans obtain South Korean citizenship and providing them with assistance to safely return to their home country.

Through the efforts of the Red Cross, the large-scale repatriation of the Sakhalin Koreans was made possible in 2000. A total of 489 households were settled in the Ansan Gohyang Village. The Joint Cooperation Body managed the payment of the construction fund and rental cost of 260 million dollars. In total, 17,299 Sakhalin Koreans temporarily returned to Korea between 1989 and March 2018, and 3,770 returned permanently between 1995 and March 2018. The Joint Cooperation Body also supported 7,270 returnees to visit family members who had remained behind in Sakhalin.

4.2 Sakhalin forced labor problem and NGOs

While the Japanese government had implemented its budget through the Red Cross, civil society played an important role in pushing the Japanese government to spend this budget. The Return Sakhalin-Detained Koreans Society (hereafter, the Korean Society), a Japan-based civic organization, aimed to solve the Sakhalin Korean problem and began its activities for promoting the Sakhalin Koreans' return to Korea well before the South Korean and Japanese governments showed any interest in the issue. This organization had been founded by Sakhalin Koreans married to Japanese nationals, who had been allowed to return to Japan in the 1950s. Among these, Park Roh-hak, an especially

active founding member, drew up a list of Sakhalin Koreans who wished to return through an extensive exchange of letters with Koreans who were still in Sakhalin. Park Roh-hak also wrote an opinion piece in the *Donga Ilbo*, where he published the list of Sakhalin Koreans who wished to return to South Korea. In the piece, Roh urged Koreans to ‘establish organizations such as Return Acceleration to lobby the Japanese Embassy in Korea and the Red Cross’ (Ryu, 1966). In response to his message, the family members of the Sakhalin Korean victims in Korea established the Sakhalin Return Acceleration in 1970 (Donga Ilbo, 1971). Thus, the major civic groups promoting the resolution of the Sakhalin problem, including the Korean Society and the Sakhalin Return Acceleration, were all voluntary solidarity groups led by the victims or victims’ family. This differentiates these advocacy groups from those connected to the comfort women issue, where professional activists, rather than victims themselves, became leaders of the organizations and led the compensation movement.

In Japan, in addition to the victim-operated civic groups, several Japanese civic groups were also established with the aim of supporting the repatriation of the Sakhalin Koreans. For example, the Society of Wives Cooperating with the Return Sakhalin-Detained Koreans Society (hereafter, the Society of Wives) was established in 1973, and it supported the return movement and the activities of the Korean Society. With the support of the Japan Bar Association, the Society of Wives played a major role in filing the Sakhalin case against the Japanese government in 1975. The lawsuit received some spotlight throughout the 14 years of the legal proceedings and became an opportunity for publicizing the Sakhalin Korean issue to larger Japanese society (Ota, 2018: 70). The lawsuit was withdrawn in 1989; but the Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs soon allowed entry into Japan for Sakhalin Koreans who wished to be repatriated. The repatriation was thus a major victory for the alliance of Japanese civic organizations and Japanese lawyer organizations. However, this hard-won victory was hampered by the Soviet Union government, which refused to give exit permits to the Sakhalin Koreans in July 1976 (Miyata, 1981).

The turning point came in 1987, when Japan–Soviet Union bilateral ties began to improve. That year, NGO activists, Onuma Yasuaki and Takagi Genichi, attempted to persuade the Liberal Democratic Party’s Hara Bunbe and the Socialist Party’s Igarashi Gojo to form the Roundtable Committee of MPs (Members of Parliament) on the Issue of Koreans Left in Sakhalin (hereafter, the MP Roundtable). Subsequently, the responsibility for the return movement shifted to the MP Roundtable. Consequently, many activists became concerned that the movement would be dominated by politicians (Arai, 1998: 230). However, the chairman of the MP Roundtable Hara stated that no political approach would be necessary for resolving the Sakhalin Korean problem. Furthermore, he emphasized the importance of the return movement, which had been led by a victim himself, Park Roh-hak, and cautioned against the politicization of the problem (The Roundtable Committee of MPs on the issue of Koreans left in Sakhalin, 1994: 18, 620–621). Thanks to the efforts of the MP Roundtable, the Japanese government decided to spend 31 million dollars in constructing housing and sanitarium facilities for the returnees in 1994. Following this, the MP Roundtable determined that the goal of supporting the victims had been attained and voluntarily disbanded itself. Although the compensation measures offered by the Japanese government did not reflect all demands of the victims, they finally secured an opportunity to return to Korea after a miserable life of being forced to emigrate and neglected in Sakhalin (Sun and Ji, 2013: 97).

The success of the Sakhalin Korean return movement can be attributed to the fact that the victims themselves voluntarily formed the Korean Society, which exerted strong pressure on the Japanese government to provide necessary support. Furthermore, the MP Roundtable, acting cautiously and avoiding politicization of the issue, focused on procuring effective support for the victims instead. Thus, the respective Red Cross organizations of South Korea and Japan could successfully pursue many support programs, including the permanent return of Sakhalin Koreans, with financial support from the Japanese government. Unlike the various resolution initiatives related to the comfort women issue, the Sakhalin programs are progressing smoothly and have not caused any diplomatic conflicts between South Korea and Japan.

4.3 Role of the Red Cross in the atomic bomb victims problem

As with the Sakhalin forced labor issue, the Japanese government began to support the Korean victims of the atomic bomb through the Korean Red Cross as part of a 'humanitarian aid' effort. In the beginning, the Japanese government provided a temporary funding of 405,000 dollars per annum in 1989 and 1990 through the Korean Red Cross. Furthermore, between 1991 and 1993, the Japanese government donated approximately 38 million dollars to the Korean Red Cross. The Korean Red Cross opened the Atomic Bomb Welfare Center in 1993 (renamed Special Welfare Center in 1998) in order to manage these funds and to pay the medical expenses of the victims (Korea Atomic Bombs Victim Association, 2011: 225–227). The amount of compensation offered by the Japanese government fell far short of what the victims requested and the victims were disappointed. However, they did not reject this assistance, but tried to obtain follow-up assistance through continuous compensation movements and trials.

In 2002, the Japanese government abolished the old compensation system, which had not recognized support for overseas atomic bomb victims, and implemented Support Service for Atomic Bomb Survivors Overseas instead. This revision allowed Korean atomic bomb survivors to receive continuous relief support from the Japanese government. Victims wishing to receive support from the Japanese government were required to obtain an Atomic Bomb Survivor's Certificate (hereafter, the Certificate), which was issued by the Japanese government. Since 2003, the Special Welfare Certificate Center of the Korean Red Cross has been supporting Korean victims in applying for such necessary documents; furthermore, it has been closely involved in identifying and resolving issues faced by Korean atomic bomb victims (Korea Atomic Bombs Victim Association, 2011: 241–244).

Korean atomic bomb victims had to travel to Japan in order to apply for the Certificate; consequently, some disabled victims were unable to receive the Certificate. In 2008, however, the Japanese government revised the Atomic Bomb Survivors' Assistance Act in order to facilitate overseas victims to receive the Certificate without entering Japan (Oh, 2013: 168). Since then, the Special Welfare Center of the Korean Red Cross has provided administrative support for Korean victims to enable them to obtain the Certificate in Korea itself. Furthermore, the Special Welfare Center uses the budget entrusted to it by the Japanese government to provide monthly allowances and pay the medical expenses of victims. It also supports various administrative services such as health consultation support provided by Japanese atomic bomb specialists and various treatment options in Japan.

Recently, in South Korea, legal provisions such as Special Law to Support Korean Atomic Bomb Victims (enacted on 29 May 2016) and Special Law to Support Sakhalin Koreans (enacted on 26 May 2020) have provided a legal basis for supporting victims. Thus, it should be noted that Korean society welcomes dual financing – both from Japan and South Korea – for supporting such victims. While several problems related to compensation for Korean atomic bomb victims do remain, the influx of public funds from the Japanese government has been received rather smoothly within South Korean society since the late 1980s.

4.4 Atomic bomb survivors and NGOs

As in the case of the Sakhalin Koreans, NGOs played an important role in dealing with the atomic bomb victim issue – particularly by providing effective support for such survivors. Consider the case of Son Jin-du, who smuggled himself into Japan. Son was exposed to the atomic bomb blast in Hiroshima, where he had migrated with his family in 1944. In 1951, he smuggled himself into Japan in order to receive medical treatment but was forcibly repatriated to Korea because he had violated the Alien Registration Order. In 1970, he smuggled himself into Japan again. However, the Japanese government refused to provide him with the support he needed. Several Japanese NGOs called upon the Japanese government to provide relief support to Mr. Son. They began to raise funds to cover his legal and medical fees and lobbied the government to reverse its decision. During this process, Japanese citizens established advocacy groups – the Civic Organization for Son Jin-du to stay and be treated in Japan and the Association of Citizens for Supporting Son-san – to

provide assistance to the victim, Mr. Son. Supported by the Japanese NGOs, Son filed a lawsuit against the Governor of Fukuoka Prefecture in order to receive the Certificate in 1972. His victorious first trial in 1974 opened up the possibility of providing blanket government support for overseas victims. Finally, in 1978, Son won in the Supreme Court and consequently claimed his legal right to receive support from the Japanese government as an overseas atomic bomb survivor. The South Korea-based Korean Atomic Bomb Victim Relief Society issued a statement thanking Japanese NGOs for supporting Son Jin-du's legal struggles. Thus, Son's lawsuit was not only an individual case, but also a dispute redressal attempt between all Korean atomic bomb victims and the Japanese government (Korea Atomic Bombs Victim Association, 2011: 179).

The Korean Atomic Bomb Victim Relief Society (hereafter, Korean Society) had been established in 1967 in order to support victims by providing medical assistance or by lobbying for relevant legislation in Korea (Kyunghyang Shinmun, 1967).³ In its early years, a non-victim served as its president; however, later, an atomic bomb victim, Shin Young-su, took over as president for the first time in 1970. Like the Korean Society of Sakhalin victims, the Korean Society was a self-help organization that enabled the victims themselves to launch their compensation movement (Oh, 2013: 177). After Shin Young-su visited Japan in 1971, the Association of Citizens for Supporting South Korean Atomic Bomb Victims (hereafter, the Association of Citizens) was established in Japan. The Association of Citizens systematically investigated the number of victims and their physical and psychological damages in order to identify and verify the realities of the Korean atomic bomb victims (Ichiba, 2003: 79). The outcomes of this fact-finding survey would later be used as a basis not only by the Japanese civic groups, but also by the Korean Society in order to request support from the Japanese government.

However, the Korean Society could not conduct its activities seeking compensation effectively from the Japanese government. This is mostly because Korean atomic bomb victims found it difficult to participate in the Japan-based compensation movement due to their health or economic circumstances. Thus, the Korean Society began to rely on the Association of Citizens and other Japanese NGOs in order to proceed with its compensation movement (Oh, 2013: 165). For example, the Japanese NGO National Council for Peace and Against Nuclear Weapons raised nationwide funding in Japan and established a medical center for Korean atomic bomb victims in Hapcheon, Korea in 1973. This medical center was the first facility in Korea to provide specialized treatment to atomic bomb victims. For the survivors in Korea, the establishment of this medical center was a meaningful achievement because it allowed them to access professional treatment within Korea itself.

While Japanese civic groups had done a full-fledged compensation movement, including fact-finding investigations and provision of medical support for Korean victims in the 1970s, from the 1980s onward, conscientious lawyer organizations that supported Korean atomic bomb victims through various legal proceedings took center stage. After Son Jin-du's trial in 1978, the Japanese government began to provide support for Korean victims who traveled to Japan to receive medical treatment. However, in 1986, when the South Korean government stopped paying the travel expenses of victims who wished to go to Japan, the Japan-based treatment of Korean atomic bomb victims was also stopped. Against this backdrop, the Japan Federation of Bar Associations (hereafter, the Bar Association) officially filed a claim for compensation of USD 2.3 billion against the Japanese government on behalf of the Korean Society. This marked the beginning of an active legal struggle, and the movement officially began to move beyond the previous tactic of publicizing the victims' situation within larger Japanese society.

During this process, the Citizens' Council on Issues Concerning the Korean Atomic Bomb (hereafter, the Citizens' Council) was established with Takagi Genichi as its president. Takagi was the president of the Bar Association and had been involved in redressing the Sakhalin Korean issue. The Citizens'

³The Korean Atomic Bomb Relief Society began conducting a memorial service for the victims, which received considerable spotlight within the Japanese media. The Korean Society's efforts thus highlighted the existence and conditions of the Korean atomic bomb victims within Japanese society.

Council collaborated with the Korean society and actively led various activities related to the issue. The Citizens' Council supported the 1998 so-called 'Kwak Ki-hoon trial,' which questioned the legality of invalidating an atomic bomb victim's certificate once he or she left Japan. Amidst general indifference within South Korean society, Kwak continued his trial with the support of the Citizens' Council and other Japanese civic groups and finally won his case in 2002. This victory allowed Korean atomic bomb victims living in Korea to receive assistance from the Japanese government beginning in 2003. The legal support provided by conscientious lawyer associations in Japan is not just a kind of solidarity among civic organizations within the perpetrating country but also an international solidarity between organizations in South Korea and Japan. The efforts of civic groups, including the Bar Association, continued until the Japanese Supreme Court's ruling in 2015, which allowed overseas atomic bomb victims to receive the same medical expense exemptions as those provided to Japanese victims. Consequently, from 2016 onward, victims in Korea and other foreign countries also began to receive full exemption of medical expenses. This was the result of 43 years of lawsuits, starting with Son's lawsuit against Fukuoka Prefecture in 1972 to receive documentation certifying him as an atomic bomb victim. In short, it had been an arduous journey for the Korean victims of the atomic bomb to obtain the necessary support from the Japanese government. Nevertheless, success of the movement should be gaged from the level to which the victims accepted the support to date.

In short, it can be said that the movement was successful in that the victims have accepted the support so far. This can be attributed to the fact that the involved stakeholder organizations used a victim-led approach, and various support groups had avoided any political agenda-based solutions.

5. Conclusion

This article has analyzed three postwar compensation issues – the comfort women problem, Korean atomic bomb survivors issue, and the Sakhalin forced labor issue – that South Koreans regarded as unresolved through the 1965 Treaty on Basic Relations between Japan and Korea. This paper has attempted to explain the outcomes of these issues by focusing on the organizational character and geographical base of the various bodies that led respective compensation movement.

In movements related to the comfort women problem, victim-relief activities were led by women's rights activists who were mostly based in South Korea. Most of these Korean NGOs approached the comfort women problem not only as a women's rights issue, but also as a nationalist political issue. This approach presented the comfort women problem as a political symbol of anti-Japanese nationalism. Consequently, this appeal to nationalism encouraged several diplomatic conflicts between South Korea and Japan. It also deeply ruptured the solidarity between Japanese NGOs, which had tended to treat the comfort women problem as a women's rights issues, and South Korean NGOs, which insisted on treating it as a national-pride issue.

In contrast, the Red Cross, an international organization known for its political neutrality, oversaw the resolution of both the issues of Sakhalin forced labor and the atomic bomb victims. According to the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross, the organization must remain independent to maintain its integrity while the national branches abide by local laws. Here, independence means it should maintain political neutrality and resist political, ideological, and economic interference from the local government (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2015: 52, 55) in conducting its activities. It can be said that the Red Cross complied with these principles in the operation of the funds allocated by Japanese and Korean governments for the victims. Although the issues of Sakhalin forced labor and the atomic bomb victims had not received nearly as much spotlight as the comfort women issue within South Korean society, the NGOs working on their resolution eventually achieved a broader range of realistic support for the victims. The two issues' resolution efforts were led largely by Japanese NGOs, and solidarity between South Korea and Japan remained stable.

As such, compared to the comfort women problem, it can be said that the Sakhalin forced labor and atomic bomb victim issues achieved relative success. It is true that the two victim groups did not always receive satisfactory compensation from the Japanese government. However, it is noteworthy

that all related compensation funds were distributed smoothly, and the victims received their allotted funds without much resistance.

South Korean legislations regarding assistance programs have brought the Korea–Japan compensation issue into a new phase. Recently, Korean laws have been legislated to support the Sakhalin Koreans and the atomic bomb victims. The Korean Atomic Bomb Victim Law of 2016 was enacted against the backdrop of winning a lawsuit at the Korean Constitutional Court in 2011 that accused the Korean government of failing to make an effort to solve the problem; and the Japanese Supreme Court’s ruling that the Japanese government should bear the medical expenses of victims of atomic bombing in Korea (the South Korean Atomic Bomb Victim Medical Billing Lawsuits in 2015). The Law stipulates that medical treatment will be provided to victims who have received the Certificate in accordance with the Atomic Bomb Survivors’ Assistance Act of Japan. Also, the Special Act on Support for Sakhalin Koreans was enacted in 2020 when support for the first-generation Sakhalin Koreans was about to cease. The Special Act expanded its support beyond the first generation to include part of the second generation. These two laws now supplement Japan’s compensation policy, thus providing more solid support for the victims of these issues.

Further analysis of the relative successes and failures of the three discussed issues – the comfort women problem, the Sakhalin forced labor issue, and the atomic bomb victim issue – may provide more valuable insights for designing realistic victim supports and for resolving related diplomatic conflicts between South Korea and Japan.

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