

Sexual Violence in a Society that has a History of Drafting Army-prostitutes

by Yoshiko Isshiki

1. Introduction

In Japanese during the war history, there had been army prostitutes. Particularly, these girls were taken from various Asian countries. This shameful reality has been hidden in society.

We appreciate some courageous Korean Christian sisters who investigated these facts and brought them to public awareness. So it has finally been acknowledged by the Japanese government, that these events were indeed fact, and that there had been documents which contained information about the programs. Under the army sanitary plans, there had been organized houses for the soldiers' sexual activities. There were most cruel dealings with those women and many became not only ill, but insane; there were many suicides, and many were killed.

As we all know, in present day Asia there are various kinds of sexual abuses and new situations of women's slavery, including prostitution of young children. For us, Japanese women, we realize that we are exposed as the partner of the exploiters. It is very difficult for Japanese women to acknowledge these realities, yet very recently many movements among Japanese women, as well as other Asian women, are taking place against this exploitation and oppression of women and children.

What is the cause of these exploitations? Many point out the economic situation of the South and the North. It is the reality that we have to deal with.

Within this study, the emphasis is focused on the aspects of Japanese mentality that have made these exploitation's possible. And also to discover if there is some connection to what has recently been done concerning tourism, including 'sex tours' and 'sexual business' that bring girls from Asian countries to Japan.

2. Japanese Mentality towards Sex

2-1. Separation of Sex from Humanity

In the mentality of Japanese men, there is a tendency to separate sex from humanity; sex is separated from his cultural life. Society has built and fostered a set of myths which allow this mentality to thrive, even today. It is commonly understood that men cannot control their sex drive, and that it is permissible for men to have sexual relationships with women other than their wives. In olden days,

it was thought that a man showed his capability by having several women other than his wife, though the constitution did not permit polygamy. Still, these ideologies remain imbedded somewhere within society. The mentality left from those olden days, made it and still make it permissible for men to be disloyal. Even the sexual looseness of the former prime minister, as long as it was not revealed, was hidden by a society who did not say much. In Japanese society, if one is capable in a social status, their private life is almost free from criticism.

Matters about sex are only physical matters to men, even to the extent that women are treated as "materials" that have no feelings. So naturally, sex can be separated from humanity. It is separated from the individual human being. Men separate their own sex from their own humanity and treat women as sexual objects, separating women's sex from her being. This means they do not listen to women's voices. They only assume from their male mentality, that women would be their objects or play things, to suit their preference. Men only see women as sexual objects; a woman is never allowed to be perceived as a subject. Women exist only for men.

As you see in Kabuki, in which only men play women's roles, those 'men-played' women are more sexually appealing than real women. This de-humanization of human sex is the violence to humanity. It objectifies and allows all sort of vital violence towards women.

In the church community, it is different. Christian church members think that they have "clean" hands in matters of sex. They can control themselves. They are ethical. The Japanese Christian church is a minority in the society; it contains only about 1% of the population. And the Japanese Protestant church is generally small, in congregation. "They are usually a minister-centered small, intellectual group, with the tendency so intellectual that even looking down simple sermons that can reach common people."¹

The problem originates here, that Christian men and intellectual men do not want to be mixed with those vulgar mentalities. It is also true that they do not want to accept their share of the responsibility because they are men. The church, in general, does not want to deal with these social problems.

Church women are changing, and becoming seriously concerned, particularly about war time army-prostitutes who were brought from other Asian countries and sex tourism. Women's action in the church is bringing these concerns to light and church men are gradually beginning to hear and feel concerned.

2-2. Group-nizing society

There are various causes for the tendency in Japanese society to organize social structures around the group, of 'group-nize'. This becomes violence to those few who have a different attitude from the group. In villages, from early times, there were many village centered activities. Group-centered mentality, they say, comes from rice-farming. Urbanization has loosened the ties within the villages, yet in

¹ Laman, Gordon D. "Formative Factors for Early Japanese Protestant Mission" *Journal of Theology* Number LIII(1991). Society for theological Study, Tokyo Union Theological Seminary, Kyobunkan. p. 63

urban residences, there are also some tendencies of 'group-nizing'. There is a daily need to function in the group, and if one expresses the inconveniency of joining, that person would be expelled from the group and treated like a non-resident. This is the oppression of the individual; grouping erases individuality.

This is the violence of the individuality. A totalitarian society loses the value of its individual member. Nationalization and militarization give mono-value or only one value to the group. If an individual does not follow the group's values, they are criticised by the majority of the group and forced to give up their own ideas, to live within the group without conflict.

The values of such a society are mainly dependent upon what is generally approved by the group, and not by the essential value or order. Even falsehood is permissible when the majority of the people are doing it. We have a saying that even the red light means it is safe to cross the road, when many break the rules. This kind of mentality kills the individual feeling of a human being, dehumanised occurs. Dehumanization of one's own self allows one to take for granted other people's dehumanization. Oppression of the individual by group is very common in Japanese society. This violence destroys the value and significance of each person's existence.

Once a group is organized, someone would become the head, and this produces the power-relationship. Patriarchy is the mono-value culture. It does not allow women's participation or views in the society. And patriarchy organizes itself from top to bottom with her archy of verdict domination.

These characteristics of groupings ignore the individual within their organized membership. This is the violence to the sacred value of an individual person. Here, another de-humanization takes place.

Another danger of this group-centered mentality, is intolerance to diversities, there is no appreciation of diversity among people. However, it is essential to know the appreciation of God-given individual differences. This is yet another de-humanization stripping away the values that the individual has. All of this de-humanization is social violence to the core of an individual's existence.

2-3. Discrimination against "Others"

God created human beings and blessed them in God's love and care. Human beings are made in God's own image. Yet, human beings are most different from God, though we have the image of God. God, through Jesus Christ, showed us God's care and compassion towards our existence. There are not 'others' to God since Jesus Christ calls us "sisters and brothers", "friends" and not "servants", in spite of all our undeserved realities. God accepts us as just what we are through Jesus Christ. Since we are accepted by Jesus Christ, so God accepts us. We are to accept "others", just as God accepts others.

Japanese society has the tendency to discriminate the "others" of the society. Others in other words, are those people that are not part of the majority. The majority treats the minority with discrimination. The majority dominates with very little concern over some other ideas. There is very little appreciation of the variety

of cultures that the minority has. There is discrimination against Koreans-in-Japan, Ainu and Burakus. Anything other than majority of Japanese, is labelled negatively as "other". Military prostitutes were devised from this mentality.

2-4. Noble(high) and Low

The highest nobility in Japan is the Emperor. In the long history of the Emperor system can be found the distinction which leads to discrimination. Long ago there were a few female emperors, but the present imperial rule neglects woman's succession to the throne. This change illustrates that 'cleanliness' has been attached to 'Nobility', while 'Lowness' become associated with being "soiled" or impure.² The idea of a woman being "soiled" (in connection with her menstrual blood) came into the patriarchal system, and resulted in no more 'Woman-Emperor'. Not only was their direct discrimination against women in the system, but more damaging discrimination lay in the mere existence of the Emperor system itself, for as the symbol of nobility and cleanness, it had to suggest a opposite pole. There is no equality in Japanese society even today. Women always come at the bottom of the line in a society with this kind of mentality.

3. Theological View

3-1. Feminist Theology of Acceptance

Historically, it is well known that Christianity has brought some change to Japanese who became Christians. Ever . since Christianity, at first Catholic, came to Japan in 1549 it was obvious that those early Christian women and men had been changed from the men-centered obedience of the feudalistic age to a God-centered obedience, it can be proven that those Christians became free from the group-centered values.

Protestant Christianity came to Japan in the 19th century. It was the time of Meiji Restoration. Tokugawa dynasty lost its power and thousands of knights lost their positions. The stoic Protestant Christianity fit well to stoic knight-hood, the patriarchal knight-hood like and stoic ethical Christianity also fit well with the new family system, which was a replacement of feudalistic social system of ranks. This family system was strictly organized by the order of father as the head Christianity enforced patriarchy in the church. So the protestant of a family. It was strongly patriarchal. Thus, Protestant churches in early days had the men's seats and women's seats separated, and emphasized strictly the orders of the church. Yet, it was a remarkable record that we started ordaining woman ministers for nearly 60 years. As the Christianity lots helping people, the patriarchy in Christianity could not stop to acknowledge women's full humanity.

Now, what theological interpretation of these dehumanizing realities can help realize essential change for future betterment in the church and in society. The

² Noma, Hiroshi and Okiura, Kazuteru Japanese Sanctity and Locality The Middle Age Edition, Jinbun Shoin, Kyoto, 1985

'Feminist Theology of Acceptance' is the concept and expression that I have been using as result of my survey.^{3 4}

As a Japanese woman, the theology of acceptance is suitable to me; from the reality of the lives of our Japanese women and mentality towards God and Jesus Christ as our own Saviour, this theology is essential. To combat sexual violence from the base of our society, we must change in our social concept towards women, gaining women's status as equal to men. The patriarchal customs, educational political and economic systems must change as well. We must free our people, not only women but also men, all who are trapped in their nests, discriminating each other from a vast freer world.

To give women a strong power inside, this paper will focus on three points. Through this focus women must be made to realize the importance of their existence in the society, and gain their sacred value as what they are. they must find the importance of individual value separate from group values, and stand up strongly in appreciation of diversity in our society.

A Feminist (Women) theological approach can be obtained here.

3-2. To gain women's value in the society

It is difficult to establish women's substantial value in a patriarchal, male centered society, which has a long history and customs that are rooted in feudalism and patriarchy even though our constitution declares fundamental equality. The old laws and values based on Confucius' teachings did not have any dealing with women. What they mentioned and very commonly quoted was the phrase, "Women and Children are impossible creature to deal with". So, women could survive only through men, fathers, husbands and sons.

Modern society is changing. On average, there are more women than men who proceed with education after high school. However, these statistics have an unseen slant. While there are more women who go to Junior College, more men go to four year colleges, nation-wide. In Tokyo, like our school, Keisen high school of women, over 85% go to 4 year colleges.

Today we find an increase in the ratio of working women to working men. The number of working women in Japan, in November or 1992 was the highest in the century's history, 19,180,000 women. This is 38.3% of the total population of women. Currently, 82% of new female college graduates are working, which exceed the amount of working men in the same category, men's working ratio. If we observe this only from the statistics. it appears as though women are having better opportunities than men, but in reality many of these women have to be satisfied with secretarial work. the marriage age is higher now. Still at the base of people's mentality towards women has not changed much.

³ Isshiki, Yoshiko, "On Self-Acceptance in Woman-Theology: An Introduction of Theology of Acceptance" Theological Survey Number 6, Society of woman-Ministers' Theological Survey, 1990

⁴ Isshiki, Yoshiko "A Theology of Acceptance - A Feminist Survey of the Gospels" Keisen Jogakuen College Bulletin Number 4 (1992)

The basic theological concept of women, comes from Genesis Chapter 1 and Chapter 2. Chapter 1:27 and 28 indicate that "God created man in God's own image in the image of God. God created male and female. God created them and God blessed them." Man and woman, both are God created creatures.

Chapter 2 also indicates that man was created and woman was also created by God, and that man did not lend any hand in woman's creation. Both are God created creatures.

In the New Testament, in the Gospels, we find Jesus Christ meeting women, and each time, Jesus accepts woman as what she is.⁵ When women are accepted by Jesus Christ, they act as independent people in spite of the social disadvantages. The acceptance of women and women's reaction to their oppression is of crucial importance. This acceptance allows women to be very active in their work for others who are in need of independent action.

Even in the rejection⁶ (The mother and brothers of Jesus, Matthew 12:46-50), one unique point can be noted, Jesus' rejection of both the mother-son relationship and relationships with his relatives. This rejection of relatives as having special status leads to the acceptance of everyone without condition. Rejection here means wider acceptance, or complete acceptance of all human beings. The rejection of family ties also leads to the establishment of new relations which are not based on blood ties but on human relationships.⁷ Viewed from another angles, it can be said that Jesus rejects those who are violate human rights.

In the above case, Jesus rejects those who insist on the special rights of one group or individual over other less privileged people. Thus, women are as equally accepted and, equally sinful, not listen to what God had said. Woman did not listen to what God said, and Man did not listen to what God had said.

3-3. To gain women's individual value as separate from group value

As we see Jesus acceptance of women, it is clear that Jesus accepts the value that each person has, as it is. With the pouring of ointment, at the widow's offering, or at the Canaanite woman trying to ask for Jesus' care for her child, he breaks the conventional ideas and laws. He demonstrates non-group oriented values. If Jesus accepts us as what we are, through his Cross, death, and resurrection, we can depend only upon Jesus and God, and not on group balance.

God is good and this is essential in the understanding of relationship, if we are accepted, we are to accept others. It does not matter how others think, of what the balance is between the individual and the group.

3-4. Appreciation of diversity

The Holy Spirit was sent by God, and Jesus Christ signifies the Spirit of Acceptance. When the Holy Spirit descended as recorded in Act 1:14, people, men and women

⁵ Ibid., pp. 53-56

⁶ Ibid., pp. 57-59

⁷ Ibid., p. 58

had gathered together, yet every one individually received the spirit. They started speak out each in their own language, yet they still communicated. This indicates an acceptance of diversities. God uses these diversities. Each individual knew that he or she had been accepted by God, through the Holy spirit, and could start speaking in his or her own language, for they could understand that each language was also acceptable. If each language, each culture, and is accepted, then we are free to express our reply in our own culture, in our own woman's expression. The value of diversity is a God accepted value. We are to believe that God accepted values of others, and appreciated them. For an individual person to speak out in one's own language is the expression of diversities, as well as individuality.

For Japanese women, it is very important that each woman can express herself in her own way. The ruling is so tight, that women are afraid of expressing their own feelings in their own language. We can free them from this oppression. It is the violence that is never addressed to the individual person that forbids women from finding individuality and expression. It is the violence or not which is the violence to shut them down to the extent constantly they are figuring out if what they say is not different from the majority of people. It is the violence of forcing the individual into an mono-valued mould of expression and mentality.

5. Conclusion

Viewed realistically in the concept of theological interpretation, social violence to women in Japan is silence seen within women themselves. For women are accustomed to fulfilling the duty of understanding men, while men are the creatures who do not try to understand women. Women's concepts of men are as traditional as that of men to women.

We realize how little we are trying to understand men as individual persons. Quite often, men represent the living earners; they are not allowed the opportunity to become persons. Companies, enterprises, and institutions, take their merit at a higher level than that of individual need. Group-oriented and village-oriented mentality in the present economic situation has transferred to the institution, making the mentality institution-centered. Japanese are often called 'economic animals'. Sadly, in a way, it is true, for often they do not know any other values or ways of being. If an individual is violated, and a group-orientation reigns in the society, it is very difficult to regain the individual status. Sexual violence practiced by Japanese men, has deep roots in their loss of individuality. This is true not only of men, but more so of women. When a woman is violated in her mind or bodies, it is something that will force a change to the depth of her personality.

Japanese women meeting Jesus Christ is essentially the start of the fight against all kinds of violence, particularly sexual violence over women just because they are women.

Many Japanese women aware of this reality and they have started fighting against all kinds of violence to women. Especially they are fighting and expressing concerns over Asian women who are brought into Japan through deceit; they are told that

they will be a 'waitress' or entertainers and they are forced to become prostitutes. HELP is in the Japan Christian Women's Temperance Union. By combating the discrimination, violence to women of over various backgrounds, women in Japan are slowly coming to understand their own situations.

Being accepted by Jesus Christ, we are to set ourselves to stand strongly against violence towards all women and men for their humanity.

Aus: In God's Image, Vol.13, No.3, 1994.