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“WIANBU”: HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND IMPACT ON BILATERAL RELATIONS BETWEEN JAPAN AND THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA

The article is devoted to the analysis of the role of “comfort women” phenomenon in political and cultural dialogue of Japan and the Republic of Korea. Historical context and the current state of memorialization of the issue are studied.

It is determined that the first “comfort stations” began to appear after 1931, and became actively distributed in 1937. The main motives for the creation of a network of such stations by the Japanese military leadership are outlined, in particular, the antirape effort in the newly occupied territories and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases among soldiers of the imperial army, as well as the prevention of espionage among sex workers. The main ways of recruiting women are identified, such as false promises of high-paying jobs, ransom or even kidnapping. It is established that South Korea was the main source and location of “comfort stations” for the Japanese. The conditions in which “comfort women” had to live during the war time and occupation, as well as the social and cultural consequences of the analyzed phenomenon, are characterized.

It is found that Japan and the Republic of Korea have long shown different attitudes towards “comfort stations”. It is determined that Japan for quite a long time stood in the position of denying its guilt in creating the problem of “comfort women”, not wanting to engage in a dialogue on this issue. At the current stage, the country of the morning sun considers the problem of rethinking its participation in crimes related to the phenomenon of “comfort women” closed, especially after the 2015 Agreement.

The 2015 South Korean – Japanese Agreement is analyzed. According to the 2015 Agreement, the “wianbu” issue was to be finally resolved through monetary compensation and mutual concessions by both states. It turned out that this Agreement caused a number of protests, was recognized as unfair, and was categorically not accepted by Korean society.

It is concluded that the “comfort women” issue still remains a “bone of contention” that prevents the normalization of bilateral relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea.

Keywords: “wianbu”, Far Eastern diplomacy, World War II, “comfort women”, comforter, memorialization, “comfort stations”.

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«ВІАНБУ»: ІСТОРИЧНІ ВІДОМОСТІ ТА ВПЛИВ НА ДВОСТОРОННІ ВІДНОСИНИ МІЖ ЯПОНІЄЮ ТА РЕСПУБЛІКОЮ КОРЕЯ

Стаття присвячена аналізу ролі явища «жінок для втіхи» в політичному та культурному діалозі Японії та Південної Кореї. Досліджено історичні відомості та сучасний стан меморіалізації проблеми.

Визначено, що перші «станції для втіх» почали з'являтися після 1931 року, а активного поширення набули в 1937 році. Окреслено головні мотиви створення мережі подібних закладів японським військовим керівництвом, зокрема боротьба зі згвалтуваннями на новоокупованих територіях та поширенням венеричних хвороб серед солдат імперської армії, а також запобігання шпіднажу серед секс-працівниць. Виявлено основні шляхи вербування жінок, такі як фальшиві обіцянки високооплачуваної роботи, викуп чи навіть викрадення. Встановлено, що для японців основним джерелом і місцем дислокації «станцій для втіх» була Корея. Схарактеризовано умови, в яких доводилося жити жінкам-утішницям в роки війни та окупації, а також соціальні та культурні наслідки явища.

За допомогою контент-аналізу з'ясовано, що Японія та Республіка Корея тривалий час демонстрували неоднакове ставлення щодо «станцій втіх». Визначено, що Японія досить тривалий час стояла на позиції заперечення своєї вини у створенні проблеми «жінок для втіх», не бажаючи вести діалог з цього приводу. На сучасному етапі країна вранішнього сонця вважає закритим питання переосмислення своєї участі у злочинах, пов'язаних із явищем «жінок для втіх», особливо після Угоди 2015 року.

Проаналізовано Угоду між Японією та Республікою Корея 2015 року, згідно з якою питання «віанбу» мало бути остаточно вирішене шляхом грошової компенсації та взаємних поступок з боку обох держав. З'ясовано, що ця Угода спричинила низку протестів, була визнана несправедливою та категорично не прийнята корейським суспільством.

Підсумовано, що питання «жінок для втіх» по сьогодні залишається «яблуком розбрату», що перешкоджає нормалізації двосторонніх відносин Японії та Республіки Корея.

***Ключові слова:** «віанбу», далекосхідна дипломатія, Друга світова війна, «Жінки для втіхи», комфортантка, меморіалізація, «станції комфорту».*

Introduction. The “comfort women” issue is one of the most controversial and emotionally charged topics in the bilateral dialogue between Japan and the Republic of Korea. Its essence lies in the fact that the command of the Japanese Empire on the eve of and during World War II forcibly recruited women, mainly Koreans, to work in Japanese military brothels, known as “comfort stations”. “Comfort stations” were created from 1931 and operated until the end of

World War II. At the same time, at the current stage, Japan avoids commemorating the victims of these crimes, which especially aggravates its diplomatic relations with the Republic of Korea. The difficulty of solving the problem lies, on the one hand, in radically different perceptions of the scale of the issue and its essence, and on the other hand, in the rather strong pressure of the Korean public on the governments of both states.

For quite a long time, the “wianbu” issue continues to cause significant differences between the two countries, which certainly has a negative impact on political, economic and cultural relations. The government of the Republic of Korea and the citizens of the country demand official recognition, a sincere apology and compensation for the victims of this crime. Former “comfort women” and civil society activists lay special emphasis on the need for Japan to acknowledge crimes against humanity in order to heal the wounds of the past and to put the historical record straight. In its turn, Japan claims that the problem has already been settled by a number of agreements, such as the Agreement on the Settlement of Problems Concerning Property and Claims and on Economic Co-operation between Japan and the Republic of Korea (대한민국과, 1965) and the 2015 Agreement (Announcement, 2015).

The “comfort women” issue is deeply rooted in the political and cultural dialogue between the two states. The unresolved issue remains an obstacle to full cooperation between Japan and the Republic of Korea, which in turn affects security in the Asia-Pacific Region.

Analysis of recent researches and publications. At the current stage, foreign scientists are most actively engaged in the study of the “wianbu” issue. Among them, we can single out Chunghee Sarah Soh, an American anthropologist who specializes in issues of women, gender and sexuality. In her book “The Comfort Women: Sexual Violence and Postcolonial Memory in Korea and Japan”, the author offers a new perspective on the issue, emphasizing that responsibility for the crimes committed should not only be borne by Japan, but also by the Korean patriarchal society (Soh, 2009). Among other famous researchers, we can single out Edward Wang, Yoshimi Yoshiaki, Aniko Varga, Keith Howard, etc. (Yoshiaki, 2000; Varga, 2009). In the Ukrainian scientific space, the outlined issue has not yet become the subject of research.

The aim of the article is to analyze the historical context, the current state of memorialization and the impact of the “comfort women” phenomenon on bilateral relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea.

Results. Today, Japan and the Republic of Korea are of strategic importance for security in the Asia-Pacific region. Both countries are allies of the USA and play an important role in countering the nuclear threat from North Korea. That is why the issue of establishing bilateral relations of the outlined states has not lost its relevance for quite a long time. However, solving this issue is complicated by the shared historical past

of both nations, in which one played the role of the enslaver, and the other played the role of the victim.

First of all, we can single out the following “pitfalls” in the foreign policy relations between South Korea and Japan: 1) the problem of territorial belonging of Dokdo Takeshima Island (called Liancourt Rocks by some nations and Takeshima by Japan) in the Sea of Japan; 2) a visit by Japan’s political elite to the Yasukuni Shrine that honors the memory of all soldiers who laid down their lives for Japan, including those recognized as criminals according to the decision of the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal; 3) the issue of compensations and apologies for the crimes of the Japanese government during the colonial era.

The problem of sexual slavery of Korean women in the 30s and 40s of the 20th century remains a rather acute issue in the bilateral dialogue to this day. “Comfort women”, “servant girls”, “comforters”, “imperial gifts”, “wianbu” – these are all euphemisms used to denote women who “worked” at the so-called “comfort stations” in the territory of the Pacific Theater of World War II.

The creation of these stations is associated with the Mukden incident of 1931, after which a whole system of “comfort stations” began to emerge in the territories occupied by Japan. However, they became almost the most widespread after one of the most shameful incidents in the attempt of imperial Japan to seize China – the Nanjing Massacre. On December 13, 1937, Japanese troops began a six-day massacre that resulted in the actual destruction of the Chinese city of Nanjing. During these six days, the soldiers raped between 20,000 and 80,000 Chinese women. The ferocity horrified the world so much that Emperor Hirohito himself was concerned about such a blow to the image of the state (Blakemore, 2023). Therefore, a decision was made to expand the network of “comfort stations” in order to reduce the number of rapes, and with them to reduce the level of dissatisfaction of the local population with the Japanese, and to prevent espionage among sex workers and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases among soldiers of the imperial army (Piper, 2001: 161).

According to witnesses, women were brought to the “comfort stations” in different ways. Forced recruitment of women was reported in Japanese colonies, Korea and Taiwan, but the most common methods included deception through false offers of work to girls from poor families. Another way is by “brainwashing” schoolgirls that was possible due to Japanese educational reforms introduced in the colonies. The recruiters hid the true nature of the “work” from the new recruits until they were sent to the meeting points. During recruitment, the Japanese military usu-

ally stayed "behind the scenes", using military brothels owners or other middlemen, mostly of Korean nationality (Yoshiaki, 2000). It was not uncommon for young girls to be sold by their own families or simply kidnapped right in the middle of the street (Varga, 2009: 289). In general, today it is difficult to establish the exact number of women who suffered from Japanese militarists in the 1930s and 1940s. The data vary: numbers from 20,000 to 400,000 are given, but most of women were Koreans (Kim, 2014: 83).

The conditions in which the women were kept were terrible. The "comfort stations", depending on their location, were either buildings captured by the Japanese military during the attacks or field expedients jerry-built by the army specifically to house "comfort women". At front line, "comfort stations" were often tents or temporary wooden shacks. The spots were usually surrounded by barbed wire, well-guarded and patrolled. Many women said that they were never allowed to leave the camp, only some were allowed to go outside at the designated time each morning. Others testified that they were allowed to go out occasionally to get a haircut or even to watch a movie. Any significant freedom of movement was restricted and escape was almost always impossible. The "comfort station", as a rule, was a one- or two-storeyed building with a dining and reception area on the first floor. The women's rooms were usually located in the back or upstairs and usually consisted of cramped, narrow cubicles, often only 3 by 5 feet, with room only for a bed. In such conditions, "comfort women" had to serve 60 to 70 men a day. Their health was regularly checked by a military doctor. However, as many "comfort women" mention, these checks were done to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. Doctors paid almost no attention to the frequent cigarette burns, bruises, bayonet wounds and even broken bones inflicted on women by soldiers (United Nations Commission, 1996).

As a result of such torture, women very often fell ill, often died from severe beatings or diseases that developed against the background of daily rape. There were also those who could not endure it psychologically, ending their lives by suicide. So, until the end of World War II, a rather insignificant number of "comfort women" survived. However, even those who survived were in no hurry to tell the world about militarist Japan crimes. Such silence of these women is explained mainly by their oppression in the patriarchal Korean society, which strictly adheres to traditional morality, as well as the fear that they will be ostracized (Lee, Crowe, 2015: 347–348).

The "comfort women" issue gained active publicity after 1991, when one of the former "wianbu" –

Kim Hak Sun – publicly told her story for the first time, starting the first court case against the Japanese government (Frost, Vickers, 2021: 3). Similar actions inspired other former "comfort women" and, thus, the issue of "comfort stations" and their victims entered the media and public space, and also became a popular topic for discussion, which remains to this day.

For a long time, Japan has denied any direct involvement of the Japanese military and the Japanese state in the organized sexual slavery of women during wartime. They insisted that the "comfort women" system was just a continuation of commercial prostitution, and the women themselves received quite a good reward for their services (Frost, Vickers, 2021: 4). However, in this context, it is worth noting that the attitudes to the "wianbu" issue changed, depending on which party was in power and how much it cooperated with public organizations.

In the early 1990s, the Japanese government organized a study on the "comfort women" issue. Its results were published in the form of a statement by the Chief Secretary of the Cabinet of Ministers of Japan, Yohei Kono, dated August 4, 1993. The statement clearly stated that "the then Japanese military was directly or indirectly involved in the creation and management of the "comfort stations"; recruitment of women was carried out mainly by private recruiters commissioned by the military; women were mostly recruited against their will, and sometimes administrative/military personnel were directly involved in the process" (Statement, 1993).

In 1996, at the initiative of the Japanese government, the Asian Women's Fund was formed to pay compensation to "comfort women", but it was criticized by the UN due to the lack of recognition of state responsibility (Miyamoto, 2023: 272). Korean society also did not appreciate "halfway policy" and continued to demand that Japan admit guilt in the matter of organizing the work of "comfort stations" and make an official apology to the victims.

In 2015, an agreement was concluded, which aimed to finally solve the "comfort women" issue. According to it, the government of Japan was obliged to make a one-time cash contribution of 8.3 million dollars to a special support fund for former "comfort women", the creation of which was entrusted to the government of the Republic of Korea. The Korean side, in its turn, recognized the fact that the Japanese government is concerned about the "Statue of Peace" in front of the Japanese embassy in Seoul and obliged to take measures to solve this problem. Both sides agreed to refrain from further accusing or criticizing each other regarding the wianbu issue in the international community, including the UN (Announcement,

2015). The Agreement caused heavy criticism and dissatisfaction among the citizens of the Republic of Korea, which resulted in a public outcry for cancellation of the Agreement; the outcry, however, turned out to be unsuccessful.

The situation changed when President Moon Jae-in took over the government in the Republic of Korea. He took office in May 2017 and soon called for a review of the Agreement. A special group created by the government, which examined the terms of the Agreement, criticized its contents: "The Agreement was concluded on the basis of the views of the government without due consideration of the opinions of the victims. The parties reached an agreement thanks to mutual concessions, as if it was a general diplomatic issue." In the end, President Moon Jae-in agreed to hold to the terms of the Agreement, while calling on Japan to make more efforts to resolve the issue, including a sincere apology to the victims. The Prime Minister of Japan, however, refused to do so, saying that revising and supplementing the Agreement is "absolutely unacceptable" (Chekhovska, 2018).

In 2021, another lawsuit was commenced by former "wianbu" against the Japanese government, tipping the scales in favor of the victims. The Seoul Central District Court delivered a judgement according to which the Japanese government was obliged pay compensation to a group of female plaintiffs who were once forced to work at "comfort stations". However, within a few months, the decision was overturned, citing the concept of "sovereign immunity", according to which the Republic of Korea has no jurisdiction in the case. The case received new impetus in 2023,

when a South Korean appellate court made a judgement in favor of the plaintiffs and obliged Japan to pay the victims \$154,000 each. It is obvious that the reaction of Japan was extremely negative; the Japanese government still adheres to the line that the "comfort women" issue was finally closed by the 2015 Agreement. In response to the court's decision, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan Yoko Kamikawa said it was "very sad and completely unacceptable" and called on South Korea to "immediately take appropriate measures to cure the breach of international law" (Kuzmenko, 2023).

Conclusion. Taking into account all the above, it can be concluded that the "wianbu" issue has caused the memory war in Japan and the Republic of Korea. In both countries the issue of "comfort women" is considered mainly through the prism of national enmity. In this context, not understanding or not accepting certain aspects of the issue reinforces the cycle of hatred, hindering the process of memorializing the problem. It prevents national prejudices from being overcome and turns the "comfort women" issue exclusively into a bilateral dispute between Japan and the Republic of Korea.

It is quite obvious that the "wianbu" issue, despite the existence of a number of statements, agreements, decrees, etc., still remains open. Nevertheless, the former "comfort women" together with conscious Korean citizens actively continue the struggle for the recognition by the Japanese government of its crimes against the occupied countries and the introduction of an adequate culture of memory of these events, because every victim of the militarist regime deserves proper memorialization.

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