

Japanese Official Development Assistance as International Bribery for the Comfort Woman Issue in the Philippines

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to analyze Japanese Official Development Assistance (ODA) as international bribery for comfort woman issues in the Philippines. Qualitative research was done with rational choice, using secondary data. To resolve the issue of comfort women in the Philippines is challenging, due to lack of government support in voicing victim demands for formal apologies and reparations. The Philippine government argues that the problem was resolved by the San Francisco Peace Agreement of 1951. Victim voices were also rejected by domestic institutions such as the Supreme Court and Regional Trial Courts. The Philippine government prefers to retain diplomatic ties with Japan and strategic foreign policy in line with national interests. However, Japan's establishment of an Asian Women's Fund (AWF) is an attempt to approach the international community, including the Philippines, to show Japanese moral responsibility for imperialist damages. This paper concludes that generous aid and loan funds for Philippines national development through ODA motivated the government to preserve Japanese partnership and set aside concerns of former comfort women.

Keywords: Japan, The Philippines, Comfort women, Official Development Assistance, Asian Women's Fund.

Introduction

From 1931 to 1945, Japan aggressively expanded its territory through a series of conflicts against China and the United States. While expanding regionally, the Japanese army asked the government to provide one prostitute female or *ianfu* in Japanese, for every 70 Japanese soldiers. The practice of wartime sex enslavement of women in military border areas continued at that time. Later, commercial sex activities were legitimized by the Japanese imperialist government. Comfort stations (sex slavery sites) were built and women in colonies became military sex slaves for the Japanese army. Comfort stations, or garrisons, public buildings and other buildings in cities controlled by Japan were used as locations for systematic rape, torture, and murder of around 200,000 people, including Japanese military sex slaves called comfort women (Ling, 2009).

The Japanese army threatened and abducted women in agricultural fields, schools, streets, restaurants, markets, wells, riverbanks, factories, and in family homes to supply military sexual needs. The term comfort women is a translation of a Japanese euphemism, *jugun ianfu* (military prostitute), referring to women of diverse ethnicities, educational backgrounds, and social conditions. These women became sex workers for Japanese military forces before and during the Second World War. The Japanese government, military officials, and Japanese industrial agents hoped that the term comfort women would conceal the inherent trauma and restore respect for the women. Comfort women victims are estimated at 80,000 to 200,000, 80% of them from Korea and the remainder from Japan, China, the Netherlands and the Philippines. Around 1,000 Filipino women were arrested and forced to be comfort women during the war (Paula, 2015).

Many women who failed to escape were killed, some impregnated, and or infected with venereal diseases. As an effort to cover up the existence of comfort women, the Japanese army killed them after losing the war. Some were offered to Japanese allies as military prostitutes. Under cruel and inhuman working conditions, as many as 75 to 90 % of comfort women fell victim to war, according to historical estimates, succumbing to gynecological infections, venereal disease, tuberculosis, and mental disorders caused by poor physical and medical care as well as physical and sexual violence by Japanese soldiers (Yun Chai, 1993).

In December 1991, the issue of comfort women began to emerge as an international talking point. Koreans (including three comfort women victims) sued the Japanese government, demanding compensation for human rights violations during

Japanese colonialism. Significant political action and campaigns related to comfort women issues increased. Hundreds of women victims began to speak up and told the same story about torture and coercion to become sex workers for Japanese military forces. In 1992, around 44 Filipino women described Japanese atrocities against comfort women. In 1993, after South Korean women, Filipinas, and others spoke up about the issue of comfort women, the Japanese government finally responded with The Kono Statement (MOFA Japan, 1993).

The Japanese government conducted a fact-finding study on comfort women in December 1991 and announced research results in July 1992 and August 1993. The public document is the result of research open to the public at the Cabinet Secretariat. In 1993, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yōhei Kōno issued a statement of apology and regret for all victims and acknowledged the problem of comfort women during Japanese imperialism of the Second World War. Military authorities at the time were considered to have damaged the honor and dignity of many women by making them sex slaves for the Japanese army (OHCHR, 2002).

The Japanese government realized that enslavement as comfort women damaged the honor and dignity of many women. In a belated effort as damage control, the Japanese government and people debated a resolution to express apologies and regrets to former comfort women. As a result, the Asian Women's Fund (AWF) was established on 19 July 1995, providing compensation funds from Japan to former comfort women. The Japanese government optimized assistance to AWF as a moral responsibility, including covering all operational costs and assisting with funding to carry out activities to achieve organizational objectives. Funding assistance of around 4.8 billion yen was provided to AWF to sponsor health facilities as well as insurance and welfare guarantees for former comfort women (MOFA Japan, 2021).

In addition, Japan offers development funding through Official Development Assistance (ODA) to promote sustainable economic, social and welfare development. This assistance is an approach by state governments to former comfort women. ODA has varied programs fulfilling the needs of developing countries through bilateral assistance in investment, finances, and loan cooperation for education, health, infrastructure, and community welfare projects. ODA loan assistance is received by developing countries, among them the Philippines. In 2018, Japan became the main donor of ODA to help Philippine national development. Rodrigo Duterte, then-president of the Philippines, responded positively to assistance for implementing infrastructure

development. Although the Philippines was one of the sources of comfort women during the Second World War, the Philippine National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) noted that Japan is the largest source of foreign funding for the Philippines. Almost half of the loan portfolio of \$5.977 billion USD from Japan contributes 41.2% of official national development assistance.

ODA assistance provided by Japan is aimed at assisting development of the Philippines. In the context of the issue of comfort women, Japan provides ODA through AWF in the form of compensation to comfort women victims. This assistance includes AWF assistance to Filipino comfort women victims, the Lila Pilipina support group, Task Force on Filipino Comfort Women (TFFCW), and the Philippine Government Department of Social Welfare and Development (AWF, 2007). As a developing nation, the Philippines requires substantial funding, and Japanese assistance through ODA benefits the Philippine government through foreign development assistance. However, these donations also appear Japanese government attempts to stifle discussion about comfort women in the Philippines during the Japanese occupation. Therefore, this paper will analyze how significant the impact of Japanese aid through ODA is on the issue of comfort women in the Philippines.

Rational Choice Theory

In a rational choice model, individuals as unitary actors ensure that outcomes are results of their decisions. In practice, assumptions by unitary actors usually combine elements of methodological convenience and beliefs empirically describing state behavior (Thompson, 2002). This rational theory illustrates how authorities or stakeholders in the Philippines decide something related to the issue of comfort women. The government or stakeholders mix individual preferences to fulfill diverse self-interests, with the final decision following their choice, representing the state as unitary actor. This is because Japan is the largest ODA donor to the Philippines and a strategic partner for the Philippines in economic, financial assistance, and security sectors. Given Japan's strategic partnership position and the advantages of maintaining good relations, the government continued cooperation, ignoring demands for justice from comfort women victims.

In this case, the government is the relevant actor determining foreign policy and other decisions relating to international cooperation. The Philippine government prioritized nation building and the most profitable option. As decision makers, Philippine stakeholders sought to secure investments and grants, rather than potentially damaging

diplomatic relations with Japan over the comfort women issue. Cooperation with Japan as strategic partner continued despite unresolved historical issues. The Philippines government, which has changed several times since this era, retains good relations with Japan and fails to allow comfort women victims to demand justice from the Japanese, as when a monument in the Philippines to the sufferings of comfort women was removed following Japanese government protests.

Qualitative research was done with rational choice analysis of secondary data. As a rational actor, the Philippines government has prioritized national interests due to ODA from the Japanese government, mandating positive international relations. Any stumbling blocks such as the issue of comfort women might damage such relations. Therefore, the Philippines opts to accept Japan's ODA assistance, which may be seen as a form of international bribery to suppress discourse about the comfort women issue in the Philippines.

Japanese and the Philippine Relations

Diplomatic relations between the Philippines and Japan was established in the 19th century and has been maintained until the present day (DFA Philippines, 2015). A strategic security partnership confronts Chinese maritime expansion in the South and East China Seas. Since the second decade of 21st century, the Philippines and Japan have tightened their security partnership in the face of expansionist China and its aggressive activities. These two countries have the most advanced security relations among all Southeast Asian countries, due to their shared wariness of China. The Philippine and Japanese alliance combines mutual efforts in security, resources, and residual rights.

These alliances were constructed in September 1951, after the signature of the Treaty of Peace with Japan under the Eisenhower administration. This alliance was formed in response to Chinese coercive action toward Japan in the East China Sea and the Philippines in the South China Sea, as well as other territorial disputes, including at Senkaku Island. Those territories served regional Japanese and Philippine economic and security interests on the global stage. Later, the Philippines established a comprehensive border protection program through the Philippine Air Force (PAF), Philippine Navy (PN), and Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) extending territorial waters to the contiguous, exclusive economic zone (EEZ), involved Japan in its Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) to give the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) access to Philippines military bases, and execute multiple joint training (Gady, 2016; Parameswaran, 2015).

The Philippines and Japan have maintained economic relations contributing to close diplomatic ties and partnership, including in security (Castro, 2017). The Philippines continues to expect ODA from Japan. From 1995 to 1999, the Philippines government received ODA assistance from Japan (see table 3 on the sub-topic 'Japan ODA and its Implications on the Comfort Woman Issue'). Forms of Japanese ODA to the Philippines also benefit the Philippines government, especially economically, for national development. This may be seen during six phases from 1954 to 1999 and onward (see table 1 on the sub-topic Japanese ODA and its implications to the comfort women issue). In 1999, the Philippines was ranked sixth in ODA grants from Japan (see table 2 on the sub-theme of Japanese ODA and its implications to the comfort women issue).

In 2019, Japan was the Philippine's second largest trading partner with total trade of \$10,6 billion USD representing 15,1% share of overall national exports (Workman, n.d.). This intense relationship was enhanced and sustained by promoting free trade of goods and services as well as capital through the Philippines-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement (JPEA). Japan is also the Philippine's biggest ODA donor with three types of cooperation: i) ODA loans; ii) grant aid; and iii) technical cooperation. Japanese infrastructure development loan assistance in the Philippines was distributed in transportation, the environment, and disaster risk reduction. Grant aid cooperation contributed to electrification, the environment, disaster risk reduction, health and education, and technical cooperation was implemented in transportation, the environment, administration, industrial promotion, public safety, maritime safety, agriculture, and health (MOFA Japan, 2017).

Between 2014 and 2017, Japanese ODA for the Philippines was 1,69 billion USD, making Japan the leading donor country. (Inada, 2019). Japanese and Philippine political relations were enhanced by regional bilateral cooperation on discussions and partnerships, such as the signing of the Japan-Philippines Joint Declaration: A Strengthened Strategic Partnership for Advancing the Shared Principles and Goals of Peace, Security, and Growth in the Region and Beyond. The agreement committed to promoting policy dialogue on security, maritime and consular affairs, and enhanced mutual efforts to prevent and resolve human trafficking (Castro, 2017). This declaration enhanced security, economic, and political exchanges.

Japanese ODA and its Impact on the Comfort Woman Issue

Japanese ODA facilitated economic development through enlarged capital investment. Japanese ODA phase in the Philippines is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1
Phases of Japan's ODA in Philippines by econstor.eu

PHASE	FEATURE/ CHARACTERISTICS
Phase 1 (1954 – 1957)	Reparation payments to Southeast Asian countries
Phase 2 (1958 – mid 1960's)	Non-reparation financial aid and its conscious tie-up with Japan's export promotion policy
Phase 3 (mid 1960's – early 1970's)	Rapid growth of ODA with East and Southeast Asia as the main destinations
Phase 4 (early 1970's – 1977)	Geographical diversification of ODA to countries outside Asia in response to first oil shock
Phase 5 (1978 – late 1980)	Coincided with the implementation of three midterm plans that expanded significantly the amount of ODA
Phase 6 (1999 – onwards)	Japan as largest ODA donor

Source: Imai, et.al., 1992 as cited in Rivera, 2003

Japan initially provided Second World War reparations funds, then became the largest donor of ODA in the Philippines by 1999. The Philippines consistently ranked among the 10 largest Japanese ODA beneficiaries in Asia (see table 2).

Table 2
Ten Largest Recipient Countries of Bilateral ODA econstor.eu

Net disbursement bases: unit \$ million, %									
RANK	COUNTRY	1999		COUNTRY	2000		COUNTRY	2001	
		AMOUNT	SHARE		AMOUNT	SHARE		AMOUNT	SHARE
1	Indonesia	1,806.83	15.30	Indonesia	970.10	10.06	Indonesia	860.07	11.54
2	China	1,225.97	11.68	Vietnam	923.68	9.58	China	686.13	9.21
3	Thailand	880.26	8.39	China	769.09	7.98	India	528.87	7.10
4	Vietnam	679.96	6.48	Thailand	636.25	7.98	Vietnam	469.53	6.17
5	India	634.02	6.04	India	368.16	3.82	Philippines	296.22	4.00
6	Philippines	412.96	3.93	Philippines	304.48	3.16	Tanzania	260.44	3.49
7	Peru	189.12	1.80	Pakistan	280.36	2.91	Pakistan	211.41	2.84
8	Pakistan	169.74	1.62	Tanzania	217.14	2.25	Thailand	209.59	2.81
9	Brazil	149.36	1.42	Bangladesh	201.52	2.09	Sri Lanka	184.72	2.48
10	Syria	136.17	1.30	Peru	191.68	1.99	Peru	156.52	2.10
	Total	6,083.45	57.95	Total	4,861.64	50.43	Total	3,855.50	51.74
	Total/	10,497.56	100.00	Total/	9,640.10	100.00	Total/	7,452.04	100.00
	bilateral aid			bilateral aid			bilateral aid		
	to			to			to		
	developing			developing			developing		
	countries			countries			countries		

Source: Adapted from Japan's ODA, 2001 and MOFA

Japanese ODA in Southeast Asia, including the Philippines, has different patterns and phases. Geographically, Asia is the priority area for ODA targets to receive assistance from Japan, although a significant reduction can be noted from 63.2% to 54.8% in 1999 to 2000. Consistent with the ODA charter, the special emphasis of Japanese donors is on Asia because this region has a strategic relationship in trade prospects. Priority assistance areas consist of building peace and promoting understanding of Japan, building basic infrastructure to promote economic integration and economic growth in Asia, the environment, energy, and poverty alleviation (MOFA Japan, 2003).

Japan is the largest source of ODA assistance in the Philippines (see table 3). In line with ODA commitment to accommodate multilateral donors, Japan provides assistance of around 45% (around \$6.3 billion USD) of the total amount of ODA in 1992-1999. More ODA derives from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and World Bank, with respective percentages of 19% (\$2.7 billion USD) and 18% (\$2.5 billion USD). Economic relations between the Philippines and Japan became strategically dynamic. Since establishment of the Philippine-Japan Friendship Highway in 1968, Japan has become the second largest trading partner and second largest source of investment in the Philippines. From 1969 to 1998, total Japanese ODA to the Philippines had reached \$8.426 billion USD. In the first half of 2002, Japan contributed about 81% of total ODA commitment to the Philippines (\$634 million USD) with the signing of a seventh loan through a 25th Yen Loan package and the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) (ECCO, 2002).

Table 3

Amount of DAC Countries' ODA Disbursements to the Philippines (net disbursement, \$million) by econstor.eu

YEAR	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL
1995	Japan 416.1	USA 112.0	Germany 67.6	Australia 56.0	France 35.8	748.8
1996	Japan 414.5	Germany 106.6	Australia 55.9	USA 46.0	France 27.4	748.2
1997	Japan 319.0	Germany 56.6	Australia 42.9	Spain 22.7	Netherlands 22.4	567.3
1998	Japan 297.6	Germany 45.4	Australia 45.0	USA 27.3	France 24.4	528.0
1999	Japan 413.0	USA 72.7	Australia 29.2	Germany 22.1	Spain 12.9	616.0

Source: Japan ODA White Paper 2001

According to table 3, Japan outperformed aid from the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) comprising wealthy economies such as the United States (US), Germany, Australia, France, Spain and the Netherlands. In 1995, total net US disbursement was \$112 million USD, only about 25% of the total disbursement provided by Japan (\$416.1 million USD). The proportion of DAC assistance continued to decline to 17% in 1999 with total DAC aid and disbursement only one third that of Japan (Jose & Agham, 2004).

Japan has used this powerful ODA assistance to divert governmental attention from the issue of comfort women through commitment to sustainable development in the ODA Charter. Japanese aid based on the ODA Charter coheres to principles of the United Nation (UN) Charter in promoting democratization and market-oriented economic recognition, protecting human rights and freedom in the recipient country.

Using Realpolitik, the Philippine government has responded positively to Japanese ODA assistance leading to substantial potential economic benefits from cooperative agreements. These include technical developmental assistance in information and communication technology, science, intellectual property, human resource development, and increasing national capacity to design appropriate competitive policies. An increase in Japanese ODA channeled to the social sector should help alleviate poverty and lead to human development. Economically, the Philippines has benefited from development assistance in the industrial, infrastructure, and trade sectors. The Philippines economy can grow significantly through technical cooperation in trade and investment activities, infrastructure and energy, government procurement, e-commerce, and paperless trade. Philippine small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) should also benefit economically from ODA cooperation, increasing trade and facilitating business by forming strategic alliances and partnerships with Japanese companies (Camacho & Cuevas, 2004).

Japan and the Philippines continue significant ODA economic cooperation. President Benigno Aquino cited Japan as a main driver of future Philippine economic growth. During the Aquino administration (2010-2016), the government boosted foreign direct investment (FDI) to expand the manufacturing sector and achieve national inclusive growth goals. In 2012, Japan became the largest trading partner of the Philippines with total trade of \$16 billion USD and the second main FDI source. Prime Minister Abe's visit was seen as a catalyst for Tokyo support of the Aquino Government's main program in infrastructure development, disaster mitigation, and the Mindanao peace process through ODA (MOFA Japan, 2015).

The Comfort Woman Issue during Wartime

On December 1941, Japanese military forces landed on the island of Luzon, the Philippines and successfully occupied Manila, establishing a military government on January 3, 1942. Filipinos carried out guerrilla attacks to organize resistance movements against the Japanese military administration. However, the Japanese army fought to suppress guerrilla opposition. Among the 381 Japanese war crimes cases filed in postwar military court in the Philippines was sexual slavery of Filipinos by Japanese military forces. Over 100 Filipinas were forced to bring looted goods to the Red House, used by the Japanese army as dormitories, and then raped and enslaved. Japan constructed a number of brothels or comfort stations, used as sites for comfort women to serve the Japanese army (Lynch, 2019).

Figure 1

Distribution of Comfort Stations in the Philippines



Source: Digital Museum AWF, <http://www.awf.or.jp/e1/philippine-00.html>

According to a research report from a Manila Student Council Alliance of the Philippines (SCAP) section (number 2 on figure 1), about a dozen of these comfort stations, plus five brothels for Japanese private officers and non-commissioned officers were constructed. In around six comfort stations, Korean, Filipino and Chinese women

worked as sex slaves for the Japanese military. On the Island of North Luzon, the comfort station was in Bayonbong (1). In the Central Visaya region, Masbate Island (3) there was a comfort station known as the Military Club. In Iloilo (4) on Panay Island, were two comfort stations, employing approximately 14 women. In Cebu (5), a Japanese property owner also opened a comfort station. In Tacloban (6), Leyte Island, a comfort station managed by Filipinos employed nine Filipina workers. On Burauen (7), also on Leyte, a comfort station opened in August 1944. In Butuan (8), Mindanao Island, a comfort station employed three Filipinas in 1942. In Cagayan (9), the third comfort station in the area was established in February 1943. In the center of Dansaran Island (10) was a comfort station. In Davao (11) was a comfort station where Korean and Taiwanese women as well as Filipinas were enslaved (Digital Museum, AWF: The Comfort Women Issue and AWF, n.d).

In parts of the Philippines occupied by the Japanese military, according to victim testimony, women were raped and abducted violently to garrison buildings. They were imprisoned and forced to provide sexual services. Their fathers or husbands were killed in front of the women and other family members. An estimated 1,000 Filipino women became comfort women during the Japanese imperialist era (1941-1945). In 1991, after extensive research, a public document was issued by the Japanese Cabinet Secretariat. In 1993, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yōhei Kōno issued an apology to all victims and acknowledged the problem of comfort women (MOFA Japan, 1993). However, such statements did not assuage continuing turmoil over the issue, as voiced by Korean feminists (Banks, 2017). Among examples of continued unrest include a demonstration by the League of Filipino Women against Japan in Manila in 2015, a 2013 protest by Korean comfort women activists after some Japanese politicians claimed that comfort women were necessary for maintaining army morale, and a 2015 protest against South Korea's Park government for failing to resolve the comfort women issue (Telesur, 2018; Whaley, 2016; Yamamoto, 2013; Min-kyung, 2017).

Japanese Asian Woman's Fund Policy

Japan has consistently maintained the San Francisco Peace Treaty and bilateral agreements between Japan and other countries demanding compensation for postwar claims, and no other government has directly confronted Japan by pressuring international courts for compensation to former comfort women. Yet Japan remains compelled to be morally responsible for victims affected by the war and its imperialism. The Japanese

government is concerned that the issue of comfort women towards former Japanese colonies will continue to be raised to international forums. This could cause Japan a moral disadvantage in relations with China, Korea, and the Philippines through an unresolved historical problem (Suzuki, 2014).

Addressing the issue of comfort women, Japan established the AWF in July 1995. The funds are nominally NGOs and staff members are not government employees. However, in practical terms, it is under the direction of the Japanese government. The fund became controversial even before its launch from street protests and meetings in Japan and elsewhere urging Japan to abolish the fund. The fund raised atonement money for war victims from donations from conscientious citizens, cabinet secretaries, public servants, and Japanese intellectuals. Other AWF volunteers included retired politicians, former senior-level civil servants, a trade union representative, journalists, and lawyers. Despite harsh criticisms from redress movement leaders, who insisted that state compensation was the only acceptable resolution to the comfort women issue as a war crime, AWF began its national atonement projects for non-Japanese victim survivors in August 1996 (Soh, 2003).

The Japanese government claimed to have taken steps to restore the honor of former comfort women and provide treatment as an attempt at moral accountability through AWF. Through cooperation between the Japanese people and government, AWF sought to implement peace goals and rehabilitation projects for former comfort women. The fund's resources were mainly donated by concerned individuals, with 448 million yen (over \$5 million USD) raised from the private sector between 1995 and 2000. The government was expected to contribute about 700 million yen (around \$7 million USD) over ten years. The Japanese government provided 4.8 billion yen, with around 600 million yen donated by Japanese citizens. The Japanese government extended maximum cooperation to AWF, which implemented medical support and welfare projects and provided compensation money to assist comfort women victims during the Second World War (MOFA Japan, 2019).

The fund's mission has expanded to implement actions combining civil activities and government programmes in four categories: i) delivering atonement money (around two million yen) to each survivor-applicant from citizen AWF donations, accompanied by letters of apology from the prime minister and AWF president; ii) implementing government medical and social welfare programs for individual survivors costing between 1.2 to 3 million yen in reflection of living costs in different countries; iii) compiling

materials on comfort women for the historical record; and iv) building initiation and support conferences, workshops, and discussions addressing contemporary issues of violence against women (Soh, 2003).

Philippines Comfort Women Response

Of approximately 400 Filipinas identified as comfort women, only 45 to 50 are believed to be alive (McCharthy, 2020). Before 2020, victims of Japanese military sex slavery (comfort women) in the Philippines during the Second World War urged President Aquino to submit their demands for an official apology from Japan to Prime Minister Abe Shinzo. Until 2020, comfort women victims in the Philippines continued demanding official recognition and compensation from the Japanese government as well as a Philippine government acknowledgment for their continued suffering (McCharthy, 2020). This struggle continued because President Aquino failed to fulfill the request in a bilateral meeting with Japan and suggested that the Philippines stop discussing the historic conflict. At that time, the Philippines government expressed willingness to assist Japan in countering China in the Asia Pacific region (Julius Cesar, 2013). On December 30, 2018, a bronze comfort women monument in Laguna, the Philippines, was taken down after the Japanese government protested. The monument, erected on December 28, 2018 as a symbol of recognition, respect, protection and empowerment of women through peace and friendship throughout the world, unsettled the Japanese government. Presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo stated that the monument was considered counterproductive by President Aquino, creating misunderstandings that the Philippine government sought to antagonize Japan. (Esguerra, 2019).

In 2010, the highest Philippine tribunal ended a legal battle by a group of Filipino wartime sex slaves or former comfort women asking the government to support their demand for an official apology and reparations from the Japanese government. The Supreme Court, in a decision penned by Justice Mariano del Castillo, denied the petition as well as an application for a writ of preliminary mandatory injunction accusing the Philippines government of grave abuse of discretion for not providing war crime reparations. Previously, in March 2004, the Malaya Lolas (Free Grandmothers), an organization based in Pampanga, Philippines composed of people who were formerly comfort women or victims of sexual slavery by the Japanese imperial army, issued a petition to the Philippine government through the Supreme Court. They demanded that the Supreme Court declare certain ranking government officials at that time to have

abused their authority by refusing to accept the group's claims of crimes against humanity. The Philippine government was deemed to have violated legal obligations to fight crimes against humanity by not supporting complaints against Japan before international courts of justice. Acceptance of apologies from Japan by the Philippine government and AWF funding did not fulfill the demands of former comfort women (Japan Times, 2014).

The highest tribunal in the Philippines supported the government, asserting that reparation claims against Japan had been waived under the Treaty of Peace with Japan in 1951 and the Philippines government had no international obligation to accede to the demands of the Malaya Lolas. After exhausting all legal efforts in Philippine courts to seek reparation, the Malaya Lolas filed a 38-page complaint with the United Nations (UN) Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) claiming that the Philippine government position favored Japan over the comfort women. The government argued that accepting Malaya Lolas demands would harm national foreign policy interests and could disrupt diplomatic relations with Japan (The Law Phil Project, 2010).

The movement of activists and former comfort women in the Philippines has many challenges due to lack of support from the Philippine Government. Successive governments has been silent on the issue due to generous investments, loans and aids from Japan which have helped Philippine national development. Unlike Korea and China, which continue to discuss war crimes committed by Japan, including the issue of comfort women, the Philippine government remains passive in response to demands from former comfort women. for compensation and formal apologies. Alternately, the government reactively responded to protests threatening foreign policy relationships between the Philippines and Japan. Comfort women in South Korea have received a direct apology from Japan and around \$8.5 million USD to compensate war damages after an agreement between Seoul and Tokyo. This was also criticized by some circles, especially activists due to lack of inviting public opinion or victim participation. In the Philippines, former comfort women have been completely overlooked by successive governments (Sigit & Anantasya, 2021).

Former comfort women in the Malaya Group confirmed by communication that no negotiations have been made with victims of wartime slavery and no compensation provided. The Philippine government continually referred to the Treaty of Peace with Japan, waiving reparations claims. In addition to providing economic and development assistance, ODA is also an indirect Japanese approach to the Philippines government

to defuse the issue of international war crimes. Seeing the magnitude of the role and power of the government in mass mobilization and decision-making on responses and bilateral relations, Japan seeks major assistance through the government. AWF became an instrument of moral accountability to the Filipino people, accompanied by manipulation of assistance to the Philippine government. Although AWF provided a compensation fund of 3.2 million yen to the Philippines in 1996, this has not satisfied those who insist that the Japanese state must admit its crimes, apologize, and provide direct compensation from Japanese government (Haruki, 2008; MOFA Japan, 2021). Struggles for justice and demands by comfort women victims continue, but the Japanese government has yet to issue any apology or justice to comfort women victims in the Philippines (The Guardian, 2016; Efe, 2018).

Conclusion

The issue of comfort women has been seriously discussed by affected nations, including Korea, China and the Philippines. Around 200,000 women were forced to be military sex slaves for the Japanese army through the establishment of comfort stations in Japanese colonies. Japan expressed apologies to comfort women victims in 1993 after political actions and campaigns in 1991 to hold Japan accountable. Through AWF, Japan provided compensation funds for comfort women victims, used for health, social and welfare services. This expresses a form of Japanese moral responsibility.

Moreover, Japan provides development assistance through ODA, received by former colonies as developing nations, including the Philippines. Japan is a main ODA donor for Philippine domestic development. Although the Philippines was a victims of Japanese imperialism, especially in providing comfort women during the Second World War, the Philippine government responded positively to development aid loans and investments. Through economic assistance, Japan manipulated ODA funding to suppress international public discourse in the Philippines on the issue of comfort women. By contrast, the Korean and Chinese governments continued to pressure Japan to formally apologize.

Japanese ODA in the Philippines indirectly bribed the Philippines government for not participating in censoring Japanese atrocities during the Second World War. This Japanese effort suppressed the issue of comfort women in the Philippines. The existence of economic assistance from Japan through ODA shows that Japan seeks to avoid the international issue of comfort women in the Philippines and other countries,

including China, Taiwan, and South Korea. In this way, Japan manipulated ODA to direct the attention of the Philippine government away from the issue of comfort women. This Japanese effort succeeded, as seen from the failed Malaya Lolas request to the Philippine government to submit a complaint to the UN CEDAW, as potentially damaging relations between the Philippine and Japanese governments (The Law Phil Project, 2010). In addition, evidence of Japanese success through ODA as international bribery to the Philippines may be seen during the administration of President Aquino. During a meeting between President Aquino and Prime Minister Abe Shinzo, President Aquino refused to fulfill demands by former comfort women against during a bilateral meeting. Furthermore, removal of a comfort women monument in the Philippines after protests from the Japanese government were further evidence of the Philippine government's currying favor with Japan. The Supreme Court and the highest Tribunal likewise denied a petition from former comfort women accusing the government of abuse of power.

Rational choice theory analysis indicates that the Philippine government has preferred the Japanese government over its own citizens by refusing to raise the issue of comfort women. The Philippines government, as a rational actor, prioritizes national interests such as development instead of addressing historical problems. The state, as rational actor, prioritizes its own interests over those of other parties, especially if in terms of obtaining Japanese ODA. Efforts to raise the issue of comfort women were seen to be muted by the Philippine government. The comfort women victim struggle continues, but the state prioritizes development funds. Realistically, the Philippines responds positively to Japanese ODA assistance as economically beneficial, disregarding rights of comfort women victims to voice demands through the Philippines government. ODA, in addition to economic and development assistance, became a Japanese approach to the Philippines government to diminish the issue of international war crimes. Yet seen from a geopolitical perspective, ODA may be an instrument for Japan to control the Philippines in an effort to prevent the expansion of Chinese influence in the South China Sea.

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