

Contemporary Japan and the Asia-Pacific: The Role of Locally-Based NGOs and the Anti-Child Sex Trade Campaign

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'In every corner of the world, commercial sexual exploitation of children hurts them both physically and psychologically, tramples on their dignity, and cruelly deprives them of their abundant possibilities. In order to eradicate this abhorrent act from the surface of the earth and to realize a world in which children can develop their innate creativity, each of us has to initiate action'. These opening remarks by Prime Minister Koizumi as the representative of the host government at the Second World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children indicate the new seriousness with which Japan is now prepared to confront a major social issue with both domestic and international implications.⁽¹⁾

The Japanese state has been slow and reluctant to tackle the issue of child prostitution. Yet even this diffident approach would have been hard to envisage but for the vocal and constructive activities of what might be termed Japanese 'social conscience' NGOs. Concrete evidence that the government of Japan is now more aware of both the issues and prepared to assist in the campaign against child sex abuse was underlined by Mr. Koizumi's brief statement at the recent world congress in Yokohama. The prime minister stated that measures to 'strengthen efforts and [construct an] international network of cooperation toward the elimination of commercial exploitation of children' would require efforts from 'diverse sectors including governments, international organizations, [and] NGOs'.⁽²⁾ Such open recognition of the role of non-state actors is both revealing and comparatively rare in ministerial commentary. It

represents belated domestic acknowledgement of the determination of Japanese NGOs to press the government into action and signals to the outside world that Japanese private initiatives have gained the ear of the state. This is not the usual language of a Japanese political system more renowned for keeping its citizens at bay and avoiding uncontrolled grassroots activism wherever possible. The fact that in January 2002 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs worked to exclude NGOs from an important international conference called to consider the reconstruction of Afghanistan is an unfortunate illustration of this attitude.⁽³⁾ Yet, in this particular instance at least, instead of instinctively deploying officialdom and its allies within the corporate sector, the contemporary Japanese state appears to be widening the somewhat narrow parameters of conventional action. The impression that this may have partly come about under duress can not be ignored but the government's behaviour deserves to be welcomed nonetheless.⁽⁴⁾ Few nations would have been willing and able to mount a world congress on the scale as that seen recently at Yokohama. The fact that the British government, for example, merely sent a particularly small, mid-career level, delegation is a reminder that there was nothing automatic about the Japanese government's official sponsorship of the international gathering.⁽⁵⁾

The Koizumi cabinet actively encouraged the Yokohama congress by dispatching both members of the Imperial family and a succession of ministers to its formal and informal sessions. This was good politics. The nation gained in terms of international and domestic media coverage, while also serving as a considerable morale-boost for Japanese NGO volunteers.⁽⁶⁾ It can not, however, have been an easy commitment in the early stages as sponsorship would inevitably entail the publication of damning material with regard to the behaviour of Japanese citizens overseas and invite criticism of the dilatory legislative record of the Japanese Diet.⁽⁷⁾ Moriyama Mayumi, the Japanese minister of Justice, for example, stated clearly in her keynote speech that the response of her fellow Diet members to the First World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Stockholm in 1996 was an important spur to the enactment of parliamentary

legislation in 1999. Minister Moriyama noted that the Stockholm proceedings provided 'a route to the enactment of a law entitled "The Law Punishing Acts Related to Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, and for Protecting Children". Initiated and enacted in 1999, this law was epoch-making against commonly accepted ideas of Japanese society prevailing in those days'.⁽⁸⁾

Behind the important decision to accept governmental sponsorship of what became the Yokohama international conference, it is permissible to suggest three factors. The first may have been the external environment, where it was well known that Japan had long earned a well-deserved reputation for male delinquency abroad, the second is the active role of domestic NGOs in lobbying for legislation against child prostitution, and finally the efforts of some within the city of Yokohama to stage the gathering deserve to be noted. It is, therefore, suggested that some amalgam of disparate foreign, national and local politics created the catalyst leading up to the congress.

There can be little doubt, however, that the sustained activities of Japanese NGOs form the essential motivational force that both brought the issue to the attention of the state and the municipal authorities. It would be naïve in the extreme to imagine that either the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the Yokohama city fathers would have wholeheartedly co-operated in such a potentially embarrassing venture without constant lobbying from NGO groupings. No government is ever going to welcome with open arms revelations of the sad saga of its so-called "sex tourists" or the ability of publishing interests to resist proposed obscenity laws against child prostitution in the form of photographs and videos.

It remains, therefore, to the credit of NGO activists in Japan that they were able to persuade their state to accept such public involvement. Indeed, the majority of the approximately 3,200 participants at Yokohama were drawn from NGOs and the proceedings were deliberately designed in order to encourage open and informal debate through workshops, briefing sessions and panel discussions. Fact sheets provided by

NGOs explained in clear, direct language that child sexual abuse is an international issue that knows no boundaries. Material provided by Japanese NGO sources stated categorically:

‘For no country is free of commercial sexual exploitation, no society immune and no child fully protected. Poverty, traditional practices, racism and discrimination, family dysfunction, drugs and conflict increase the vulnerability of children to exploitation of all forms, as does the very fact of being female. But the pressures of consumerism, misconceptions about sexuality and health, and above all increased demand and the profit motive mean that many children not normally considered vulnerable are also at risk. The isolating yet global world of new media sees children targeted by on-line stalkers and exploiters, while the child pornography trade reaches out ever faster and wider to those who exploit at a distance’.⁽⁹⁾

The same source explained that the Yokohama Congress would encourage ‘a wide range of contributors’ from adults and children alike with a ‘large variety of workshops’ intended ‘to encourage more detailed and direct sharing of experiences, methodologies, lessons learned and outstanding challenges’.⁽¹⁰⁾ The statement on the ubiquitous realities of child prostitution concluded by noting that ‘Wherever it happens, in whatever form and facilitated by whichever individual or group, one thing is certain the commercial sexual exploitation of children is pervasive and never far away’.⁽¹¹⁾

Japanese NGOs played a particularly vocal and visible role in both the organization of the Yokohama Congress and in conducting a series of well received workshops. The impact on international journalists was considerable and strongly suggests that the old, hoary, image of Japan as invariably a diffident, hesitant actor at international gatherings deserves to be revised. Local NGOs spoke up frankly and openly in English on the faults of their own society in an attempt to analyze issues that both Japan and other affluent nations need to face. It was apparent that even a single powerful presentation by a committed non-governmental group could have a far greater and more lasting impact on

audiences than a dozen articulate ministerial speeches. Remarks, for example, made by participants from the Asian Women and Children's Network (AWC) on the prevalence of *enjo kosai* (compensatory dating) were incorporated into a host of domestic and international reports from the Yokohama Congress.⁽¹²⁾ AWC argued that *enjo kosai* was 'the result of a lack of sex education, a gender-oriented society, a malfunctioning family structure, conformist education that neglects human rights and a materialistic society'.⁽¹³⁾ Its speakers maintained that compensatory dating is 'one form of self-abusing behaviour intended to regain the once lost self-esteem that had been distorted by society. The children are rediscovering themselves'.⁽¹⁴⁾ It was also suggested that 'a culture that divorces sex from human personality and commercializes sex' adds to the problem, concluding that 'children should not be the objects of accusation. It is adults who are responsible for today's distorted society'.⁽¹⁵⁾

Speakers at this workshop provided detailed statistical data on the Japanese public's perceptions of *enjo kosai* and strongly criticized the media for trivializing the issue by implying that fault lies solely with the teenage girls involved.⁽¹⁶⁾ The intention behind the presentations was two-fold. The provision of information on compensatory dating served both to emphasize the problems of contemporary Japanese society and to remind potential volunteers that AWC endeavours to 'protect the human rights and lives of women and children in Asia' by focusing 'mainly on providing educational support to children'.⁽¹⁷⁾ It identifies poverty in parts of Southeast Asia as one factor behind the prevalence of child prostitution and hopes that greater educational opportunities would lead to wider literacy and more concrete awareness of human rights in the region.

Yet the fact that AWC was able to present to an international audience a workshop that deplored aspects of its own contemporary social behaviour, suggests that certain Japanese NGOs no longer feel constrained to downplay domestic misbehaviour in their activities. Asian Women and Children's Network deliberately avoids concentrating on "safer" issues abroad that might thereby discount the possible responsibility of Japan's

own citizenry in this process. From its inception in 1996 AWC, for example, has drawn attention to the faults of Japanese tourists in Asia, while simultaneously raising funds to assist educational projects in northern Thailand.⁽¹⁸⁾ Within a year of its foundation AWC had both worked with UNICEF Japan to call for special legislation 'to punish criminals of child abuse and child exploiters'⁽¹⁹⁾ and lobbied the authorities to put up posters and screen videos at Narita and Kansai airports to warn intending Japanese tourists en route to Southeast Asia of the consequences of child sex exploitation in the region.⁽²⁰⁾

The activities of Asian Women and Children's Network and the Japan International Centre for the Rights of the Child⁽²¹⁾ suggest that serious, well-organized citizens groups can exist in contemporary Japan to campaign against perceived wrongdoings over issues that at first glance still appear remote to the lives of many Japanese. Postwar mass protest movements against the United States-Japan security treaty, the construction of Narita airport and the Minamata scandal were able to draw support from the obvious and immediate threats each of these issues was felt to present.⁽²²⁾ It is, of course, far more difficult to organize and fund a social entity that campaigns instead to uphold the rights of children in the region and seeks also to remind Japanese society of its faults.

One explanation for the achievements of AWC has been the commitment of its founders and supporters to clear aims that are best achieved through persuasion and publicity without grasping the hand of the state. AWC attempts to remain a non-governmental organization in an environment where the temptation to be co-opted into the bureaucratic system is hard to avoid, given the organizational and financial prospects that beckon from such an embrace. By remaining outside the political-administrative circle, AWC does not risk sharing the fate of other NGOs whose actions may be deemed counter-productive and subject to sanctions by officialdom.⁽²³⁾ It is also the case that size and dedication matter. Small may not always be beautiful but the advantages of remaining a relatively coherent group where individuals can expect to be heard and have full opportunity to implement their views should not be overlooked. Dedication and

commitment may be unsustainable over time in larger, more anonymous organizations.

Perhaps the most significant contribution that AWC has been able to make is in the area of public awareness and the provision of data that serves to clarify a subject that is frequently seen as both difficult to define with much statistical precision and rarely openly discussed. UNICEF, for example, has no option but to report that 'millions of children throughout the world are exploited for commercial sex'.⁽²⁴⁾ Yet to make any impact on such a seemingly vast and hidden topic it is necessary to begin with precise goals that have the possibility of realization. AWC attempts to confront both the realities of child prostitution and gather funds and support from within Japan to combat the issue at home and abroad. It is particularly aware of the tendency within Japanese society to imagine that it is an issue that happens very largely outside its borders.

The past decade has seen a considerable expansion in the roles of Japanese NGOs towards the promotion of the rights of the child. There is now clear evidence that the first stage of establishing and organizing a core of volunteer participants in many areas of Japan has been accomplished. The success of the Second World Congress against the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in December 2001 is likely to mark the end of the beginning stage for these groups. Japanese NGOs have reason to congratulate themselves for forming and strengthening their entities against the background of what was initially an apathetic public and sceptical state.

How they will be able to build on these achievements is the next hurdle. The enthusiasm and commitment of the founding members has now to be passed on to younger participants who must then determine how to broaden still further the appeal of NGOs, while attempting to recall the ambitions of the first generation of pioneers. Any future consolidation and eventual maturity of Japanese pro-child NGOs may well require confronting different and yet more daunting challenges. Recent research suggests, unfortunately, that 'NGOs in Japan, which are mostly citizen-based, are not yet ready or equipped to handle the demands of the development roles that they ought to play in

society'.⁽²⁵⁾ New leadership will not only have to retain the enthusiasm generated over the past decade but also accept the undeniable reality that the prevalence of sexual slavery is increasing through human greed, new technologies, trans-border crime and the near collapse of many third world nations. Poverty, affluence and globalization form the unholy trinity behind this phenomenon. While the statement that the existence of 'even one child is one too many' for those campaigning against commercial sexual exploitation is indeed a powerful rallying cry, the cold truth is far from comforting.⁽²⁶⁾ Observers may never have more than an approximate answer as to the scale of the issue but, on the basis of recent calculations from the Philippines, the unchallenged view is that the number of prostituted children has greatly increased in the 1990s.⁽²⁷⁾ Since, in addition, the current relatively receptive climate of Japanese public opinion could shift in the light of greater economic and financial hardships and the government may be wary of over-assertive NGOs, it would be premature to predict further gains. Similar difficulties would appear to face activists elsewhere and doubts over the extent of international cooperation have also been voiced.⁽²⁸⁾ The next stage may well be more difficult. The testing is set to continue.

Notes

- (1) Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro, speech to the Second World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, Yokohama, December 2001. (spelling altered by author).
- (2) *ibid.*
- (3) The issue remains far from clear but it appears that two Japanese NGOs were deliberately excluded from attending the Tokyo conference on Afghanistan. This decision was then reversed but only after considerable publicity. The question of who was responsible for the initial decision was the subject of much debate in the press with rival politicians and officials making contradictory claims. At the root of the controversy was the fact that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs disliked comments made by NGOs that criticized the government for its handling of Afghan affairs. The fact that one NGO had been working closely with the government in the region only added to what the press rightly termed 'farcical arguments' between rival members of the LDP. This could only undermine Japan's diplomacy and led to a

deterioration in relations between NGOs and the government. See Aihara's article for more details. A government report in February was felt by the press to have failed to clarify whether pressure was put on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to exclude Onishi Kensuke, the head of Peace Winds Japan. See "Govt NGO scandal report far from revealing", *Daily Yomiuri*.

- (4) For criticism of the government's position in June 2000 see Roger and Machiko Buckley.
- (5) See list of official delegations provided by the Congress, internal memo Dec. 2001.
- (6) The media's reportage was seen from the outset of the conference to be particularly important. Both Ron O'Grady, the honorary chairman of ECPAT (End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes), and Professor Yokota Yozo of Chuo University spoke at an open symposium prior to the opening of the Congress on the need to disseminate more information on the issues through informed news sources.
- (7) The public remarks by former Prime Minister Hashimoto at the Yokohama conference on his personal interest in the issue of child prostitution strongly suggest that he may well share some important responsibility in the initial decision-making process.
- (8) Keynote speech by Justice Minister Moriyama.
- (9) Statement contained in 'From Stockholm to Yokohama.'
- (10) *ibid.* Among other Japanese NGOs who worked for the Yokohama conference is The Japan International Centre for the Rights of Children (JICRC). It was quick to stress that it believed in 'child participation and protagonism' and ruled out the 'charitable approach' that regarded children 'as helpless victims'. JICRC wishes 'to show how the deprived children themselves are trying to solve their problems and change the exploitative situations they find themselves in'.
- (11) *ibid.*
- (12) See, for example, James Brooke's article.
- (13) AWC information sheet prepared for distribution at its Yokohama workshop, Dec. 2001.
- (14) *ibid.*
- (15) *ibid.*
- (16) Questionnaires were given to 3164 people in the Yokohama city area, ranging from junior high school children and their parents to senior high school students and their parents. A total of 2345 responses were received and tabulated. Full details can be obtained from AWC's office in Naka-ku, Yokohama.
- (17) AWC profile.
- (18) *ibid.*
- (19) *ibid.*
- (20) *ibid.* The Transport Ministry actively supports this campaign to the present.
- (21) The history of JICRC states it was established in 1992 in Osaka. It began by campaigning for assistance to Japanese – Filipino children who were bereft of government welfare support. It later shifted its attention to anti-child labour causes throughout Asia, particularly in India. JICRC's main office is in Tokyo. It publishes 'quarterly newsletters, reports, books on child

- rights and empowerment. The centre also runs a website and mailing list for information-sharing on child rights issues'(JICRC's internal memorandum).
- (22) On *Ampo* see Packard. The lack of more recent scholarship in English on the 1960 crisis is to be regretted; issues such as *Minamata* and *Narita* have received considerably more attention.
- (23) See, for example, reportage on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs handling of the Afghan NGO issue op. cit. Statistics released by the Japanese government on international comparisons of state aid to NGOs indicate that Japan gives less than many other states to support NGOs. The USA, Canada, Britain, Germany and the Netherlands all provided a higher ratio of aid to NGOs to ODA expenditures in fiscal 1998. See "Data talk; NGOs vital to international aid", *Daily Yomiuri*.
- (24) Carol Bellamy, Executive Director, UNICEF, in *Profiting from Abuse*. The same publication attempts to note the 'facts and figures' of commercial sexual exploitation but acknowledges that 'accurate data on its occurrence is difficult to collect' and that 'definitions of child prostitution and sexual exploitation vary'.
- (25) See International Forum on Capacity Building of Southern NGOs and Japanese NGO Centre for International Cooperation 'Survey on Japanese Donor Agencies' (distributed at Southeast Asia-Japan NGO Conference, Jakarta, February 2002).
- (26) See, for example, Ron O'Grady. While O'Grady warned of the difficulties of international cooperation to police and contain the huge problem of child abuse, the editorial foreword to this special issue on 'Children: Challenges and Prospects for the New Millennium' stressed that 'the solutions to these challenges are within our reach'. In the case, however, of child prostitution this is improbable. International progress over limiting child labour, restricting the use of child soldiers and clarifying adoption procedures may warrant such qualified optimism.
- (27) All figures must be approached with caution but ECPAT suggests that the number of prostituted children in the Philippines in 1992 may have been in the region of 40,000 and that by 1997 it is thought to have risen to between 60,000 and 100,000. Briefing note 'Facts and figures: even one child is one too many', prepared for the Yokohama Congress. On child prostitution in the Philippines and elsewhere in Southeast Asia see Lim. On the problem of obtaining accurate data over the commercial sexual exploitation of children throughout the globe see also *Profiting from Abuse* by UNICEF, p.7.
- (28) The view that activists have succeeded in working since the 1996 Stockholm Congress to gain 'a much higher profile' for the necessity of eliminating commercial sexual exploitation of children may be true. National plans to combat the crime exist in over 50 nations, legislation is being put in place and regional and global cooperation has grown but very substantial domestic and global problems remain. See 'Taking action responses and gaps.'

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現代日本とアジア太平洋 — ローカルNGOの役割と子ども買春反対運動 —

〈要 約〉

ロジャー・バックレイ

本論文は、世界規模の子ども買春問題に対する現代日本の取り組みについての一考察である。

本稿は、日本や海外における最もひどい形態の人権侵害のひとつである子ども買春を撲滅しようとする日本のNGOの努力に注目し、社会や国家に対する働きかけにおいて、NGOが直面し続けてきた困難や最近の成果を指摘するものである。特に、2001年12月に横浜で開催された「第2回子どもの商業的性的搾取に反対する世界会議」を取り上げ検討する。