

Nuraini, an Indonesian survivor

Interviewed by: Takashi Suzuki

Background information provided by Akihisa Matsuno:

Indonesia was a Dutch colony and was called the Netherlands East Indies. Japan invaded Indonesia in 1942 and occupied her for three and a half years. The purpose was to obtain petroleum that Japan desperately needed to continue its war against the Allies. The Netherlands was a member of the Allies, and the Japanese military interned Dutch citizens in camps. Meanwhile Japan promised with Indonesian nationalists to grant independence, and mobilized Indonesians for its war efforts under its imperialist slogan of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. Millions were recruited as romusha or forced laborers and were sent to various places in Asia occupied by Japan for hard work. Many died overseas. The military also set up comfort stations wherever its troops were stationed. Korean, Indonesian and Dutch women were confined in those comfort stations. After the war, when they returned to the community that was patriarchal and religiously strict, they were sometimes not admitted. In such a case, they had to live a lonely life in poverty throughout their life.

About Nuraini:

Nuraini was born in the village of Banti, Enrekang District, South Sulawesi Province. Her parents were farmers. She had six brothers and sisters, but they have all passed away. The Japanese military invaded the Netherlands East Indies (present-day Indonesia) in 1942 and occupied the archipelago for three and a half years. She was confined in a comfort station in Carruk. Nuraini's life was deeply affected by the experience of sexual violence during the war. It was a reason why she left the village for work and stayed in Malaysia for twenty years. Below is her story.

I was a third-grade pupil of elementary school when Japanese troops came to my village. One day, on the way to a garden with my father, suddenly three Japanese soldiers appeared before us, grabbed by hand and tried to take me away. I resisted, and my father said, "Don't take my daughter!" But the soldiers threatened us with a gun. My father and I were forced to walk to Baraka where we stayed overnight. The next day I was put onto a truck and I had to separate with my father.

I was taken to Rura. I saw many barracks and many soldiers there. From Rura, I was taken to Carruk, a place on the hillside not far from Rura, and was put into a room of one of the barracks there. It was the room of one of the soldiers who captured me. I just sat crying in the corner of the room. At that night, the soldier came back to the room. He stripped off my cloth and forced me to have sex. I couldn't do anything but to cry. I was still a child and my breasts had not developed. No period yet.

After staying there for a few days, I went back to Rura with the soldier. There I was forced to work. I had to carry sands from the river that ran at the deep bottom of the basin to the upper area. Many girls and local men were mobilized for this work. We carried bags full of sands on our head or around the waist or dragged them with a rope, and we climbed up the steep slope. Soldiers followed us from behind, and when we walked slow, they got angry. We repeated the

work of carrying sands twice or three times a day. The work was really hard. We were not given proper foods and we all became thin.

I was raped by one seemingly high-ranking soldier. Other soldiers did not touch me. I worked during the day, and at night I was raped by the soldier. Thinking of my father, I cried.

I stayed in Carruk for about 10 months. I was released when the Japanese troops went away. The soldier gave me a handful of salt when he left. But I was never given wages or clothes. I continued to wear the same clothes I was wearing when I was captured. I washed them at night and the next morning I put them on. They were still wet.

When I went back home, my parents were very glad. I still remember their faces full of joy at that time. I told all I experienced in Carruk. They just cried hearing my story. My father was lying on the bed. I heard he fell because he was so shocked when he saw Japanese soldiers take me away in front of him. He already could not speak, and three days after I went back home, he died.

After the war, I taught at an elementary school in Polmas for four years. Then I went to a junior high school to study and graduated it. Some years after that, I married a medical doctor. I spent four years with him. One day I said to my husband that I wanted to go to work. He did not agree, but I decided to go leaving him behind. At that time very few women dared to go to many places to work like me. One reason I wanted to work overseas for such a long time was that I felt ashamed in the village. In the Suharto era, I went to Tarakan, North Kalimantan. There I earned money by sewing men's clothes. After saving money in Tarakan, I went to Sandakan in Malaysia. First, I worked in a palm oil plantation, then I became the manager of the guest house of the plantation. I did everything by myself at the guest house, and the owner had complete trust in me.

One day I received the news that my mother got sick. By then twenty years had passed since I moved to Malaysia. I wanted to stay more in Malaysia, but I had to care my mother. After coming back home, I took care of my brothers, sisters and other relatives. But I live alone. No one can care me if I fell sick.

I never forgive the Japanese soldiers who treated me like an animal. I demand that the Japanese government take responsibility for what happened to me. I also demand an apology and compensation from the Japanese government.