

The Invisible Guns

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"Hold your hands up and stand against the wall!" This is a common phrase shouted by a policeman in a detective drama. He has a gun in his hand and points it at the bad guys. The guns are the symbol of the power of the police, and they are used in order to protect the weak. But are they always used in proper ways?

"Take off your clothes, everything! Even your underwear! Hurry up!" A woman who was suspected as an arsonist was ordered to do so, as soon as she stepped into the police cell. She was forced to take off her clothes in front of several policemen under the pretext of physical examination. Also she was ordered to lean forward and jump up and down naked. Why does she have to act like that in front of policemen?

In Japan, "Police Station House Cells," in short "Police Cells," are different from detention centers or prisons. The suspects remain here in police custody during the pre-indictment period under the surveillance of mail guards. According to the Police What Paper this year, 5,500 people a day were locked up in police cells. Although they might have committed serious crimes, the people who are detained are only suspected as criminals, and not yet "guilty."

Today, there are 1,257 police cells in Japan, but only 7 have policewomen working there. As a result, even the female suspects are under the surveillance of male guards. Ladies, can you imagine yourselves asking a policeman for menstruation pads. Gentlemen, how would you feel if I kept my eyes on you every second even while you were using the toilet? This is what is happening in the police cells at this moment. Physical examinations which should not be done without permission are forced on women with guns used in wrong ways to disgrace women.

You might feel that ordinary people like you and I have nothing to do with the police cells, but is that true? Suppose I were shot dead on this stage, from this moment all of you are going to be investigated. If that investigation does not end in a day, the place you are going to sleep overnight is in a police cell. Then, you, yourself, would be the next person to be pointed at by these guns.

The line between "sexual harassment" and "official action" is very difficult to clarify. Last summer a policeman was accused of "sexual harassment." He looked into a bathroom while a woman in custody was taking a bath, and was discharged for this action. But who knows? Something wrong might have happened inside the bathroom and he might have only been following his duties. But if this action was

taken by a policewomen, there would have been no responsibility of any accusation of "sexual harassment." He was only a victim under this police system.

In order to help female suspects and the honest policemen from wrongly being accused as sexual assailants, today's police system must be changed. According to the Police White Paper 1992, the number of women working in the police department reached 4,500 in 1991. However, 50% were attached to traffic control, and 20% to juvenile counseling. The policewomen should not only work in these positions but also be reeducated and work as female guards in police cells. If only policewomen were there taking care of the female suspects, an incident called such as "sexual harassment" would never happen.

The guns are used in order to protect the weak, but don't we also have the guns to protect ourselves? In fact in the Detention Rule Article 2, it is clearly stated that female suspects must be under the surveillance of policewomen. However, our ignorance of the situations in police cells has been blinding us to the existence of this rule, which is often violated. We also carry the "invisible guns," which we have never noticed, the right to be under the surveillance of a policewoman.

Now, how can we use the invisible guns to reform the system? The "Police Listening Conference" is annually held by the National Police Agency to hear the citizens' voice directly. Actually, last July policewomen were allowed to carry guns. This was put into practice by the public opinion which rose from this conference. If each of us used this opportunity to attend the "Police Listening Conference" and insist that the police should obey the present rule, those steps would be important to reform the police system.

"Hold your hands up and stand against the wall!" This phrase can be also shouted by a policemen abusing his authority. Before these guns are pointed at you, use your "invisible guns" to protect you.