

The NHK Comfort Women Documentary -- 10 Years Later

Matthew Penney

Between 2012 and 2014 we posted a number of articles on contemporary affairs without giving them volume and issue numbers or dates. Often the date can be determined from internal evidence in the article, but sometimes not. We have decided retrospectively to list all of them as Volume 10, Issue 54 with a date of 2012 with the understanding that all were published between 2012 and 2014.

To mark the 10th anniversary of the broadcast of the NHK documentary on Comfort Women, *Senso wo do sabaku ka: Towareru senji seiboryoku* (How to Put War on Trial: Wartime Sexual Violence Considered) broadcast on January 30, 2001, the *Mainichi Shimbun* recently [presented a feature](#) on the program and the controversy over its showing that ensued in Japan.

"Comfort Women" (the translation for 慰安婦 or *ianfu* in Japanese) were women recruited during the war years, many forcibly or via acts of deception, and held in so-called "comfort stations" in areas of China, Korea and other Asian lands occupied by Japan's military, where they were subjected to rape and other forms of sexual abuse at the hands of Japanese soldiers (and some non-Japanese soldiers serving Japan).

As described in the Asia-Pacific Journal by such authors as [Tessa-Morris Suzuki](#) and [Norma Field](#), the NHK documentary, which focused on

[The Women's International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan's Military Sexual Slavery](#), was altered at the request of conservative Japanese politicians, including former Prime Minister Abe Shinzo.

Details about the political pressure put on NHK, Japan's state broadcaster, which is supposed to operate without government interference, have been murky, but the *Mainichi* story helps shed some light by collecting recent statements from NHK employees involved in the 2001 broadcast.

For example, the story visits a Tokyo symposium on reforming NHK programs held on January 30, 2011, at which Nagata Kozo, the chief producer of *Towareru senji seiboryoku*, was a guest speaker. In explaining why no follow-up documentary on the Comfort Women has been made in the last decade, Nagata defended the initial decision to focus the program's narrative on The Women's Tribunal and the NGOs that helped to bring it about. "Documentaries are made by tapping the strength of ordinary citizens. For the Comfort Women, nothing [could have been made] without the help of groups like VAWW-NET Japan ([Violence Against Women in War Network Japan](#)) and WAM (Women's Active Museum on War and Peace). Everything starts from listening to the citizen's groups."

The *Mainichi* reports that in his book *NHK, Tetsu no chinmoku ha dare no tame ni* (Who is

NHK's Steely Silence For?) published in July 2010, Nagata writes that the directive to alter the program's content came from then NHK chairman Ebisawa Katsuji and was at the request of Abe Shinzo and two other LDP members - Furuya Keiji (author's note: also the leader of the "Kita Chosen ni rachi sareta Nihonjin wo soki ni kyushutsu suru tame ni kodo suru giin renmei" [Member's Alliance for Action to Quickly Rescue the Japanese Kidnapped by North Korea]), and Arai Hiroyuki. All three had been extensively involved in LDP deliberations on fostering conservative history education.

Also reported in the *Mainichi* is that Nagai Akatsuki, who worked under Nagata at the time of the program's production, testified at a symposium held at Meiji University in October 2010 that the LDP politicians used their connections with the departments inside NHK dealing with government to "undermine NHK's editorial control, self determination, and independence." Commenting on why he did not stand up to the political pressure, Nagai recounted, "I feared that I would be punished or would lose my place in the organization."

The *Mainichi* story ends with a critique of the Democratic Party, which broke the LDP's long hold on political power in Japan by become the elected governing party in 2009. Prior to its election victory, from 2000 the then opposition Democrats, with Communist Party and Socialist Party support, repeatedly tabled legislation

calling for new compensation for former Comfort Women. Since taking power, however, the party has been slow to act on its call, perhaps, in this author's view, fearing an internal party split or a public standoff with the LDP. Against the background of this continued political hesitance, the story gives the last word to Ikeda Eriko, a former NHK director and current head of Women's Active Museum on War and Peace, who says, "In the last decade, there have been many new developments on the Comfort Women issue. I feel there is no reason why NHK should not air a new documentary."

Asia-Pacific Journal articles on the subject of Comfort Women include:

- Tessa Morris-Suzuki, [Japan's 'Comfort Women': It's time for the truth \(in the ordinary, everyday sense of the word\)](#)
- Norma Field, [The Courts, Japan's 'Military Comfort Women,' and the Conscience of Humanity: The Ruling in VAWW-Net Japan v. NHK](#)
- Kinue Tokudome, [The Japanese Apology on the "Comfort Women" Cannot Be Considered Official: Interview with Congressman Michael Honda](#)
- Wada Haruki, [The Comfort Women, the Asian Women's Fund and the Digital Museum](#)
- Rumiko Nishino, [The Women's Active Museum on War and Peace: Its Role in Public Education](#)

Written by Matthew Penney