

'Comfort Woman' Revisionism Comes to the U.S.: Symposium on The Revisionist Film Screening Event at Central Washington University

「慰安婦」修正主義、アメリカに登場 セントラル・ワシントン大学での修正主義映画の上映会と関連イベントについてのシンポジウム

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This article is the first of a three-part symposium. See parts [two](#) and [three](#) here.

Perhaps it should have been foreseen, but it was not evident in 1995 just how farcical, tragic, and alarming the 70th anniversary of the end of WWII would look in Japan. Then, Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi, the Socialist politician in an extraordinary coalition, to put it politely, with the Liberal Democratic Party, issued a [statement](#) acknowledging that his country, "through its colonial rule and aggression, [had] caused tremendous damage and suffering to the people of many countries, particularly to those of Asian nations." That followed upon a declaration two years earlier by the then chief cabinet secretary, Kōno Yōhei, which states, "Comfort stations were operated in response to the request of the military authorities of the day. The then Japanese military was, directly or indirectly, involved in the establishment and management of the comfort stations and the transfer of comfort women. The recruitment of the comfort women was conducted mainly by private recruiters who acted in response to the request of the military. The Government study has revealed that in many cases they were recruited against their own will, through coaxing, coercion, etc., and that, at times, administrative/military personnel directly took part in the recruitments. They lived in misery at comfort stations under a coercive atmosphere." This remarkably straightforward observation from what is known as the "Kono Statement" exists

in "[unofficial](#)" translation on the site of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The statement remains, at present, the official stance of the Japanese government, hard as it may be to keep that in mind in the era of the second Abe administration. In his April [address](#) to both houses of Congress,¹ Abe managed only to acknowledge that "armed conflicts have always made women suffer the most," pointedly avoiding reference to the former "comfort women," which led Rep. Mike Honda (D-Calif.) to find the speech "shocking and shameful" for its failure to take advantage of the opportunity to offer a sincere apology.² Rep. Honda, of course, is the author of [House Resolution 121](#) that called on the Japanese Government to "acknowledge, apologize, and accept historical responsibility in a clear and unequivocal manner for its Imperial Armed Forces' coercion of young women into sexual slavery, known to the world as 'comfort women'" That was in the summer of 2007. Passage of the nonbinding resolution was apparently abetted, ironically enough, by a lengthy paid advertisement in the *Washington Post* titled "The Facts,"³ a compendium of rightwing revisionist talking points on the "comfort women." The resolution was one of several setbacks for Abe in his initial term as premier. Beset by recurrent scandals in his cabinet appointments, he beat a hasty retreat in the fall of 2007.

THE FACTS

The purpose of this paid public comment is to present historical facts

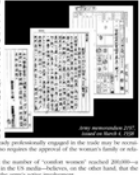
At the end of April, an advertisement purporting to list "The Truth about Comfort Women" appeared in the Washington Post. The article contained in these statements, though were anything but the "truth" either than being based on "lies," they appeared a far cry to be the product of "faith."

The people of Japan have the highest respect for the United States as a fellow democratic nation and as a strong and reliable ally. For democracy to operate effectively, though, the freedom of speech, thought, academic research, and religion must be guaranteed so that individual citizens can draw their own appropriate conclusions.

To enable the people of Japan to have access to correct information, historical documents, stories, and facts, this public comment seeks to present a number of historical facts relating to "comfort women," that have not been adequately brought to light as to be enable the readers of this respected publication to draw their own conclusions.

FACT 1

FACT 1 No historical document has ever been found by historians or research organizations that positively demonstrates that women were forced against their will into prostitution by the Japanese army. A search of the archives at the Japan Center for Asian Historical Records, which houses wartime orders from the government and military leaders, turned up nothing indicating that women were forcibly rounded up to work as *慰安婦* or "comfort women."



FACT 2

FACT 2 There are many newspaper articles, moreover, that demonstrate that these directives were dutifully carried out. The August 31, 1950, issue of *Dong-A Ilbo*, published in Korea, reports of brokers who forced women to become infirm against their will being punished by the local police, which was under Japanese jurisdiction at the time. This offers proof that the Japanese government dealt severely with inhumane crimes against women.



FACT 3

FACT 3

FACT 4

FACT 4

FACT 5

FACT 5 The *iatto* who were embedded with the Japanese army were working under a system of licensed prostitution earned incomes far in excess of what would be paid to field theological Warfare Teams Attached to U.S. Army Forces, and were treated well.

is not, as is commonly reported, "sex slaves," but on that was commonplace around the world at the time. Many of the women, in fact, were and even generally (as reported by the United States Office of War Information, *For Phyllis Thaxter*, APO 680), and there are many testimonies attesting to the fact that they were countries set up hospitals for their armies, in fact, to prevent soldiers from contracting any government to set up hygienic and safe "comfort stations" to prevent rape by Axis

Finally, many women were made to suffer under harsher conditions than were their White counterparts. It is well publicized argument that no contemporary film depicts historical racism. At the same time, we must state that it is a gross and deliberate distortion of reality to contend that the Japanese army was guilty of "consuming young women and sexual slavery." In "Sex of the Larger-scale of human trafficking in the 20th century," in the *News Release* (March 2004), and also, "Sex of 1944" of the *Exposition for the 150th Anniversary* (2005), during the war were Japanese women, as depicted in an academic paper by Winston Botsford. We are concerned, however, in sharing the truth with the American public. Application for events that actually occurred in the United States, and the Japanese women suffered and died not only for the public and economic imperatives of national security but could represent the friendship between Japan and the United States. We do not only think that the truth is a complete distortion of reality but also that the

Translation of an article demonstrating that there was no organized or forced recruitment of women for sexual slavery by the Japanese military during World War II.

<http://www.sdb-fact.com/CL02/1/31/S4.pdf>

– Assentors

[illegible]

We, the undersigned members of the Committee for Historical Facts, endorse the public comment presented above.

Taro Yayama <i>Public Commentator</i> TEIJIYA AKIYASUJI TARO YAYAMA MOTOYUKI KAWAGUCHI	Yoshihiko Sakurai <i>Public Commentator</i> YOSHIOHICO SAKURAI	Hisabuki Hanaka <i>Public Commentator</i> HISABUKI HANAKA	Kaichi Sonjima <i>Public Commentator</i> KAICHI SONJIMA	Kohya Wachiwura <i>Public Commentator</i> KOHYA WACHIWURA
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Source: THE FACTS

Revisionist forces were undeterred by what they could have construed as a misstep in publishing “The Facts.” They have redoubled their determination to set the historical record straight and redeem their country’s tarnished honor. And certainly they feel a strong wind in their sails under the current Abe administration, whose members, beginning with the prime minister himself, are a strong presence in the [Nippon Kaigi](#) (the “Japan Conference,”) along with nearly 40% of parliamentary representatives and numerous members of local government.⁴ Abe’s defiant commitment to Yasukuni visits, the passage of the State Secrecy Act (2013), the

uncompromising stance on building a humanly and environmentally devastating US Marine base in Henoko in the face of overwhelming local opposition in Okinawa, and the insistence on disregarding popular opposition to nuclear restarts have accelerated and intensified the crescendo effect of the conservative agenda to undo the “postwar order.” This movement may be traced by such markers as the conferring of legal status as national flag and national anthem to the Rising Sun flag and the “Kimigayo” (1999), the revision of the Fundamental Education Law (2006) and, of course, the gradual but determined dismantling of the substance of the postwar Constitution, most notably, Article 9, the so-called “no-war” clause.

Against this background, the revisionist right is apparently so confident of its domestic standing that it has moved its “major battleground” to the U.S., where memorials to comfort women are being erected, and a world history textbook by a major publisher includes a reference to military sexual slavery.⁵ This is the development elucidated by Emi Koyama in her piece, “The U.S. as Major Battleground for ‘Comfort Woman’ Revisionism: The Screening of *Scottsboro Girls* at Central Washington University.” However cogent Koyama’s exposition, it falls short—properly so—of providing a rationale for the invitation to the director, one Taniyama Yūjirō, let alone the actual screening of his film on a U.S. campus. Koyama therefore goes on to give us her eye-witness account and analysis of the event.

In “Responding to ‘Comfort Woman’ Denial at Central Washington University,” Mark Auslander and Chong Eun Ahn reflect on the process by which a response to the screening was developed, from the early debates as to whether to attempt to block it, followed by whether to withhold attention, culminating in a full fledged communal effort to learn and think about the history of comfort women. The process is not over yet, as the piece makes

clear. Or rather, it shows that any serious attempt to address a profound historical injury, compounded by a concerted effort to deny it altogether, is likely to direct us to look close to home with the new eyes gained from looking far, temporally as well as geographically.⁶

Invocations of “American freedom and democracy” by foreign and American politicians are too often devoid of meaning at best, more likely gestures that cover over the denial of the same to numerous others not in the room. Abe’s recent performance and its reception are no exception. What the CWU experience suggests, however, is that the arrival of comfort woman revisionism on these shores can become the occasion of a pedagogical experience that puts these notions to the test and in so doing, infuse them with life.

Norma Field retired in 2011 as the Robert S. Ingersoll Distinguished Service Professor in Japanese Studies at the University of Chicago. Her books include *In the Realm of a Dying Emperor*. She is an editor (with Heather Bowen-Struyk), of the forthcoming *For Dignity, Justice, and Revolution: An Anthology of Japanese Proletarian Literature* (University of Chicago Press, 2015). She is co-translator of the 2015 ebook *Fukushima Radiation: Will You Still Say No Crime Was Committed: Statements by 50 Complainants for Criminal Prosecution of the Fukushima Nuclear Disaster*

Tomomi Yamaguchi is an associate professor of Anthropology at Montana State University. She is the author of “Feminizumu no Shiten kara Mita Kodo-hoshu Undo to Ianfu Mondai.” (“The Action Conservative Movement and the “Comfort Women” Issue From a Feminist Perspective”). *Journalism* (November 2013): .81-91, and “Gender Free” Feminism in Japan: A Story of Mainstreaming and Backlash.” *Feminist Studies*, 40, no.3 (Fall 2014): 541-572.

Related Articles

Asia-Pacific Journal Feature, [Open Letter in Support of Historians in Japan](#).

Asia-Pacific Journal Feature, [Fact Sheet on Japanese Military “Comfort Women.”](#)

Arudou Debito, [Japanese Government Pressures American Publisher to Delete Textbook Treatment of Wartime Sexual Slavery: An Interview with Herbert Ziegler](#).

Alexis Dudden, [Korean Americans Enter the History Wars on Behalf of the Comfort Women](#).

Jeff Kingston, [Extremists Flourish in Abe’s Japan](#).

David McNeill and Justin McCurry. [Sink the Asahi! The ‘Comfort Women’ Controversy and the Neo-Nationalist Attack](#).

Narusawa, Muneo. [Abe Shinzo: Japan’s New Prime Minister a Far-Right Denier of History](#).

Nishino Rumiko and Nogawa Motokazu, [The Japanese State’s New Assault on the Victims of Wartime Sexual Slavery](#).

Uemura Takashi (translated by Norma Field), [Journalist Who Broke Comfort Women Story Files 16.5 million Yen Libel Suit Against Bungei Shunju: Uemura Takashi's Speech to the Press](#)

Uemura Takashi (translation and introduction by Tomomi Yamaguchi), [Labeled the Reporter Who “Fabricated” the Comfort Woman Issue: A Rebuttal](#)

Yoshimi Yoshiaki with an introduction by Satoko Norimatsu, [Reexamining the “Comfort Women” Issue. An Interview with Yoshimi Yoshiaki](#)

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Notes

¹ See Kerry Smith's [analysis](#) of the speech on this site.

² [USA Today](#), 29 April 2015.

³ See [here](#) for text in English and Japanese.

⁴ For more information on Nippon Kaigi, see "Nihon Saidai no Uha Soshiki, Nippon Kaigi o Kenshō (Japan's Largest Right-wing Organization: Examining Nippon Kaigi)." *Tokyo Shimbun*, July 31, 2014, and "[Chihō kara Kaiken no Koe Enshutsu: Nippon Kaigi ga Anbun, Giin ra Koou](#)" (Voices for Constitutional

Revision from the Provinces: Nippon Kaigi Prepares the Draft, and Assembly Members Respond." *Asahi Shimbun*, August 1, 2014. Also see Narusawa Muneo, "[Japan's New Prime Minister a Far-Right Denier of History.](#)"

⁵ See [interview](#) with Herbert Ziegler, the historian responsible for the passage in the McGraw Hill textbook.

⁶ As of this writing, Michael Yon, an American writer recently recruited by the revisionists, has [made explicit](#) his objections to Taniyama's film for its lack of understanding of American values, and his criticism of Sakurai Yoshiko, a towering figure in the revisionist movement, for promoting it. Mariko Okada-Collins, the Japanese language instructor who initiated the invitation, [has written to affirm](#) Yon's intentions in voicing such criticism.