

A Joint Statement from Japanese Historians and History Educators on Recent Developments in the Japanese Military's "Comfort Women" Issue

In May 2015, a national network of Japanese historians and history educators published a joint statement regarding the Japanese Army's "comfort women" issue.¹ Since the statement's publication there have been two major developments. First, the Japanese and South Korean governments published a joint declaration about the "comfort women" issue following a December 28, 2015 conference between the two nations' foreign ministers (hereafter, "the Japan-Korea Agreement"). Second, on January 20, 2016, the Tokyo District Court dismissed Professor Yoshiaki Yoshimi's defamation suit against former Diet representative Fumiki Sakaurauchi. These two developments have raised a number of serious issues, which we wish to highlight.

First, we believe that the Japan-Korea Agreement obscures the issue of official involvement in the "comfort women" system. Historical research has unequivocally established that the Japanese government and army proposed, established, managed, and regulated "comfort stations" at military facilities, and that the "comfort women" system was essentially a system of sexual slavery that violated existing domestic and international legal standards. Despite these facts, the Agreement fails to take heed of either point, going only so far as to vaguely acknowledge the "involvement of the Japanese military authorities."

Second, the Japan-Korea Agreement fails to sufficiently consider the honor and dignity of former "comfort women," which, we believe, is a human rights issue. Instead, the Agreement attempts to formally settle the issue without addressing the suffering of the victims. Specifically, the Agreement states that the "comfort women" issue is "resolved finally and irreversibly." In addition, it mentions that both parties "will refrain from accusing or criticizing each other" in the international community. By declaring the issue formally resolved, these statements threaten to suppress subsequent historical research and any future solutions to the issue that research can provide. Moreover, the Agreement makes no reference to historical education, despite the fact that accounts of the "comfort women" issue continue to be removed from Japanese textbooks. In light of these trends, we renew our call that historical facts be properly related via education.

In short we believe that the Japan-Korea Agreement fails to sufficiently address the hopes and desires of the parties involved. Rather than representing a popularly-supported resolution that properly acknowledged the concerns of former "comfort women," it represents an intra-governmental accord that appears designed to suppress future debate. Accordingly, we believe that the Agreement is incapable of truly and fundamentally resolving the "comfort women" issue.

The second major development requiring mention concerns Professor Yoshiaki Yoshimi's defamation suit against former Diet representative Fumiki Sakaurauchi. Although the Tokyo District Court ruled that Sakaurauchi's May 2013 comment that Professor Yoshiaki Yoshimi's research was "a fabrication" did in fact constitute defamation, it asserted that the comment does not "transcend the accepted limits of opinion or commentary" and ultimately denied Yoshimi's claim. Major dictionaries define "fabrication" as the act of making something false appear true. This ruling fails to recognize the gravity and potential danger of a claim that an empirically supported and widely-accepted body of research is "a fabrication." For researchers, a claim that one's findings are a fabrication is something that threatens one's career and future. Therefore, we are unable to ignore statements that fail to recognize just how serious claims of academic dishonesty truly are and judicial rulings that appear to tolerate such claims.

These two recent developments are similar in that they trivialize the significance of the "comfort women" issue, ignore the hopes and desires of the parties involved, and are designed to force an abrupt conclusion to the issue. Therefore, we request that the concerned parties in the Japanese and Korean governments, as well as members of the Japanese judiciary, have a sober and honest debate about the "comfort women" issue and work to truly resolve it.

¹ The document was entitled *A Joint Statement by Japanese Historians and History Educators on the "Comfort Women" Issue*.

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15 associations of history scholars and educators in Japan

The Japanese Historical Council

Association of Historical Science

Association of History of Japanese Thought

Chiba Historical Society

The Gender History Association of Japan

The Historical Association of Senshu University

The Historical Science Society of Japan

History Educationalist Conference of Japan

The Japanese Historical Society

The Japanese Society for Historical Studies

The Osaka Association of Historical Sciences

Osaka Historical Association

The Society for Historical Science of Nagoya

The Society for Research on Women's History

Tokyo Historical Science Association