

“Japan, US, South Korea Joint Symposium” to condemn the comfort women issue held

By Matsuki Kunitoshi, fellow, International Research Institute of Controversial Histories

Japanese, American and South Korean researchers grandly assembled in Tokyo

On July 10, 2024, the Third International Symposium over the Comfort Women Issue was held at Seiryō-kaikan Hall at Nagata-cho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo, to refute the fiction of the comfort women issue and to pursue a true understanding between Japan and South Korea.

The symposium was held once in Tokyo in 2022 and twice in Seoul in 2023. The persistent lie about the forced abduction of comfort women during the Pacific War has already been perfectly refuted by studies reported during the past two symposiums.

The main goal of the symposium this time was for Japanese, American and South Korean researchers of the comfort women issue to get together in Tokyo, review the activities so far, exchange information related to the situations in the respective countries, deepen the mutual bond and clearly show the way to the complete solution of the comfort women issue.

As this is an extremely important theme in terms of the national honor of Japan and peace and security in the entire East Asia, an audience of nearly 300 people packed the hall and the symposium was opened in the most enthusiastic atmosphere.

At the opening ceremony, the national anthems of the attending countries were played in order of Japan, South Korea and the United States. Then, President Sugihara Seishiro of the International Research Institute of Controversial Histories, representing the organizers of the symposium, made a powerful opening statement: “We should resolutely fight against liars in Japan, South and North Korea, remove comfort woman statues and retrieve the true history.”

Statement made by a female South Korean activist

Prior to the keynote lectures, Ms. Shu Ok-sun from South Korea, chairman of the national women’s committee of the Liberal Unification Party, and permanent representative of the “National Moms’ Squad,” reported on the progress of the fight in South Korea. The “National Moms’ Squad” is a conservative women’s political body, which makes regular appearances in the South Korean media.

The body strictly condemns the lies over the comfort women issue spread by the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan, currently, the Korean Council for Justice and Remembrance for the Issue of Military Sexual Slavery by Japan (Korean Council for Justice), organized by anti-Japan, pro-North Korea powers. They organize anti-“Wednesday demonstration,” asking for the removal of the comfort woman statue, beside the “Wednesday demonstration” held by the Council for Justice every Wednesday in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul. Ms. Shu Ok-sun said, “Ms. Yoon Mee-hyang, who has long represented the Korean Council, and her family are anti-South Korea activists subject to North Korea” and condemned her, saying, “Yoon Mee-hyang, under the North Korean leadership, has been working to worsen the Japan-South Korea relationship, using the comfort women issue.”

Ms. Shu went on saying, “Let us cooperate together between Japan and South Korea until the day when the threat to peace in East Asia from China and North Korea falls” and received hearty applause from the audience.

Part I : Keynote lectures

Keynote lectures were given by three speakers: Professor Nishioka Tsutomu of Reitaku University, chairman of the Historical Awareness Research Committee; Mr. Lee Yong-heon, Professor Emeritus of Seoul University, principal of Syngman Rhee Private School; and Harvard University Professor J. Mark Ramseyer. The following is the summary of their lectures.

1. Mr. Nishioka Tsutomu: “The comfort women issue as a historical recognition issue”

In the analysis of the development of the comfort women issue, there are four factors.

- 1) Anti-Japan mass media, scholars and activists within Japan, in cooperation with a group of activists in South Korea, staged campaigns accusing Japan. Following them, the South Korean mass media further spread aggravated fallacies.
- 2) The Korean Government made it an official diplomatic issue and urged Japan to solve it.
- 3) The Japanese Government, without substantially refuting the South Korean unfair demands, first apologized and admitted moral responsibility and in the name of humanitarian support half-heartedly provided compensations for issues that had been already settled by a treaty and agreement, thus making the issue worse.
- 4) North Korea, with the intention to aggravate the Japan-South Korea relationship, spread

groundless anti-Japan criticism in the international community in cooperation with Japanese and South Korean anti-Japan activists. Consequently, diplomatic conflicts erupted between Japan and South Korea, enormously damaging the dignity of our country and ancestors.

Anti-Japan mass media and leftist scholars in Japan conducted anti-Japan campaign because the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 made it difficult for them to advocate for communist superiority and without examining their own faults, they chose to flee to the “anti-Japan fortress,” making accusations over Japan’s past. They began anti-Japan activities, unilaterally declaring themselves the only conscientious intellectuals who express regret about the “atrocities” Japan committed in the past.

In South Korea, since the Chun Doo-hwan administration early in 1980, they began to use history in the past as a diplomatic tool. At first, Chun Doo-hwan emphasized that South Korea is a breakwater against communism and asked Japan for economic assistance. As the Japanese Government was reluctant to fight together against communism, the Chun Doo-hwan administration switched to the distorted anti-Japan strategy, urging Japan to succumb to their demand by confronting Japan with the alleged past “atrocities.” In collaboration with the Chinese Communist Party and the Japanese leftist media like *The Asahi Newspaper*, South Korea attacked Japan over historical issues and as a result, during the Nakasone Cabinet, won economic support amounting to \$4 billion from Japan.

On the other hand, North Korea, entering 1980s, fell behind South Korea in economic power and aiming to assert its superiority launched a policy of anti-Japan nationalism. Within South Korea, North Korea spread the “anti-Korea view of history,” asserting that “South Korea did not punish pro-Japan sectors and when the Japan-friendly Park Chung-hee held the power and concluded diplomatic relationship with Japan, he left the regrettable past unquestioned. On the contrary, North Korea was founded by the hero of anti-Japan movement Kim Il-sung and punished pro-Japan Koreans, sticking to the anti-Japan ethnicism and therefore, the authenticity of Korea as a nation lies in North Korea.”

This “anti-South Korea view of history” spread across South Korea during the leftist Administrations of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moon-hyun and during the Moon Jae-in Administration it nearly became an “official history” of South Korea.

This “anti-South Korea view of history” is based greatly on the historical view that “Japan’s rule was illegal colonial control” and therefore Japan’s rule of the Korean Peninsula had to be filled with bad deeds. A lie alleging that the Japanese military forcibly abducted many Korean girls and made them sexual slaves was the most suitable story to support this anti-Korea historical view.

The comfort women issue came to be fabricated through such a process and it is meant to be never resolved, however laboriously and repeatedly Japan apologizes. Regrettably, no one noticed this until the Abe Shinzo Administration entered the scene and it was easily believed that if only Japan should show enough sincerity, things would go well, so, they never tried to refute the accusations on the basis of historical facts. Therefore, lies spread in the international community, damaging the honor and dignity of our country and our ancestors, leading to more Korea-phobic Japanese in Japan and no end of the aggravated Japan-South Korea relationship.

Powers that spread the lies had their own motives and reasons as just mentioned here. It is the task of historical awareness research to reveal the true power that spread the lie and its motive and purpose. From now on, the truth-seekers from Japan, South Korea and the United States who gathered here must cope with this issue in cooperative efforts and completely refute the “lie,” based on facts.

2. Mr. Lee Young-hoon: Destructive impact of the Japanese military comfort women issue on the South Korean society

In South Korean political history, “authoritarian” administrations from Syngman Rhee to Park Chung-hee can be said to have objectively pursued the national interest without being affected by the people’s nationalistic sentiment, following the basic strategy to establish the national concept and accelerate economic development. Since then, during the authoritarian political period (1948~1986) until the Chun Doo-hwan Administration, South Korea established the framework of a modern nation state and achieved high economic growth.

When President Kim Young-san assumed power in 1987, the so-called “democratization period” started. Since then, the consecutive administrations criticized the governments up to the Chun Doo-hwan Administration as traitors that adopted “Japan-friendly policy” and vindicated “pro-Japanese” South Koreans and by denying such pro-Japan political stance, tried to affirm their national authenticity. Therefore, the anti-Japan Korean sentiment was further aggravated since the democratization movement began. Generally, when international exchange increases and economy develops, animosity against other countries, especially neighbors, will be softened. However, in South Korea, animosity seems to have taken the opposite course. In this respect, we can perceive the impact of the Japanese military comfort women issue together with the change in the Korean political history as major contributing factors.

The comfort women issue in South Korea was first triggered by the book *My War Crime: Forced*

Abduction of Koreans, written by Yoshida Seiji and published in Japan in 1981, which presented a fabricated story as a fact. The Korean younger generation who has not experienced the period of Japan's rule or the Korean War lacks the understanding that prostitution used to be a legal profession, and the lie Yoshida told that "during wartime, many women were forcibly taken by the Japanese military and made sexual slaves" naturally stays in their minds as true history.

In addition, the Korean Council activists confusing the voluntary corps with comfort women advertised that women were mobilized as volunteer corps and made sexual slaves and this mistaken recognition spread and accepted as truth within South Korea.

However, this is a sheer "lie." The volunteer corps were unmarried women aged 12 to 40 who were mobilized as factory workers under the Volunteer Female Workers Act issued in 1944 in Japan and had nothing to do with comfort women. Moreover, this Act was not issued within South Korea and in Korea, roughly 2,000 women were selected among applicants and worked in factories.

The Korean Council activists were not the only ones, there were also no Korean history scholars and sociologists who comprehensively understood the Japanese comfort women issue and in 1990s, when the comfort women issue erupted, I could not find any paper or writing worthy of academic study. The Korean Council activists started the issue out of total academic impotency, resulting in enormous side effects on both South Korea and Japan.

I was the first to stand up arguing against the comfort women movement led by the Korean Council. In 2004, during the nation-wide broadcast of a TV discussion, I pointed out that the South Korean Army ran comfort stations during the Korean War and that under the support of the Korean Government, tens of thousands of comfort women were allocated to the U.S. Forces stationed in South Korea and asked, "Why is it that only the comfort women sent to the Japanese military were regarded as war crime victims and only those who forcibly mobilized them were punished?"

However, this subjected me to a barrage of bashing. Many ill-willed phone calls were made, and the website of the University department I belonged to was infested with numerous posts criticizing me. Eggs were thrown at my university office and female Parliament members requested that I be stripped of my national university professorship.

Then, information came that former comfort women would come over to the university campus on wheelchairs to protest and I was obliged to visit the facility where those women were accommodated and apologize to them.

At the scene of my apology, I said to them, “As a researcher I will closely study how and why all of you were obliged to live such an unhappy life and someday disseminate what I have learned to the world.” Finally, I could realize my promise in 2019. Having duly retired from the university, I co-authored with several researchers and published the book *Anti-Japan Ethnicism*.

While I was writing this book, I learned that after the war ended in 1945 and until 1960, in South Korea, there were dozens of times more comfort women present than during the Japanese rule at private whore villages, the U.S. bases and during the Korean War around the South Korean Army. They were put under far worse conditions than the Japanese military comfort women.

On the other hand, I could not confirm any evidential proof to support the forced abduction theory or sexual slavery theory.

The Japanese military comfort women were women who were engaged in professional prostitution whose poor parents agreed to their daughter becoming a comfort woman in exchange for receiving handsome advance money under indented labor contract. It was true that some became too stressed and physically or mentally incapacitated, but most of them either on the completion of the payment of the advance money or on the expiration of the contract term left the comfort station to start a new life.

Currently in South Korea, the movement to remove comfort woman statues built across the country is well under way, led by Mr. Kim Byung-heon. Mr. Kim stated the truth that the Japanese military comfort women movement in the past thirty years had been a national and international fraud. However, against his assertion, the South Korean politics, intellectuality and speech remain silent. The comfort women issue has made the South Korean people’s intelligence and conscience numb. This is exactly the “destructive effect” mentioned in the title of my lecture.

3. Mr. Ramseyer: “Historical issue and the issue of U.S. universities--what we should do from now on”

My paper short of mere eight pages brought about an amazingly drastic opposition movement. There are two evident origins to this movement. First, there are many second or third generation of Korean immigrants who study at universities in the United States. It is quite understandable that they have strong, patriotic love toward South Korea, which they feel close to as their mother country. However, most of them seem to have little knowledge about South Korean politics and history except what they learn from their parents. When it comes to immigrants, this is the same everywhere in the world and basically it cannot be helped.

Second, there are self-claimed Japan-expert scholars in universities in the United States. Regarding this, “it cannot be helped” won’t do. This is complete “academic fallacy.” In their attempt to make me withdraw my paper, they tried to have Harvard University punish me. The theories of sexual slavery and forced abduction seem to be vital to their ideology. The fact that they stubbornly insist on their theories and censor other scholars’ assertions is nothing short of violence against academic freedom.

How can this kind of academic violence be allowed to have its own way? It is clear if you look at the thinking trend of university professors in the United States. Especially in human science faculties, there are many leftist professors supporting the Democratic Party. For example, in the case of the history faculty at University of California, Berkeley, there are 31 Democratic Party supporting professors to 1 Republican Party supporting professor and in the case of Stanford history faculty, 22 to 0. In the United States, scholars supporting the Democratic Party are mostly extreme leftist and students tend to avoid history major, lest the specific idea should dominate the study and at present, the ratio of students majoring in history study is less than 1%.

Incidentally, let me introduce a problem going on at U.S. universities controlled by the leftist powers. Regarding history, Project 1619 to reconstruct the U.S. history is progressing. This project regards the year 1619, when slaves were brought to the land of now the United States of America for the first time as the true founding year of the United States of America and defines the American Civil War as the “war to maintain the slavery.” A special article put in *The New York Times* in August 2019 was the beginning of the project and after this article, Black Lives Matters (BLM) movement spread nationwide. This historical view is a “lie,” totally ungrounded on historical fact. However, the historian who criticized this lie, former president of History Study Society, was obliged to rescind his statement in only two days under fierce bashing.

There are many seemingly politics-related issues. A Harvard Professor asserted that there is no fact showing that White police officers shot more Black people to death than Black police officers. This professor faced the penalty of no pay for two years. A female Harvard instructor told the normal fact that sexual difference is not selective but based on biology and she was fired. The number of scholars who were unduly punished owing to so-called political reasons amounted to 537 in these seven years.

Appalling phenomena akin to the Stalin-era purge or Mao Zedong’s Cultural Revolution are now taking place at universities in the United States. My papers were also severely criticized by the leftist dominant historical science society. Those scholars who criticized me merely adhere to their own ideology, hardly read Japanese literature and know nothing about the truth. They have never heard of

the name of Yoshida Seiji. This is their scholarly level and the true circumstance of Japan study in the United States.

How, then, should we cope with such a situation? First, American scholars like me should publish English papers and literature one after another. This responsibility is mine. And most importantly as a human, “speak the truth only,” “write the truth only,” and “never, ever apologize when attacked.”