

# **The Comfort Women Issue**

A  
Review of the Facts  
and  
Common Misunderstandings

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## PREFACE

It is a fact that during the war era a large number of Korean women, along with Japanese women, became comfort women and suffered greatly as a consequence. This was unforgivable from the standpoint of today's values by which Japan as well as South Korea prohibit the comfort women system and prostitution. On the other hand, the allegation that the "Japanese military forcefully recruited 200,000 Korean women as sex slaves and slaughtered many of them after the end of the war" is not true.

Substantive research and debate over the past twenty-two years have vastly improved our knowledge of the comfort women issue. This essay will address common allegations by illuminating the facts while dispelling falsehoods that are unsupported by the evidence.

## **The Comfort Women**

The claim that “the Japanese army mobilized 200,000 Korean women as sex slaves and slaughtered many of them after the end of the war” is incorrect. This report will clarify common international misunderstandings regarding the comfort women issue.

It has been alleged that “wartime Japan forced 200,000 Korean women to serve as ‘comfort women,’ that is to say ‘sex slaves’ in the war zone. Then immediately after the war, many of the women were massacred.” Misconceptions such as these are in contradiction to the established facts, yet they are being spread throughout the international community. South Korean non-government organizations in particular have been working aggressively to disseminate such misunderstandings.

Of course, it is a fact that a large number of Korean women, along with Japanese women, became comfort women and suffered greatly as a consequence. This was unforgivable from the standpoint of today’s values by which Japan as well as South Korea prohibit the comfort women system and prostitution. There are differences also from one country to another in how history is viewed. In this sense, we do not see it as a problem that South Korea’s perception of history is different from that of Japan.

With the above premise in mind, the purpose of this essay is to provide a clear explanation of the facts and how they differ from common misconceptions among non-Japanese who may not be as familiar with this history.

## 1. The Allegation That Comfort Women Were Forcibly Recruited By Government Authorities Is Not True.

First, there are no instances in which Korean women were forcibly recruited by government authorities to become comfort women. Evidence to verify the allegations of forced recruitment has never been found.

Throughout the 1980's, the theory that government authorities engaged in the forced abduction of comfort women was prevalent in academia and the mass media in Japan as well as South Korea. However, from 1992 onward, it was taken up as a diplomatic issue, prompting bona fide research and widespread debate to begin. As a consequence, the dominant opinion in Japan as well as among some segments of South Korean academia has become the realization that "there are no instances where Korean women were forced to become comfort women by government officials."

The prevailing theory in academia and among mass media in Japan and South Korea through the 1980's was that "Korean women were mobilized as comfort women under the Volunteer Corps system." Influential media such as the *Asahi Shimbun* and *Mainichi Shimbun*, among others, presented it in just this manner.<sup>1</sup> This above-mentioned Volunteer Corps

<sup>1</sup> *Chōsen O Shiru Jiten* (Encyclopedia To Know Korea) (Heibonsha, 1986), which was editorially supervised jointly by several academics specializing in Japanese-Korean studies, including Abito Ito, Masuo Omura, Hideki Kajimura, Yukio Takeda, and Soji Takasaki, defines the term "military comfort women" by explaining that "approximately 200,000 Korean women were mobilized for labor from 1943 on, under the name of Women's Volunteer Corps. Of those, 50,000 to 70,000 young, unmarried women were made to become comfort women." Also see *Chōsen-shi* (History of Korea) (Yamakawa Shuppansha, 1985), which was written by members of the Korean History Studies Association, a prominent Korean history studies organization in Japan, and edited by Yukio Takeda, in which the authors state that the Women's Volunteer Corps Labor Decree was issued in August 1944, resulting in the mobilization for labor of several hundred thousand of Korean women ranging in age from 12 to 40 years old; among those, several tens of thousands (20,000 to 40,000) of unmarried women were forced to become comfort women. (cont.)

system specifically refers to the mobilization of labor by government authorities under the war-era National General Mobilization Law.

However, after the matter of comfort women became a diplomatic issue in 1992, the Japanese government began a thorough investigation including examination of pre-war documents, sparking an intense debate in academia and among opinion-leading forums in Japan. As a result, the theory that comfort women were mobilized under the Volunteer Corps system was disavowed. There are absolutely no facts to support the allegation.

Grounds proffered in support of the allegation consisted of the testimony of a person by the name of Seiji Yoshida, who said, “I conducted the forceful recruitment of comfort women like a slave hunt on South Korea’s Jeju Island based on orders from the Army to recruit Volunteer Corps members.”<sup>2</sup> However, in the process of debate and as the investigation proceeded, it was revealed that there was absolutely no evidence or other testimony to support his claim while many local inhabitants of Jeju Island insisted that there had been no such activities,<sup>3</sup> leading to the conclusion that “this claim has too many problems to be employed as a fact.”<sup>4</sup>

The *Asahi Shimbun*, in its January 11, 1992 edition, reported as an explanation of the term “military comfort women” that “as the Pacific War began, Japan forcibly took away Korean women under the name of a Volunteer Corps,” while the *Mainichi Shimbun*, in its March 5, 1992 edition, also reported the same explanation that “primarily from the Korean peninsula during the Second World War, approximately 100,000 to 200,000 women ranging in age from teenagers up to 40 years old were gathered under the name Volunteer Corps.”

<sup>2</sup> See *Watashi No Sensō Hanzai: Chōsen-jin No Kyōsei Renkō* (My War Crimes: Forceful Recruitment of Koreans), by Seiji Yoshida (San’ichi Shobo, 1983). Mr. Yoshida wrote in the book’s forward that “For three years from 1942 to the end of the war, as head of a mobilization section of Yamaguchi Prefecture’s Labor Dedication to the Nation Association, I conducted ‘slave hunts’ while engaged in the business of requisitioning Koreans.”

<sup>3</sup> See *Ianfu To Senjō No Sei* (Comfort Women and Sex in the War Zone), by Ikuhiko Hata (Shinchosha, 1999), pages 229-248 (Chapter 7: *Yoshida Seiji No Tsukuribanashi [Seiji Yoshida’s Fictitious Story]*).

<sup>4</sup> See “*Jūgun Ianfu*” *O Meguru Sanjū No Uso To Shinjitsu* (30 Lies and Truths about



The investigation also confirmed that the objective of the Women's Volunteer Corps system was to mobilize a female workforce for the defense industry, which was completely unrelated to comfort women. No evidentiary materials have been found to back up the contention that government authorities engaged in the mobilization of comfort women.

As a result of deliberations such as the foregoing, the opinion held by academia and mass media in Japan today is that "there is no evidence that government officials forcefully recruited Korean women as comfort women." There is a consensus on this point.

Japanese historian Ikuhiko Hata, Ph.D., for example, asserts that "there was never any procurement of comfort women on the Korean peninsula through forceful recruitment by government authorities."<sup>5</sup> Yoshiaki Yoshimi and Haruki Wada, representative of historians who view the Japanese government's responsibility more critically, also express similar views in their following statements. Yoshimi says that "government authorities' forceful recruitment like a slave hunt in Korea or Taiwan has not been confirmed. Moreover, it seems that there was no mobilization of comfort women based on the Women's Volunteer Labor Decree";<sup>6</sup> Wada states that "certainly documentary materials have not been found to prove the use of direct coercion by government authorities."<sup>7</sup> With

"Military Comfort Women"), edited by Yoshiaki Yoshimi and Fumiko Kawata (Otsuki Shoten 1997, page 27, lines 1-5. Yoshiaki Yoshimi was a professor of the Department of Commerce at Chuo University. Also see his English-language book, *Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery in the Japanese Military During World War II* (Columbia University Press, 2002).

In addition, *Asahi Shimbun*, which first positively reported the Yoshida testimony in many editions of its newspaper, came to accept the result of the debate and reported in its March 31, 1997 edition, that "no evidence has emerged to prove Yoshida's claim; thus the authenticity of the claim cannot be confirmed."

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. footnote 3. Page 192, upper column, lines 17-19.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. footnote 4. Page 24, lines 3-4.

<sup>7</sup> See *Asian Women's Fund News*, issue no. 8, March 5, 1997, page 3, left column, lines

respect to the results of its own investigation, the Japanese government said, “Among the materials uncovered by the government, there are no records directly showing so-called forceful recruitment by either the army or government authorities.”<sup>8</sup>

And yet in South Korea there continue to be strong voices of opinion insisting that there was forceful recruitment of comfort women by government authorities and that the debunked Yoshida testimony is a fact.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, as a result of the bona fide research, in some quarters of South Korean academia there is an emerging trend of opinion that there was no forced recruitment. For example, Ahn Byeong-jik, Ph.D, Professor Emeritus of Seoul University, who participated in the hearing-interviews of former comfort women, stated on a South Korean television program, “Despite testimony by some former comfort women about forceful recruitment, there is not even one tangible piece of objective data in either South Korea or Japan to prove it. In South Korea there are brothels and numerous entities like comfort women. There should be a study into the reasons for this phenomenon. Surely this phenomenon

15-17. In 1997, Tokyo University Professor Haruki Wada was one of the advocates for creation of the Asian Women’s Fund, which was set up for the purpose of apologizing to and compensating former comfort women.

<sup>8</sup> See *Paper Answering the Question Raised by Kiyomi Tsujimoto, Member of the Lower House of the Japanese Diet*, by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, March 16, 2007. [http://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb\\_shitsumon.nsf/html/shitsumon/b166266.htm](http://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_shitsumon.nsf/html/shitsumon/b166266.htm)

<sup>9</sup> A leading South Korean newspaper, *The Chosoun Ilbo*, in its August 3, 2012 editorial entitled “Prime Minister Noda - Go and Show the United Nations that Comfort Women Never Existed,” presents the debunked Yoshida testimony as fact and criticizes Japan in the following quote:

“For three years beginning in 1942, Seiji Yoshida, former head of a mobilization section of Yamaguchi Prefecture’s Labor Dedication to the Nation Association, testified that ‘Korean women were mobilized as comfort women’ and said, ‘I left Shimonoseki and arrived at Jeju Island on May 14, 1943, and hunted women.’ Yoshida also testified that ‘matters related to comfort women were all classified as military secrets. At present, when the world is coming together as one, the crime of forceful recruitment of sex slaves by Japan has been publicly recognized as one of the ugliest historical cases in modern history.’”

did not happen just because of some form of coercion.”<sup>10</sup>

## **2. The International Community’s Erroneous Recognition Of Disproved Allegations Has Not Yet Been Expunged.**

Second, the above-mentioned results of bona fide research and debate in Japan have not become known in the international community, including that “there were no instances of forced recruitment of Korean women as comfort women by government authorities.” At the same time the clearly discredited allegation that “government authorities forcefully abducted comfort women” is still widely believed and thus the issue has become distorted.

The Coomaraswamy Report submitted to the UN Human Rights Commission in 1996 promoted the spread of misunderstanding in the international community by its statement, “200,000 Korean women were forcefully recruited to battlefields as comfort women, that is to say ‘sex slaves.’” Ms. Coomaraswamy, who was appointed by the Commission as a special rapporteur into the issue of violence against women, concluded the report after conducting research in Japan, South Korea and North Korea for her investigation. In that report she defined comfort women as “military slaves” and demanded that the Japanese government admit legal responsibility, compensate the victims and punish those held accountable. The report claims that, based on the National General Mobilization Law, the Japanese military conducted large-scale, forceful and violent recruitment like a slave hunt, proceeding further with the following text:

“... the Japanese military resorted to violence, undisguised force

<sup>10</sup> See *News Focus*, a program of South Korea’s Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation (MBC), broadcast on December 6, 2006. Reference to the remark by Professor Ahn Byeong-jik may also be found on pages 99-106 of *Shimpan Yoku Wakaru Ianfu Mondai* (New Edition: The Comfort Women Issue Made Comprehensible), by Tsutomu Nishioka (Soshisha, 2012).

and raids which involved the slaughter of family members who tried to prevent the abduction of their daughters. These methods were facilitated by the strengthening of the National General Mobilization Law, which had been passed in 1938 but was only used for the forcible recruitment of Koreans from 1942 onwards. Notes / G. Hicks, *"The Comfort Women: Sex Slaves of the Japanese Imperial Forces,"* Heinemann Asia, Singapore, 1995, p. 25. The testimonies of many former military sexual slaves bear witness to the widespread use of violence and coercion in the recruitment process. Moreover, the wartime experiences of one raider, Yoshida Seiji, are recorded in his book, in which he confesses to having been part of slave raids in which, among other Koreans, as many as 1,000 women were obtained for "comfort women" duties under the National Labour Service Association as part of the National General Mobilization Law. Yoshida Seiji, *My War Crimes: the Forced Draft of Koreans*, Tokyo, 1983.<sup>11</sup>

Yet, use of the National General Mobilization Law for the recruitment of comfort women and the testimony of Seiji Yoshida, both listed as grounds for her premise, have been proven to be untrue. The report cites what is asserted to be historical background in forty-four paragraphs, including quotations from other reports; there are eleven purported evidentiary facts offered in support that are cited in footnotes. Of the eleven footnotes, the sources of ten are from G. Hicks, *Comfort Women: Sex Slaves of the Japanese Imperial Force* (Heinemann Asia, Singapore, 1995), and one is the Seiji Yoshida testimony. In addition, the G. Hicks book also relies on the Yoshida testimony as fact, demonstrating a low level of

<sup>11</sup> See E/CN.4/1996/53/Add.1., 4 January 1996, *Addendum Report of the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, its Causes and Consequences, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, in accordance with Commission on Human Rights Resolution 1994/45, Report on the Mission to the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea, the Republic of Korea and Japan on the Issue of Military Sexual Slavery in Wartime*, at Paragraph 29. <http://www.unhchr.ch/Huridocda/Huridoca.nsf/0/6ad5f3990967f3e802566d600575fcb?Opendocument>

verification and entirely failing to reflect the results of the research and debate in Japan.

Since 2007, resolutions seeking to place responsibility on the Japanese government for the comfort women issue have been adopted by the United States Congress, the European Union Parliament and others, but all of them used as their principal basis the Coomaraswamy Report, which ultimately was formed on the fictional assumption of forced recruitment of comfort women by government authorities.

Related to these disproved allegations, another unfounded rumor is circulating in some parts of the international community that Japanese military forces slaughtered numerous Korean comfort women in the immediate aftermath of the war.<sup>12</sup> This allegation is absolutely groundless. Had there been any such case, certainly it would have been prosecuted as a war crime by the Allied Forces, and yet there is not a single such case.

### **3. The “Kono Statement” Expanded International Misunderstanding.**

Third, the expression of apology to former comfort women in the 1993 statement of Chief Cabinet Minister Yohei Kono, followed by declarations of the same meaning by successive Japanese Prime Ministers, was an acknowledgement of moral responsibility based on current values. It was not an admission of “legal liability” within the framework of the wartime era in which prostitution was legal. However, chiefly because of the failure of the Japanese government and mass media to perform their

<sup>12</sup> House Resolution 121 (Comfort Women Resolution), adopted by the United States House of Representatives in 2007, includes in its statement of justification, “Whereas the ‘comfort women’ system of forced military prostitution by the Government of Japan, considered unprecedented in its cruelty and magnitude, included gang rape, forced abortions, humiliation, and sexual violence resulting in mutilation, death or eventual suicide in one of the largest cases of human trafficking in the 20th century.” In the quote, the words “mutilation” and “death” suggest a massacre by Japanese armed forces. Furthermore, South Korean cartoonists submitted a caricature of the Japanese military slaughtering comfort women to a cartoon exhibit held in France in January 2014.

responsibility to adequately inform the international community, the reality is that the misunderstanding spread further, as if the Japanese government had admitted the forceful recruitment of Koreans by government authorities.

Japanese government diplomacy on the comfort women issue has been a succession of failures. The issue was taken up in January 1992 at a summit meeting with South Korean President Roh Tae-woo upon the visit of Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa to South Korea. At that time, when Japanese and South Korean mass media widely reported Japan had not acknowledged its responsibility for government authorities' forceful recruitment of comfort women, Prime Minister Miyazawa apologized repeatedly for a total of eight times. One year later President Roh Tae-woo visited Japan and stated, "(the comfort women issue) actually was first brought up by representatives of the Japanese news media, thereby inflaming anti-Japanese sentiment among our people, infuriating them."<sup>13</sup>

These apologies are the origin of the misunderstanding. The reason they caused misunderstanding is as follows. The Japanese government issued statements of apology, but it did not acknowledge as fact the allegation that Koreans were forcefully recruited as comfort women by government authorities. Nevertheless, the apologies gave rise to the misunderstanding that forceful recruitment by government authorities had actually happened. As explained above, subsequent research and debate disproved the claim that Koreans had been forcefully recruited by government authorities to be comfort women. At the same time, the Japanese government did not make any effort to dispel the misunderstanding that its own apologies had created and furthered the misconception when Chief Cabinet Minister Yohei Kono issued his statement in August 1993. In point of fact, the South Korean government of the time conveyed its wishes that, if the Japanese government would

<sup>13</sup> See *Bungei Shunju*, the monthly magazine published by Bungei Shunju publishing company, March 1993 issue.

clearly express its remorse, the South Korean government intended to put an end to this issue; the Japanese government responded to the overture by issuing the Kono Statement. For this reason the document employed many ambiguous expressions rather than providing an orderly account of the facts.

Just before the release of the Kono Statement, the Japanese government conducted a series of investigatory hearings with former comfort women living in South Korea. The contents of the investigation were sequestered, but in 2013 the sloppiness of the investigation became apparent through the release of internal government documents. Testimony was taken from sixteen former comfort women during the investigation, but no effort was made to authenticate their testimony or question contradictory points. Among the sixteen interviewees, six individuals, or forty percent, said that they had been comfort women in areas that were not battlefields: two in Osaka and one in Kumamoto on the Japanese mainland and three who were in Japanese-administered Taiwan.<sup>14</sup>

Even now there are many observers who assume that the Japanese government acknowledged the forceful recruitment of comfort women when it issued the Kono Statement. However, this is erroneous. On the recruitment of comfort women, the statement says as follows:<sup>15</sup>

“The recruitment of comfort women was conducted mainly by private recruiters who acted in response to requests of the military. The Government study also 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

<sup>14</sup> See *Seiron*, a monthly magazine published by the *Sankei Shinbun*, December 2013 issue, in which is published nearly the full text of the report, *Kankoku-jin Ianfu Jūroku-nin Kara No Kikitori-chōsa Hōkoku* (Hearing Investigation Report on 16 South Korean Former Comfort Women), together with a detailed commentary by Tsutomu Nishioka.

<sup>15</sup> See *Statement by Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono on the results of the study on the issue of “comfort women”*: <http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/women/fund/state9308.html>

the recruitments. They were compelled to live at comfort stations under a coercive atmosphere.”

As to the origin of those comfort women who were transferred to the war areas, excluding those from Japan, those from the Korean Peninsula accounted for a large part. The Korean Peninsula was under Japanese rule in those days, and their recruitment, transfer, control, etc. were conducted generally against their will through coaxing, coercion, etc.”

In the case of women who were in the position of having to sell sex to soldiers even though it was not their intention, clearly they were made to do so “against their will.” The Kono Statement took a position with regard to these matters to express strong sympathy for these women although the cause for their recruitment was not force used by government authorities, but instead poverty, exacerbated by the intervention of private recruiters. That is the meaning of the part of the statement that reads, “The recruitment of comfort women was conducted mainly by private recruiters who acted in response to requests of the military.”

In the statement, the wording that “at times, administrative/military personnel directly took part in the recruitments” is the passage that most strongly invites misinterpretation. Japanese government officials in charge at the time, when asked about the meaning of this particular part of the statement, responded that it derives from a “war crimes” case in Indonesia where some Japanese Army units forced Dutch women in a prisoner-of-war camp to work in a brothel for some months.<sup>16</sup> After the war that incident was submitted to the War Crimes Tribunal conducted

<sup>16</sup> See *Rekishi Kyokasho E No Gimon* (Questions about History Textbooks), edited by the *Nihon No Zento To Rekishi Kyōka-sho O Kangaeru Wakate Giin No Kai* (Group of Young Diet Members to Think About Japan’s Future and Its History Education), Tendensha, 1997, pages 146-154, referring to the statement of Yoshinobu Higashi, Counselor, Division of External Affairs, Prime Minister’s Office, at a meeting of the Liberal Democratic Party’s (LDP) Group of Young Diet Members to Think About Japan’s Future and its History Education at LDP Headquarters in Tokyo.



by the Netherlands, at which the judgment was taken against certain Japanese military officers and civilians who were sentenced to death and executed. Examination of the quotes in the Kono Statement shows clearly that the expression “administrative/military personnel directly took part in the recruitments” was never used to refer to the paragraph on recruitment of comfort women on the Korean peninsula. Accordingly, in the statement the Japanese government did not acknowledge that “government authorities forcefully recruited Korean women as comfort women.” At the time, this misunderstanding had already begun to spread as a result of Prime Minister Miyazawa’s apologies. The Japanese government further contributed to the international community’s misunderstanding when it issued the Kono Statement with its vague and ambiguous expressions. On that point, the Japanese government’s responsibility is very great.

On the other hand, the part of the statement (below) that refers to moral responsibility for infringing upon women’s dignity has been and continues to be the position of the Japanese government since the statement was issued, including in the 2nd Abe Administration.

“This was an act, with the involvement of the military authorities of the day, that severely injured the honor and dignity of many women. The Government of Japan would like to take this opportunity once again to extend its sincere apologies and remorse to all those, irrespective of place of origin, who suffered immeasurable pain and incurable physical and psychological wounds as comfort women.”

The Japanese government should continue to strongly emphasize this aspect of its unchanged moral apology and sense of remorse while making an effort to correct the widespread international misunderstanding of other facts.

#### **4. Post-War Reparations Between Japan And South Korea Are Fully Resolved.**

After the independence of the Republic of Korea, the three successive governments of Syngman Rhee, Chang Myon and Park Chung-hee undertook the task of normalizing diplomatic relations with the clear objective of acquiring the maximum amount of reparations from Japan. Yet, in that process not once did they demand any reparations on account of comfort women. In that period, when there was still first-hand knowledge of this history, demanding reparations from the Japanese government on account of comfort women was not even considered. The 1965 Accords also stated that the post-war process between the two countries was a matter “completely and finally” resolved. (Agreement Between Japan and the Republic of Korea Concerning the Settlement of Problems in Regard to Property and Claims and Economic Cooperation (Article 2, Paragraph 1).

Based on the 1965 Accords, Japan provided South Korea with monetary compensation in the form of a grant of 300 million U.S. dollars, together with loan assistance in the amount of 200 million U.S. dollars. At the time, given that the total amount of Japan’s foreign reserves amounted to 1.8 billion U.S. dollars, 500 million U.S. dollars paid in equal installments over ten years was not a small amount.

According to the Reparations Rights White Paper published by the South Korean government, the 500 million U.S. dollars provided by Japan was calculated to have contributed 20% to South Korea’s economic growth over the “Miracle of the Han River” period from 1966 through 1975. The South Korean government used that money to build infrastructure such as highways, dams and ironworks and for such purposes as awards to independence movement activists of merit as well as scholarships for their children. Compensation was awarded to deceased victims who had

been drafted or volunteered for the military during the war, though no special reparations were made to survivors, including the wounded. In contrast to those who volunteered or were conscripted into the military, there were no reparations for comfort women who were hired by private recruiters. This policy judgment was entirely that of the South Korean government. It was the philosophy of the Park Chung-hee government at the time that, since the entire nation had suffered from the injury of colonial rule, the majority of funds received from Japan should be used for the production of assets that would benefit the nation as a whole.

President Roh Tae-woo raised the issue of comfort women at the 1992 Japan-South Korea summit meeting at which Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa responded from a humanitarian standpoint with an apology; the following year in 1993 Chief Cabinet Minister Yohei Kono issued a statement confirming the government's apology. Thereon the Japanese government, taking responsibility for administration costs, raised donations from the Japanese public of approximately 700 million Japanese yen (5.7 million U.S. dollars) for distribution to former comfort women. Yet, after being informed, some of the South Korean former comfort women rejected the monetary offering and have continued to demand that the Japanese government give them an official apology together with reparations from government funds.

The number of former comfort women registered with the South Korean government is 237, out of which there are 55 survivors as of February 2014. Of those who are registered, 61 women have accepted reparations from the Japanese public-private partnership Asian Women's Fund and were acknowledged with letters of apology from successive Japanese prime ministers.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> See the *Sankei Shinbun*, February 10, 2014 edition, newspaper column by Katsuhiro Kuroda.

## Digest

It is a fact that a large number of Korean women along with Japanese women suffered greatly as a consequence of becoming comfort women during the war era, yet there are also many common false allegations about this issue. This essay has taken advantage of the objectivity enabled by twenty-two years of substantive research and debate to distinguish the facts from the falsehoods and further international understanding of the issue.

### **1. The Allegation That Comfort Women Were Forcibly Recruited By Government Authorities Is Not True.**

There were no instances in which Korean women were forcibly recruited by government authorities to become comfort women.

Throughout the 1980's, the theory that government authorities engaged in the forced abduction of comfort women was prevalent in academia and the mass media in Japan as well as in South Korea. However, since 1992 this has been a diplomatic issue, prompting bona fide research into the facts and a widespread debate. As a consequence of the research, the dominant opinion in Japan as well as among some segments of South Korean academia has become the realization that "there are no instances where Korean women were forced to become comfort women by public officials."

The grounds proffered in support of the false allegations for years relied on the "testimony" by a person named Seiji Yoshida, who said, "I conducted the forceful recruitment of comfort women like a slave hunt on South Korea's Jeju Island based on orders from the Army to recruit Vol-

unteer Corps members.” However, as the investigation proceeded, it was revealed that there was absolutely no evidence or other testimony to support his claims.

## **2. The International Community’s Erroneous Recognition Has Not Yet Been Expunged.**

The international community has not taken note of the research and debate on this issue, including the conclusion that “there were no instances of forced recruitment of Korean women as comfort women by government authorities.” At the same time the clearly discredited allegation that “government authorities forcefully abducted comfort women” is still widely believed in the international community, and thus the issue has become distorted.

Unfortunately, the misunderstanding in the international community was heightened by the Coomaraswamy Report, submitted to the United Nations Human Rights Commission in 1996. As evidence, the report relied upon the testimony of Seiji Yoshida, which had already been proven to be false. Subsequently, resolutions seeking to place responsibility on the Japanese government for the comfort women issue were adopted by the United States Congress, the European Parliament and others, all of which relied on the flawed Coomaraswamy Report as their basis.

## **3. The “Kono Statement” Expanded International Misunderstanding.**

The expression of apology to former comfort women in the 1993 statement of Chief Cabinet Minister Yohei Kono, followed by declarations of the same meaning by successive Japanese Prime Ministers, was an acknowledgment of moral responsibility based on current values.

Even now, there are many observers who wrongly assume that the Japanese government acknowledged the forceful recruitment of comfort women by government authorities in the statement. The section of the Kono Statement that most strongly invites this misinterpretation is the clause, “at times, administrative/military personnel directly took part in the recruitments.” This clause exclusively refers to a specific war crimes case in Indonesia where some Japanese Army units forced female Dutch prisoners of war to work in a brothel.

In contrast, the part of the statement that refers to Japan’s moral responsibility for infringing upon women’s dignity applies to all women. It has been and continues to be the unchanging position of successive Japanese governments, including the current 2nd Abe Administration.

#### **4. Post-War Reparations Between Japan And South Korea Are Fully Resolved.**

Since its independence and establishment as the Republic of Korea, no South Korean government has ever demanded reparations for comfort women in its diplomatic negotiations with Japan. The 1965 Accords negotiated by the two countries state that the post-war process between Japan and South Korea is a matter “completely and finally” resolved. As a consequence, Japan provided South Korea with compensation in the form of a grant of 300 million U.S. dollars, together with loan assistance in the amount of 200 million U.S. dollars. The 500 million U.S. dollar fund provided by Japan contributed to 20% of South Korea’s economic growth over the period 1966 and 1975.

In 1995, the Asian Women’s Fund was created, with management and administrative expenses paid by the Japanese government. It raised 700 million Japanese yen from the Japanese public (equivalent to 500 million U.S. dollars), which was offered to former comfort women. Of the 237 former comfort women registered with the South Korean govern-

ment, 61 accepted and received reparations from the Fund together with letters of consolation and apology from successive Japanese Prime Ministers.

## About The Author

TSUTOMU NISHIOKA is a professor at Tokyo Christian University, where he has taught since 1991. He is a scholar specializing in Korean peninsula studies, for which he developed a passion early in his education. He was an exchange student at Yonsei University in the International Division (1977-78) during undergraduate studies at Tokyo International Christian University (BA, 1979). While completing his Master Degree in Area Studies at Tsukuba University (MA, 1983), he was selected as a Foreign Ministry Research Fellow for which he was assigned to the Embassy of Japan in Seoul, South Korea, from 1982-84. He is known for his research and prolific writing on contemporary Korean issues and served as the Editor in Chief of the foreign affairs journal *Gendai Koria* (Today's Korea) from 1990-2000. Among his many books, the following relate closely to his most recent examination of South Korean-Japanese history and the comfort women issue: *Nikkan Gokai No Shin'en* (The Abyss of Japan-South Korean Misunderstanding), Aki Shobo (1992); *Koria Tabū O Toku* (Solving the Korea Taboo), Aki Shobo (2007); *Yami Ni Idomu: Rachi, Kiga, Ianfu, Han-Nichi O Dō Haaku Suru Ka* (Deciphering the Darkness: Abductions, Starvation, Comfort Women and the Anti-Japan Movement), Tokuma Shoten (1998-99); *Nikkan "Rekishi Mondai" No Shinjitsu* (The Truth About the Japan-South Korea History Issue), PHP Research Institute (2005); *Yoku Wakaru Ianfu Mondai :Zōho Shimpan* (The Comfort Women Issue Decoded, Revised Edition), Soshisha (2012).