

JAPANESE SCHOLARS' POSITION ON RESPONSE TO STATEMENT ISSUED BY  
AMERICAN SCHOLARS  
(Opening Address)

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My name is Watanabe Toshio. I am one of the organizers of today's event.

In May of this year a statement concerning the so-called comfort women was published; it was signed by 187 American scholars. I was astonished to see the names of Ronald Dore and Ezra Vogel in the list of signers, as they are distinguished scholars who have had significant influence on Japan's intellectuals.

I have read the statement in question and noticed that it makes claims that absolutely must be challenged. It is my hope to improve mutual understanding between Japan and the United States. To that end, I will limit my discussion to two points at issue.

First, the statement contains the following language: "Among the many instances of wartime sexual violence and military prostitution in the twentieth century, the 'comfort women' system was distinguished by its large scale and systematic management under the military, and by its exploitation of young, poor, and vulnerable women in areas colonized or occupied by Japan."

Because it is an attack on a nation's history, an accusation like this one must be based on scrupulous verification of the facts. Is this statement the product of such an effort? The fruits of meticulous research into the comfort-women system done by Japanese scholars prove that the assertions made by the Americans will not stand up to scrutiny.

The statement enters the realm of obsession when it chastises Japanese researchers for using "legalistic arguments focused on particular terms or isolated documents to challenge the victims' testimony." It urges us to abandon this approach, and instead focus our efforts on leaving "as full and unbiased an accounting of past wrongs as possible."

We, on the other hand, embrace a value system rooted in the belief that the truth exists only in facts. We search for historical resources and testimony to the extent possible. They may be limited, but when we examine them in detail and accumulate a body of verified facts, then — and only then — can we arrive at the unvarnished truth. In other words, we are advocates of historical positivism.

Through painstaking efforts on the part of Japanese researchers, we now know the truth about the comfort women. Today the great majority of Japanese are aware of the results of that research and have come to terms with it. Professor Nishioka Tsutomu will address this topic later today. In any event, the allegation that Japanese military authorities forced 200,000 Korean women into sexual slavery, and then slaughtered most of them after the war is patently untrue.

In the world of Japanese journalism, the *Asahi Shimbun* has for many years been publishing articles maintaining that Japanese military personnel abducted Korean women and compelled them to serve as comfort women. However, even the *Asahi Shimbun* published an article in August 2014 admitting that its statements about abduction and coercion were erroneous, and retracting all previous articles on the subject. The Americans' contention that the comfort-women system stands out "[a]mong the many instances of wartime sexual violence and military prostitution in the twentieth century" is extremely inappropriate, flying in the face of sound research as it does.

It is most unfortunate that the notion that comfort women were forcibly recruited has become conventional wisdom in the Western world. American history textbooks, which are used by young people at a suggestible age, contain appallingly brazen statements such as:

"The Japanese army forcibly recruited, conscripted, and dragooned as many as two hundred thousand women ... to serve in military brothels ... ."

"The army presented the women as a gift from the emperor ... ."

and

"At the end of the war, soldiers massacred large numbers of comfort women to cover up the operation."

There is no factual basis for any of these insulting accounts.

Precisely because they are scholars, and because they exert a powerful influence on society, I urge American scholars to turn their attention to the empirical research conducted by members of Japan's academic community, and then to do everything in their power to dispel the misconceptions that have arisen from false reports like those in the aforementioned textbook.

The second issue I would like to raise concerns the portion of the statement that praises Japan for its postwar history of democracy. Unfortunately, the next sentence reads as follows:

"Yet problems of historical interpretation pose an impediment to celebrating these achievements."

I object to the arrogance of this particular remark, which demonstrates a complete lack of tolerance for differences of “historical interpretation” between nations or ethnic groups.

Today’s date, August 6, marks the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the day the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, killing 140,000 noncombatants. Three days later, on August 9, another atomic bomb claimed 74,000 innocent victims, this time in Nagasaki. Earlier in 1945, on March 10, more than 100,000 Japanese citizens burned to death during the firebombing of Tokyo. These events have been validated as undeniable fact. However, there is a difference between the way they are perceived in Japan and in the US. We believe in tolerance for diverging interpretations of historical events that have been substantiated. But if the Americans insist on our adopting their interpretations of historical events, which have not been substantiated, we have no hope of forging healthy international relations.

Furthermore, we are convinced that the report issued by the UN Commission on Human Rights (commonly known as the Coomaraswamy Report) in 1996, the resolution condemning the comfort-women system issued by the US House of Representatives in 2007 and other, similar publications are nothing more than attempts to inculcate a specific, unsubstantiated historical interpretation.

We appeal to all principled Japanese scholars who believe that the truth lies in the facts, and only in the facts, to join us in our protest against the statement issued by the American scholars, and urge you to support our position.