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# **Japan Should Set an Example for South Korea and US by Making an Apology to Comfort Women**

By KATO Akira

The Asahi Shimbun retracted its "at least sixteen articles" (The Sankei Shimbun on 7 Aug., 2014) of the past, reflecting a conclusion that the series of testimony of YOSHIDA Seiji regarding the "forcible taking away of comfort women" was entirely fallacious. The retracted articles are not specified. It is not just one or two articles. "At least sixteen articles" have been retracted all of a lump.

It is truly an unprecedented scandal of a fatal kind for a news media. Besides, it is not only the Asahi that is to be questioned. All the documents citing the Asahi articles including comments, articles, books and the advisory report of the UN have lost their credibility. The Asahi undeniably carries grave responsibility.

In today's international community, whether there had been forcible taking away or not regarding the comfort women issue is not being questioned. The comfort women had been forced in a status of "slave labor" as they had been deprived of "freedom to choose where to live, to go out, to close a business, and to refuse to give service to unwelcome customers" even partially. And the comfort women system including the public prostitution was virtually a system based on "human trafficking." Regarding these two points, the comfort women system is being questioned as a matter of human-rights issue especially of women.

Incidentally, the Asahi wrote that "the fundamental question is that the comfort women were deprived of freedom and their dignities was impaired considerably." Truly so. It also wrote that "In the 1990s, rape cases by militia during the Bosnian War attracted international attention. The question of wartime sexual violence against women is treated in the context of women's human-rights today." No objection. Then, the Asahi should have raised a question of comfort women in the context of women's human-rights, instead of "forcible taking away" by the Japanese military,

which is only uniquely applicable to the Japanese case. It is Asahi's now-familiar switching the focus of argument.

When it comes to women's human-rights, there is no need to bring up cases of the Bosnian War. South Korea and the U.S. respectively had similar problems during the Korean War and the Vietnam War. In June 2014, former Korean Military Comfort Women, who had been forced to work in brothels called "Camp Towns" to serve the U.S. military then stationed in South Korea during the Korean War, filed a damage suit against the South Korean government on the charge of establishing a managed prostitution system in which oppressive working conditions were compelled. It is the very same foundation for which the comfort women are making a compensation claim against Japan. Namely, "slave labor," "human trafficking," "wartime sexual violence against women," and "women's human-rights issue."

Whether there was forcible taking away or not was not at issue. With regard to the issue of Korean Military Comfort Women, it is not only the PARK Geun-hye administration that is accused. The U.S. government is also to blame. The South Korean and the U.S. military, which resorted to "sexual violence against women," thereby infringing "women's human-rights" during not only the Korean War but also the Vietnam War, must accept responsibility and make an apology more than Japan.

Now that the Asahi has admitted that its past articles on forcible taking away of comfort women have been false, the Japanese government may acknowledge that the false accusation or criticism against the Japanese military and the Japanese nationals on the charge of slave hunting by the Japanese military have been dropped. Then it should, albeit belatedly, take a step forward to make an apology to the comfort women, who were then "Japanese nationals," for having failed to exercise control over "slave labor" and "human trafficking" from a viewpoint of "women's human-rights," thereby setting an example for the South Korean government and the Obama administration in terms of making an apology to Korean Military Comfort Women. It should show to the world that Japan is a great advocate of human rights.

And the Abe administration should work on those South Koreans, Korean Americans, women's human-rights activist in the U.S. and especially the UN Human Rights Council, who voice criticism against the Japanese government on the charge of the comfort women issue, to encourage the South Korean and the U.S. governments to make an apology to Korean Military Comfort Women. Also, the Asahi Shimbun should at least take its responsibility by embarking on a campaign to call on the South Korean and the U.S. governments to protect women's human-rights from a viewpoint of "women's human-rights."

(This is an English translation of the article written by Mr. KATO Akira, Professor of J. F. Oberlin University, which originally appeared on the e-forum “Hyakka-Somei” of CEAC on August 23, 2014.)