

Japan Should Organize Rebuttal to Comfort Women Allegation

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The comfort woman issue has surged again since last year. This is the fourth time for the issue to surge. In the first incident, the Asahi Shimbun in 1991 erroneously reported traded Korean women prostitutes as “women seized forcibly for a volunteer corps.” This erroneous report led to then Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono’s 1993 statement that effectively admitted the Japanese military’s “forcible seizure” of comfort women. In the second incident, all authorized history textbooks for junior high schools included the forcible seizure of comfort women, which came under fire among some experts and lawmakers as representing misinterpretation of facts. Then, a great nationwide debate was seen on the matter. In the third incident, the U.S. House of Representatives passed an anti-Japan resolution describing comfort women as “sex slaves” in 2007.

Last August, South Korea’s Constitutional Court ruled Seoul government’s failure to demand compensation for comfort women as unconstitutional. In December, a statute of a comfort woman was placed in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul. At his talks with Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda in the same month, South Korean President Lee Myung-bak repeatedly took up the issue. A group of U.S.-based South Koreans is still promoting a movement to place comfort woman statues throughout the United States.

The situation deteriorated on an apology

The groundless anti-Japan propaganda that “the Japanese military drafted 200,000 Korean women as sex slaves during wartime” is still prevalent in the world. Essentially, the comfort women issue is not a debate about facts. It represents a campaign conspired by a North Korean spy agency, South Korean groups close to the agency and anti-Japan activists in Japan to worsen Japan-South Korea relations. Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which has failed to address the essential point and easily concluded that a faithful apology would be a solution, is primarily responsible for leading to the present situation.

The great 1996-97 debate, in which I myself participated positively, ended with a conclusion that there had been no government-authorized forcible seizure of comfort women. Before the debate ended, however, anti-Japan groups in Japan and South Korea brought the issue to the United Nations. The first person who used the word “sex slaves” at the United Nations was surprisingly Japanese lawyer Etsuro Totsuka. As a result of the anti-Japan groups’ unforgiving lobbying, the U.N. Human Rights Commission adopted a wartime sex slavery report, called “Coomaraswamy Report.” This report was a fake based on Seiji Yoshida’s testimony that even leftist scholars described as false.

MoFA succumbed to the international conspiracy

Just before the Coomaraswamy Report was adopted, MOFA submitted a 40-page rebuttal to the sex slavery allegation at the commission. But it suddenly withdrew the rebuttal document and presented a written explanation that refrained from discussing facts and pointed to Japan’s past apology. Since then, MOFA has never made any rebuttal looking into facts. In response to the U.S. House resolution, the comfort woman statute incident and South Korean President Lee’s demand for compensation, MOFA has failed to make an argument that there had been no government-authorized forcible seizure of Korean women.

An organized response is indispensable for defending Japan’s honor from the international conspiracy. The Japanese government should create a prime minister-controlled task force and a cabinet minister for such response outside MOFA. In this respect, I would like to propose that the government first create a panel of experts on the issue and that the Diet exercise its investigative power to look into MOFA’s withdrawal of the rebuttal document in 1996.

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