

The "History Wars" and the "Comfort Woman" Issue: Revisionism and the Right-wing in Contemporary Japan, U.S., and Canada

Nov 21, 2019 | 7pm - 9pm
Room 120, C.K. Choi Building

Abstract

An issue of intense controversy currently in Japan is “comfort women,” with many in the right wing relentlessly attacking the accepted historical narrative and denying that there was any government involvement in, or corresponding responsibility for, a system of sexual slavery. Right-wing media and intellectuals have begun to use the term “history wars” to refer to this development. They have criticized the “comfort woman” monuments, resolutions, museum exhibits, and coverage of “comfort women” in history textbooks and curriculum in the U.S.. In particular, as “comfort woman” monuments and statues have been built in various locations in the world, including the U.S., during the last decade, they have become the target of attacks from the Japanese government and Japanese right-wingers. They consider the United States to be the major “battleground” on the “comfort woman” issue, along with the United Nations.

Based on Dr. Yamaguchi’s anthropological fieldwork on Japanese right-wing activities in the U.S. and Japan, as well as the experiences of people involved in the making of the “comfort women” memorials in the U.S., Dr. Yamaguchi will demonstrate how this issue functions as an important rallying point to tie together disparate right-wing forces in and outside Japan. Dr. Yamaguchi will also highlight how the acts of remembering and commemorating the survivors’ experiences of wartime violence against women become such a contentious, political issue, mobilizing the Japanese right-wing so intensively and emotionally both in Japan and the United States.

Following Dr. Yamaguchi’s talk, Satoko Oka Norimatsu, Yamaguchi’s fellow *Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* editor and a Vancouver-based author, will introduce the “history wars” in Canada in 2015 over the plan to build a “comfort women” statue in Burnaby, and in 2018 over the movement to establish a Nanjing Massacre Commemorative Day in Canada.



Tomomi Yamaguchi is an associate professor of Anthropology and the director of the Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies program at Montana State University. Yamaguchi earned a Ph.D. in Anthropology from the University of Michigan in 2004, and she currently serves as an editor of the *Asia-Pacific Journal*, Japan Focus. Her research interests are feminism and right-wing movements in contemporary Japan. She is a co-author (with Nogawa Motokazu, Tessa Morris-Suzuki and Emi Koyama) of *Umi o Wataru Ianfu Mondai: Uha no Rekishisen o Tou* [The “Comfort Women” Issue Goes Overseas: Questioning the Right-wing “History Wars”], Iwanami Shoten, 2016, and her latest article is “Revisionism, Ultrnationalism, Sexism: Relations Between the Far Right and the Establishment Over the ‘Comfort Women’ Issue”. *Social Science Japan Journal*, Vol. 21, Issue 2, 2018: 219-238.



Satoko Oka Norimatsu is Editor of the *Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, and Director of the Peace Philosophy Centre. She writes and speaks on topics such as historical memory, war responsibilities, U.S. military bases, and nuclear issues mostly in the Asia-Pacific region. She is co-author (with Gavan McCormack) of *Resistant Islands: Okinawa Confronts Japan and the United States*, 2nd Edition, Rowman and Littlefield, 2018, and editor/author of *Okinawa wa Koritsu Shite Inai* [Okinawa Is Not Alone], Kinyobi, 2018.