

Editorial Japanese nationalists attempt to revise history on 'comfort women'



Former comfort woman Yong-Soo Lee. (Los Angeles Times)

By **THE TIMES EDITORIAL BOARD**

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Among the many horrors of World War II was the Japanese military's peculiar system of sexual slavery, in which women (mostly Korean) were kidnapped or otherwise conscripted to provide sex for Japanese troops as they invaded their way around Asia and the Pacific. Now, some right-wing nationalists in Japan are trying to persuade the world that it never happened.

This is nonsense. The historical record is clear about the "comfort women," as are the memories of the women themselves who were forced into a system of sexual slavery. But the truth is apparently not an obstacle for Japan's nationalists, who are in the midst of a campaign to obliterate memory of Japan's atrocities and its war-mongering role in Asia in the 1930s and early 1940s. Bizarrely, the campaign has even led former Prime Minister **Yasuhiro Nakasone** to disavow part of his 1978 memoir in which he wrote that, as an army lieutenant, he created "comfort stations" — the euphemism for military brothels — to entertain his troops. More recently, he said that he set up

recreation centers where his men could play board games.

Now the nonsense has reached new levels of absurdity. Nationalist revisionists have attacked The Asahi newspaper and one of its **former reporters** who was among the first to bring the sexual slavery to light. Seizing on fabrications from a single source in a series of stories more than 20 years ago, the critics are arguing that Asahi alone was responsible for leading the world to believe a falsehood about Japan's wartime behavior — an analysis that ignores the volumes of testimonies from the women themselves. Revisionists have also asked Radhika Coomaraswamy, the author of a 1996 United Nations Commission on Human Rights report to **retroactively change her findings**. She has refused. Here in California, a similar impulse sparked an outcry and a lawsuit seeking removal of a Glendale statue memorializing the comfort women; the plaintiffs are appealing a district court ruling preserving the statue.

These grotesque efforts at whitewashing history mirror Prime Minister **Shinzo Abe's** efforts to reconfigure Japan's past, including removing from textbooks references to the forced suicides of Okinawans ahead of the Allied surge that wrested control of the island from the Japanese. Ultimately, Abe is trying to move Japan beyond its wartime legacy, including reinterpreting its pacifist postwar constitution to allow for a stronger military and to position Japan as a competitor with China as a Pacific power.

Setting aside speculation about Abe's ultimate goals, these acts of historical dishonesty are cynical efforts to obscure unpleasant realities. National leaders owe it to their people, and to the world, not to play games with history.

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