

## Journalist Who Broke Comfort Women Story Files 16.5 million Yen Libel Suit Against Bungei Shunju: Uemura Takashi's Speech to the Press 先駆的「慰安婦」報道の元朝日記者・植村氏、文藝春秋など名誉毀損で提訴 1650万円損害賠償請求

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### Uemura Takashi's speech to the press

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Uemura at the FCCJ

Thank you all for coming to this press conference today in spite of your busy schedules. Today, I have decided to bring a libel suit in order to defend my human rights, the rights of my family and friends, and to protect the safety of my employer, Hokusei Gakuen University. The defendants are two, the Bungei Shunju Company, which publishes the *Shukan Bunshun*, and Mr. Tsutomu Nishioka, professor at the Tokyo Christian University, who has, without justification, labeled my articles "fabrications."

Twenty-four years ago, in 1991, when I was a reporter in the city news department of the

Osaka *Asahi Shimbun*, I wrote two bylined articles on the painful experiences of an elderly "comfort woman." They are dated August 11, 1991, and December 25, 1991. Because of these two articles, I have been subjected to prolonged bashing.

One year ago, an article targeting me for abuse was published in the February 6 issue of *Shukan Bunshun*. The headline read "Asahi reporter, 'fabricator of comfort women,' to become professor at exclusive women's college." It carries a comment by Mr. Nishioka about my August 1991 article to the effect that "He writes the article as if there had been forcible removal (*kyosei renko*), and it would not be an exaggeration to call it a fabrication." But in the body of my article, it is clearly written, "She was tricked into becoming a comfort woman." I have not written any articles suggesting that there had been forcible removal. Without ever referring to the statement that "She was tricked into becoming a comfort woman," Mr. Nishioka brands my article a "fabrication."

In the lead to my article, I had written, "One of those taken off to the battlefields in the name of the women's volunteer corps." In those days, comfort women were referred to as "volunteer women's corps" in South Korea. In the April

1992 issue of *Bungei Shunju*, Mr. Nishioka criticized this as a "gravely erroneous assumption of the facts." I was not, however, alone in this. At the time, reporters from other Japanese newspapers also wrote their articles on the comfort woman issue using this expression.

In an April 1992 *Bungei Shunju* article, Mr. Nishioka wrote, "Not just the *Asahi*, but all Japanese newspapers have failed to describe the process of Ms. Kim's removal in detail. As a consequence, the great majority of Japanese have ended up believing that it was the Japanese authorities of the time, who wielded their power and violently forced Ms. Kim into becoming a comfort woman."

Subsequently, however, I began to be singled out for targeting. From about 1998, my articles were framed as "fabrications," and the attacks intensified. The assessment of my 1991 articles had changed. The February 6, 2014 article is part of that trajectory. And I have been turned into a "reporter of fabrications" by Mr. Nishioka and *Shukan Bunshun*.

At the time, I was the Hakodate Bureau Chief of the *Asahi*. Born on April 28, 1958, I was 55 years old. A career change, of employment at the Kobe Shoin Women's University, had already been set for my "life after retirement." The article, however, led to the unleashing of a flood of protest phone calls and emails to the university. The university authorities demanded a de facto withdrawal of my acceptance of the position. Thinking that "the university, too, was a victim," I settled out of court and agreed to cancel the contract in early March.

It turns out that a *Shukan Bunshun* reporter had sent Shoin University a letter of inquiry to the following effect: "Many researchers and members of the media have specified that this article contains serious errors as well as intentional fabrications and has badly damaged the international reputation of Japan. Did your university take these matters into consideration in deciding to employ him?"

I took early retirement from the *Asahi Shimbun* at the end of March. The only work left to me is the adjunct lectureship at Hokusei Gakuen University in Sapporo that I have held since April 2012. I am responsible for two classes, once a week. The "special course on international exchanges" is designed for international students. I use newspapers to teach about Japan, and I also have experience-based classes in which we listen to music and look at artworks with student presentations.

After the May holidays, however, Hokusei, too, began to receive numerous protest calls and emails, culminating in the receipt of a letter with threats. Postcards with such messages as "Get out of this school get out of Japan you traitor" were addressed to me, care of the school.

Even my family began to be targeted. My daughter's photo was posted on the Internet, with the words, "We've got no choice but to go after her till she commits suicide." Even a seventeen-year-old, my daughter who was not even born when the articles were written, has been swept in. I am bitterly frustrated.

Moreover, one of my son's high-school classmates was mistaken for him and targeted

for abuse on the Internet. The persistence of such an abnormal state-of-affairs made for a very difficult period.

It was at such a time as this that the same reporter from *Shukan Bunshun*, after interviewing Hokusei Gakuen, wrote another article attacking me. He had sent a letter of inquiry asking, "Important errors have been pointed out in his articles on comfort women. Do you find that there is no question about his appropriateness as a college instructor?" I am overwhelmed by the sensation of being targeted and picked off.

On August 5, in its special feature on the comfort woman issue, the *Asahi* refuted the charge of fabrication, pronouncing that there "had been no distortion of the facts" in my articles. I had hoped that this article would restore my reputation, but in fact, the opposite proved to be the case. Fierce bashing of the *Asahi* began, and my own bashing only intensified. Reporters from photo magazines and weeklies began coming to my house and published photos taken without permission. They started prying neighbors for information, as if I were a criminal.

In September, in the midst of these trying circumstances, a movement was started up to express support for Hokusei Gakuen University. In October, the "Don't Give in, Hokusei! Group" was established. Lawyers from all over the country came together to file a complaint charging that the threatening letters constituted obstruction of business, and there was a groundswell of support for the movement to "protect Hokusei." And on December 17, Hokusei made public the decision to renew my contract in the new school year. I believe it is a courageous decision. A small university of the

north demonstrated that it would not surrender to threats.

On December 10, 2014, I myself published a rebuttal of the "fabrication reporting" in the January (2015) issue of *Bungei Shunju*. I will also be publishing pieces written from different angles for the February issues of the monthly *Sekai* and monthly *Tsukuru*.

On December 22, the *Asahi's* third-party investigative panel published its report on the paper's reporting on comfort women. The report clearly refutes the charge of fabrication with regard to my articles. To be sure, it presents some qualifications about how the articles were written, but I would like to reiterate that the other papers were reporting similarly at the time.

As a media person, I would like to continue to demonstrate the fact that I am not a "reporter of fabrications." Nevertheless, the abuse targeting my family and the attacks against my university are clearly criminal acts, acts of "terrorism against expression." I believe that *Shukan Bunshun's* articles and Mr. Nishioka's statements had the effect of triggering acts of "terrorism" against the freedom of expression of the university and others. For this reason, I have concluded that the two parties who called me a "reporter of fabrications" should be held legally responsible.

I would also like to demonstrate before the judiciary that I am not a "reporter of fabrications." And I believe that to have it be widely recognized by society that Hokusei Gakuen is not employing a "reporter of fabrications" is a way to strengthen security at

that university.

I am not a 'reporter of fabrications.' I will not yield before unjustified bashing.

By being labeled a "reporter of fabrications," my new life that was to be was wildly derailed. I intend to fight towards the recovery of my reputation and the restoration of that life.

For additional background on Uemura, please see Uemura's essay (introduction by Tomomi Yamaguchi) Labeled a Reporter Who Fabricated the "Comfort Woman" Issue: A Rebuttal (<https://apjff.org/-Uemura-Takashi/4249>)