

The Impact of “Comfort Woman” Revisionism on the Academy, the Press, and the Individual: Symposium on the U.S. Tour of Uemura Takashi

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This article is the first of a five-part symposium on the U.S. tour of Uemura Takashi, former Asahi reporter and current part-time university lecturer, from late April to early May, 2015. (See parts [two](#), [three](#), [four](#) and [five](#) here).

Just as faculty and students at Central Washington University were preparing to respond to the screening of Taniyama Yujiro’s denialist film, *The Scottsboro Girls*, dedicated to the proposition that the Japanese military “comfort women” were not sex slaves,¹ and just as Prime Minister Abe was in Washington DC preparing to [address both houses of Congress](#) where he would precisely *not* address the “comfort woman” issue, former *Asahi* reporter Uemura Takashi arrived in Chicago to embark on a speaking tour at six universities (the University of Chicago, DePaul University, Marquette University, New York University, Princeton University and UCLA).² As recounted in his first extensive response to his attackers ([translated on this site](#)), over the last year Uemura and his family have been hounded for two pioneering articles he wrote twenty-four years ago as the first former Korean “comfort woman,” Kim Hak-sun, was preparing to go public. The attacks against Uemura, which of course must be understood as a virulent form of “comfort woman” denialism, targeted both the newspaper where he worked for over thirty years, the *Asahi*, long hated by the Japanese right, and academic freedom (see [Hokusei University Support Group’s statement on this site](#)). Rightist threats have robbed Uemura of a full-time teaching position at one institution and threaten even his two-course lectureship at

another. That Uemura addressed these issues as part of his personal narrative, in other words, effecting the individualization of a social issue and the socialization of an individual struggle, proved to be effective in reaching audiences that differed enormously in their degree of familiarity with the “comfort woman” issue.

Controversy followed Uemura to the U.S., as indicated in his [“Chronicle of My American Journey,”](#) the fifth and final essay in this series. In preparing to receive him, his hosts had to weigh the risks of publicity, including personal risk, against the value of open—and civil—discussion. As with Central Washington University’s [Mark Auslander-Chong Eun Ahn’s essay](#), the contributors to this symposium refer to the pedagogical implications of their decisions to host Uemura. Eunah Lee (philosophy), Tom Looser (anthropology), and Katsuya Hirano (history) reflect on their own and their institutional experiences of hosting a speaker who was the subject of heated controversy in Japan, controversy that followed him to these shores. It is important to keep in mind their locations (Milwaukee, New York City, and Los Angeles, respectively) as well in reading their accounts. Uemura’s reflections, written in Japan after his return, provide an overview of the events, drawing them together and offering a glimpse into how they were experienced.

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Her books include *In the Realm of a Dying Emperor*. She is an editor (with Heather Bowen-Struyk), of the forthcoming *For Dignity, Justice, and Revolution: An Anthology of Japanese Proletarian Literature* (University of Chicago Press, 2015). She is co-translator of the 2015 ebook *Fukushima Radiation: Will You Still Say No Crime Was Committed: Statements by 50 Complainants for Criminal Prosecution of the Fukushima Nuclear Disaster*.

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Related Articles

Mark Auslander and Chong Eun Ahn, [Responding to the “Comfort Woman” Denial at Central Washington University](#).

Norma Field and Tomomi Yamaguchi, [“Comfort Woman” Revisionism Comes to the U.S.: Symposium on the Revisionist Film Screening Event at Central Washington University](#).

Emi Koyama, [The U.S. as “Major Battleground” for “Comfort Woman” Issue](#).

David McNeill and Justin McCurry, [Sink the Asahi: The “Comfort Women” Controversy and Neo-nationalist Attack](#).

Gavan McCormack, [Striving for Normalization: Japan-Korea Civic Cooperation and the Attempt to Resolve the “Comfort Women” Problem](#).

Tessa Morris-Suzuki, [“You Don’t Want to Know about the Girls?”: The “Comfort Women,” the Japanese Military and Allied Forces in the Asia-Pacific War](#).

Nishino Rumiko and Nogawa Motokazu. [The Japanese State’s New Assault on the Victims of Wartime Sexual Slavery](#).

Yoshiko Nozaki, [The “Comfort Women” Controversy: History and Testimony](#).

Uemura Takashi, [Labeled the “Reporter Who Fabricated” the Comfort Woman Issue: A Rebuttal](#).

Yoshikata Veki, [“Comfort Women” Denial and the Japanese Right](#).

Yoshimi Yoshiaki, [Reexamining the “Comfort Women” Issue](#).

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Notes

¹ See Mark Auslander And Chong Eun Ahn, [“Responding to Comfort-Woman Denial at Central Washington University.”](#)

² The events at Marquette, NYU, and UCLA were public, taking the form of a symposium at Marquette and public lectures at NYU and UCLA. The events at the University of Chicago and Princeton were closed. At DePaul, Uemura spoke to undergraduate classes, as he recounts in his “Chronicle.” This symposium features the contributions of the hosts of the public events.