



# THE “HISTORY WARS” AND THE “COMFORT WOMEN” ISSUE

Revisionism and the Right-wing in Contemporary Japan and the U.S.

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In current-day Japan, “comfort women” continue to be an issue of intense controversy, with many on the Right 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, and Japanese revisionists now consider the United States and the United Nations to be major “battlefields” of the “comfort woman” issue. They have criticized “comfort woman” monuments and statues, resolutions, museum exhibits, and coverage of “comfort women” in history textbooks and curricula in the U.S. In particular, the statue in Glendale, California, built in 2013, led Japanese right-wingers to pursue multiple lawsuits both in Japan and the U.S., and the statue in San Francisco, built last year, drew not only intense critique from the Japanese government, but also the cancellation of the sister city relationship between San Francisco and the City of Osaka.

Based on my 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., I will demonstrate how this issue functions as an important rallying point to tie together disparate right-wing elements, including the Abe government. I will also highlight how the acts of remembering and commemorating the survivors’ experiences of wartime violence against women become such a contentious, political issue capable of intensely and emotionally mobilizing the Japanese right-wing on both sides of the Pacific.



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