



YOSHIDA'S TESTIMONY / Used by ROK as 'proof'



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The Yomiuri Shimbun

Summary of Asahi article

The Asahi cited testimony by Seiji Yoshida, now deceased, at least 16 times as strong evidence that comfort women were forcibly taken away. The first article appeared on Sept. 2, 1982, in the morning edition published by its Osaka Head Office. It was in the city news section and stated, "Two hundred young Korean women were 'hunted out' on Jeju Island."

However, The Sankei Shimbun published an article in its morning edition of April 30, 1992, that cast doubt on Yoshida's testimony. Some weekly magazines began reporting suspicions that his testimony was fabricated. In response, a reporter from the Asahi met with Yoshida and requested introductions to people or data that could substantiate his testimony, but was turned down.

Later, a city news reporter from the Asahi's Tokyo Head Office tried to interview Yoshida in person for a special feature to be run on March 31, 1997, but was refused. Asked about the truth of his testimony over the phone, Yoshida answered, "I wrote it exactly as I experienced it." The reporter went to Jeju Island but could not find any information to substantiate Yoshida's testimony. The Asahi has not featured Yoshida since.

In April and May of this year, Asahi reporters spoke with about 40 Jeju Island residents in their late 70s to 90s, but obtained no testimony that supported Yoshida’s statements. They also interviewed researchers including Masaru Tonomura, a University of Tokyo associate professor who is knowledgeable about wartime mobilization on the Korean Peninsula, who revealed a considerable number of inconsistencies in key parts of Yoshida’s testimony.

Problematic points

Based on Yoshida’s testimony, the Asahi reported extensively on the “hunting out of comfort women,” causing the misconception to spread both at home and abroad that the authorities forcibly took away comfort women in an organized manner. The Asahi also featured Yoshida in its “Hito” (Person) column on Nov. 10, 1983.

By the mid-1990s, scholars had come to reject the credibility of Yoshida’s testimony. Considering the significant effect this issue has on international relations, the Asahi should have quickly conducted an investigation into the facts.

However, the fact that the Asahi—which effectively set off the controversy over comfort women—did not correct its articles for so long allowed South Korea’s long use of the testimony as part of the evidence that comfort women had been forcibly taken away. Comfort women memorials erected in various parts of the United States due to lobbying by South Korean-affiliated groups have inscriptions to the effect that at least 200,000 women and girls were forced to become sex slaves by the Imperial Japanese Army.

The testimony

Calling himself a former head of the mobilization department of the Shimonoseki Branch of Romu Hokoku-kai, Seiji Yoshida claimed to have been involved in “hunting up” and forcibly taking women away from Jeju Island in what is now South Korea to become comfort women. His testimony has been cited as proof that so-called comfort women were coerced. Yoshida described his experiences in a 1983 book titled “Watashi no Senso Hanzai” (My war crimes), though later research undermined the credibility of his accounts.



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