

**From Responsibility to Compassion**  
**– Lessons from the Controversy over “Comfort Women” in Japan –**

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I. INTRODUCTION

This article intends to find some clues to a solution of an important question about the concept of responsibility, namely whether and (if so) how people who were not directly involved are able to take responsibility. For that purpose, we begin by following and analyzing a controversy that has been present in Japan since the turn of the century over the question of how we should memorialize the past, and war in particular. Then we will make some considerations on responsibility in history, focusing on the concept of “post-war responsibility” that is presented and argued in that controversy.

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\*\* Further information on the topic of „comfort women“ can be found in the following previous issues of the Journal: P. SCHMIDT, Japans Wiedergutmachung: Trostfrauen, in: *ZJapanR/J.Japan.L.* 8 (1999) 5 ff.; ID., Auf der Suche nach Recht und Gerechtigkeit: der lange Weg der „Trostfrauen“, in: *ZJapanR/J.Japan.L.* Nr. 11 (2001) 203 ff.; M. SCHEER, Zusammenfassende Übersetzung der Urteile: Distriktgericht Yamaguchi, Außenstelle Shimonoseki, vom 27. April 1998 (Schadensersatzklage koreanischer Frauen gegen den japanischen Staat) und Distriktgericht Tokyo vom 9. Oktober 1998 (Schadensersatzklage philippinischer Frauen gegen den japanischen Staat) in: *ZJapanR/J.Japan.L.* 8 (1999) 181 ff., 187 ff. (*the Editors*).

The controversy has had several points at issue, one of which concerns the “comfort women” during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945).<sup>1</sup> According to Yoshiaki Yoshimi (born in 1946), who ignited the controversy by finding and making public certain important official documents concerning “comfort women” and participated as one of the main disputants as a specialist of contemporary Japanese history, “comfort women” are defined as “women restrained for a certain period with no rights, under control of the Japanese military, and forced to engage in sexual activity with Japanese military personnel.”<sup>2</sup>

## II. CONTROVERSY OVER “COMFORT WOMEN”

### 1. *Historical Context*

In 1991 three South Korean former “comfort women” went to court (Tokyo District Court) demanding apologies and compensation from the Japanese government.<sup>3</sup> Their claim, which assumed the existence of a Japanese system of “comfort women” during World War II, caused a heated discussion in Japanese society. A great variety of complexly related talking points, themes, and questions has been discussed there. To name only a few, it raised questions about whether “comfort women” really existed, whether they were forced to have sexual relations against their will, and whether the Japanese government and/or military was involved in the introduction and management of the “comfort women” system.

Before analyzing the controversy over “comfort women” in itself, however, we have to briefly follow the history of public opinion over the war responsibility in post-war Japan in order to answer a preliminary question: Why did the controversy begin in the 1990s? It might seem a little surprising that it caused so many waves so late, that is to say, almost half a century after the end of the war.

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1 As an example of other points at issue, we could cite the “rape of Nanking.” Regarding this problem, see T. YOSHIDA, *The Making of the “Rape of Nanking”* (Oxford 2006).

2 See Y. YOSHIMI, *Comfort Women* (New York 2002; the original Japanese edition was published in Tokyo 1995), 39. Yoshimi had originally been interested in the attitude of ordinary Japanese people just before and during World War II, that is to say, under the Army-led quasi-dictatorial system, and especially in their support of that regime. With this original interest at heart, he responded very quickly and sharply to the claim of three Korean former “comfort women” (see below) by looking for official documents concerning the relationship between “comfort women” and the Japanese government and/or military among the archives conserved at the library of the Institute of Defense, Japan Defense Agency. See *Ibid.*, pp. 33-40.

3 Their claim was dismissed at the Tokyo District Court in 2001. They appealed to the Tokyo High Court, who dismissed it again in 2003. They made a final appeal to the Japanese Supreme Court, who dismissed it finally in 2004. These judgments were based on the ground that their right to claim damage had been nullified by the “Treaty on Basic Relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea” (i.e., South Korea) concluded in 1965.

Immediately after World War II, there was a comprehensive consensus in Japan that “Japan” had done something wrong during the war and therefore had to take responsibility for it. The main problem here is “who” in Japan did something wrong and therefore was responsible. The answer of the government just after the defeat, led by Naruhito-ô Higashikuni Nomiya, a member of the imperial family and a general in the army, was that “all people of Japan are to blame” and called for the “collective repentance of the hundred million” (*Ichi’oku sô-zange*). However, this led to harsh criticisms such as “it is unclear who is to take responsibility,” or “with this logic, the leaders of the government and military who had the power to make decisions would be exempted from responsibility.”

This forged a way of thinking that the government and military leaders were to blame and responsible for the war, and that the rest – i.e., the ordinary people who were just obeying their command – could be regarded as victims. This stance could be called the thesis of the “Japanese people as victims,” which would play an important role in defining who was responsible for the war and later in supporting the public opinion against the atomic bomb in post-war Japan.<sup>4</sup>

This stance, however, made it difficult to conceive that ordinary Japanese people might have been perpetrators as well, especially for people in other Asian countries where the war was conducted.

In the 1980s, many parameters started to shift in various interconnected ways on international and national dimensions. For example, the Cold War ended, dictatorships in many Asian countries fell, and the two-party system in Japanese politics (Liberal Democratic Party and Japan Socialist Party) weakened.<sup>5</sup> In light of these phenomena, people in Japan and other countries began to rethink the “Japanese people as victims” thesis and to raise questions about “the responsibility of the ordinary people.”

This climate change was especially symbolized in the controversy over “comfort women.” It caused so many waves because it was closely linked to the question of how history must, should, or could be regarded and memorialized. Some Japanese people became confused when they suddenly found themselves considered perpetrators of an

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4 Many victims of atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki (more than two hundred thousand deaths up to the end of 1945) supported the sentiment that ordinary Japanese people were victims of war and that this monstrous weapon should be prohibited. The *Daigo fukuryu-maru jiken* event, in which a Japanese fishing boat called *Daigo Fukuryu-maru* was exposed to radiation in 1954 in an American atomic bombing experiment near the Marshal Islands, Pacific Ocean, causing the death of its chief radio operator, spawned a grassroots anti-nuclear movement (begun by some housewives in Tokyo) that rapidly found wide support in Japan and became a national movement. The scale and speed of this movement’s growth proves how strongly and widely the sentiment of “Japanese people as victims” was shared.

5 Take the fall of the South Korean dictatorship as an example. Under the South Korean military dictatorial governments, who were trying to maintain good diplomatic relations with their ally, Japan, to compete with their principal enemies, the three South Korean former “comfort women” could not have filed a damage suit.

act with which they had until that time not considered themselves connected. For those who were used to the concept of the Japanese people as victims, it was not easy to accept themselves, their families, or their intimates not as victims but as perpetrators.<sup>6</sup>

## 2. *Points at Issue*

It seems necessary to introduce two opposing axes of controversy over “comfort women” so we can understand what was at issue there, for the points at issue in this controversy were intertwined with one another in a very complex manner.

The main dividing line that separated the participants in the controversy was the question of whether Japan was to blame for the suffering of “comfort women.” The first opposing axis is thus described as “critical vs. affirmative” toward the action of the Japanese government and military during the war. The former side could also be defined as Left, progressive, or liberal, while the latter side could be defined as Right, traditionalist, or conservative. As is easily supposed, supporters of the critical side are generally sympathetic with the former “comfort women.” On the contrary, those of the affirmative side are generally skeptical, indifferent, or cold toward their claim.<sup>7</sup>

The second opposing axis is “history vs. story.” It is indispensable for understanding the points at issue, for the first axis alone couldn’t show us the whole picture of the controversy. This axis represents the dividing line that differentiates those who think it is important to know what really happened about “comfort women” and those who don’t. The history side thinks that, above all, we must make sure of what really happened; it is convinced that we can gain access to the facts of history by using the scientific method. Under the influence of post-modernism and social constructivism, the story side says that history is nothing but a story; we cannot judge whether such and such a historical fact is true or false. It rather emphasizes the importance of the practical effect of history, that is to say, story.

Combining those two axes, we can divide the participants in the controversy into four fields. Representative names for each field are as follows. In the “critical history” field, *Yoshimi* argues that blame is due Japan according to historical facts. The “critical story” field, maintaining that it would be better to think Japan was wrong regardless of the historical facts, is represented by *Chizuko Ueno* (born in 1948), a leading sociologist and militant feminist.<sup>8</sup> In the “affirmative history” field, *Ikuhiko Hata* (born in 1932), a

6 But, frankly speaking, isn’t it normal for ordinary people to be confused, furious, or annoyed when the exact opposite label is given?

7 For example, the damage suit filed by three former “comfort women” was heavily covered and (one could say) supported by the newspaper *Asahi Shinbun*, which is widely regarded as liberal, progressive, and center-left in Japan. *Asahi* also made a scoop in the beginning of 1992 by reporting the discovery by Yoshimi of a note issued in 1938 by an adjutant in the Ministry of War, which we will analyze later. In contrast, conservative newspapers such as *Yomiuri Shinbun* and *Sankei Shinbun* have kept a skeptical stance toward their claim.

8 See C. UENO, *Nationalism and Gender* (Melbourne 2004; the original Japanese edition was published in Tokyo in 1998).

specialist in contemporary Japanese military history,<sup>9</sup> advocates that historical facts prove that Japan is not to blame. And the “affirmative story” field, maintaining that, regardless of historical facts, Japan is not to blame, is represented by *Takao Sakamoto* (1950-2002), famous for his works on modern Japanese intellectual history.<sup>10</sup>

Because the controversy was carried on with two axes, it became quite complex. For example, Ueno, though she shared the critical stance with Yoshimi, criticized him very harshly when she said that he could say nothing about the “comfort women’s” claim, which was not based on any reliable materials, sources, archives, or testimonies.<sup>11</sup>

### 3. *How to Read Texts*

If we want to make the controversy productive, we must do so on the history side, that is to say, around the question of what really happened. Problems will still remain, however, about the question of what the texts are telling us. Such a controversy on the authenticity of historical facts is not simple enough to have a happy end.

Take the famous note issued in 1938 by an adjutant in the Ministry of War entitled “Matters Concerning the Recruitment of Women to Work in Military Comfort Stations,” for instance. As it is quite short, we will quote the whole text.<sup>12</sup>

Notice from the Adjutant to the Chiefs of Staff of the North China Area Army and Central China Expeditionary Force

In recruiting women domestically to work in the military comfort stations to be set up in the areas affected by the China Incident, it is feared that some people have claimed to be acting with the military’s consent and have damaged the honor of the army, inviting the misunderstanding of the general public. We are also afraid that, through the mediation of reporters following the military and people visiting soldiers, people are recruiting women unsupervised and causing social problems. There have also been instances where a lack of proper consideration resulted in the selection of inappropriate people to round up women, people who kidnap women

9 See I. HATA, *I’an-fu to senjō no sei* [Comfort Women and Sexual Relations in the War] (Tokyo 1999).

10 See T. SAKAMOTO, *Rekishi kyōiku o kangaeru* [Considering History Education] (Tokyo 1998).

11 See CENTER FOR RESEARCH AND DOCUMENTATION ON JAPAN’S WAR RESPONSIBILITY, CRDJWR (ed.), *Nashonarizumu to i’an-fu mondai* [Nationalism and Comfort Women Problem] (Tokyo 2003). When Ueno took part in the controversy, Yoshimi “welcomed her, thinking that she would take sides with and help us.” (*Ibid.*, 123). She, however, said that “it is meaningless to compete for the <truth-ness> in order to get in touch with a <more objective history>” (*Ibid.*, 103) that Yoshimi was pursuing to support the claim of the former “comfort women.” The contrast between the history and story sides appears very clearly here. For those belonging to the former side, the value of each argument must be judged at the level of truth-ness. For those of the latter side, on the contrary, it could, must, or should not be judged at that level. At what level then could the judgment be made? At the political one, maybe. We could say that Ueno tried to shift the battlefield of the “comfort women” controversy from academic/scientific/positive (corroborative) to political/rhetorical/subjective. Could a historian share her stance? We don’t think so.

12 It is quoted in YOSHIMI, *supra* note 1, 58 *et seq.*

and are arrested by the police. There are many things that require careful attention. In the future, armies in the field will control the recruiting of women and will use scrupulous care in selecting people to carry out this task. This task will be performed in close cooperation with the military police or local police force of the area. You are hereby notified of the Order to carry out this task with the utmost regard for preserving the honor of the army and for avoiding social problems.

Could we assume, from this text, that the Japanese government and military were involved in the system of “comfort women”? In fact, it can be read both ways. Yoshimi, for instance, quotes the whole text and focuses especially on the underlined passage, judging that “it demonstrates that the Ministry of War itself was involved in ‘comfort women’ policies.”<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, Hata quotes only the colored passage of the text and says “this instruction, being an official text, is commonly used as evidence for the military’s involvement. However, it shows at the same time that the real perpetrators were malicious business people and brokers, and that the police were acting against them by conducting arrests for example.”<sup>14</sup>

This example shows that one single document can be used on the one hand as proof for the existence of state-led abductions, and on the other hand as supporting material against it. These opposing interpretations are presented by the supporters of the history side rather than the story side. Furthermore, Yoshimi and Hata are both academics, historians trained in the positivist manner, and experts on this issue.<sup>15</sup> This shows that the existence of evidence doesn’t suffice to give a correct answer to a question about history.

We can draw certain lessons from this “comfort women” controversy. Among them, the following two points are of special importance.

First, every discussion should be done on the history side, i.e., around the question of what really happened (or “how things actually were,” the guiding principle posed for historians by Leopold von Ranke, the founder of modern historical science). Issues of memory or of story could overheat the discussions, and that is why they should be put aside at the beginning. Otherwise, the controversy will produce nothing.

Second, it has to be admitted that several interpretations are possible, and therefore there could be opposing interpretations. If the discussions are conducted properly, though it might not be possible to unite the perspectives, even opposing interpretations could be brought closer. And even if the problem cannot be solved, a proper discussion will provide an opportunity to make considerations about why others think in different manners (and why we think in this manner).<sup>16</sup>

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13 *Ibid.*, 59.

14 HATA, *supra* note 9, 270 *et seq.*

15 It could seem natural that the two historians present different interpretations from each other, for they have diametrically opposite opinions on the “critical vs. affirmative” axis. We would like to emphasize here that each tries to insist on the correctness of their own interpretation with the positivist attitude, basing their claims on a document.

16 On the story side, those belonging to the “critical story” field and those of the “affirmative story” field could hardly come close to each other, for they share nothing. On the history

### III. "POST-WAR RESPONSIBILITY" THESIS

#### 1. *From Controversy over "Comfort Women" to Post-war Responsibility Thesis*

The discussions surrounding the "comfort women" have turned out differently than we suggested above. In the process of the debate, the main stream has shifted from the history to the story side.<sup>17</sup> The focus has come to center not on the question of what really happened, but on how the past must, should, and could be used.

As for the latter question, there is no standard for judging the correctness of the answer presented. In that case, there would be no winners or losers. The controversy itself has become self-perpetuating, with disputants of the "critical story" and "affirmative story" fields not listening to each other. What we are seeing now is a rather nonsensical and overheated quarrel, because the story side supporters have the upper hand.

To the discussion table have come issues such as "How should we, and especially those who were not directly involved, remember the 'comfort women' system and World War II, which introduced this system?" Or "Do those of us who were not directly involved have to take responsibility? For example, do we who were born after World War II have a responsibility to apologize to the former 'comfort women'?"

Let's take a look at a concrete example of a claim from the "affirmative story" field: a statement of 16 March 1995, by Sana'e Taka'ichi (born in 1961), a member of the House of Representatives (*Shin-shintô* [New Frontier Party], conservative), at the Diet Committee on Foreign Affairs. Speaking of World War II, she said that "at least I am not from the generation directly involved. I therefore do not have a bad conscience. I thus do not think that others can demand it from me." In other words, she claimed that those who were not directly involved did not have responsibility.<sup>18</sup>

On an international level, such political statements will never find broad support. For example, it would be quite an unusual phenomenon to have a member of the German Parliament speak of the Nazi crimes in a manner that implies "it doesn't have anything to do with me," or a member of the French Parliament supporting the Collaboration under the Vichy regime. When it comes to France, which we know a bit better, politi-

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side, "critical history" disputants and "affirmative history" ones at least have a common ground for communication, i.e., the text.

17 We don't know exactly why this shift happened. We can only point out that an argumentative remark, effective for taking an advantageous position in a controversy, is easier to make on the story side than on the history one. Making a clear-cut claim on the latter side takes a great deal of time and effort, for it requires a procedure for making clear "what really happened."

18 Taka'ichi, after two years of internship in the office of US Democratic Congressperson Patricia Schroeder (1987-9), was elected as a member of the House of Representatives in 1993. Affiliated first with the New Frontier Party (1994) and then with the Liberal Democratic Party (1996), she joined the Cabinet as a minister charged with Okinawa, Hokkaido, science and technology, innovation, population, gender equality, and food safety problems (2006-7). She is famous for her traditionalist-conservative stance.

cians who do not criticize the Collaboration, such as members of the *Front National*, are usually labeled as non-republicans.<sup>19</sup>

The post-war responsibility thesis came up in order to criticize arguments such as Taka'ichi's, which, occurring over the years, could be regarded as a defiant self-justification.<sup>20</sup>

## 2. *Logic of Post-war Responsibility Thesis*

In Japan, the post-war responsibility thesis was first elaborated and made popular by Tetsuya Takahashi (born in 1956), a philosopher influenced by contemporary – i.e., post-modern – philosophy.<sup>21</sup>

According to Takahashi, even those who were, have been, or are not directly involved have responsibility.<sup>22</sup> This fact can be seen in the origin of the word “responsibility,” which originally meant the “ability to respond.” The non-involved have to respond in some form, including the choice of non-response, when they are addressed by the involved.

Takahashi applies this thesis to the “war and responsibility” problem. The post-war generation, though non-involved with the war, would have responsibility when they are called by someone involved. It could be called “post-war responsibility.” As for the “comfort women” controversy, we have to respond to the former “comfort women’s” call once we hear or witness it, for the call and the response (including the choice of non-response) are what makes up communication, and communication is at the very heart of a society. As long as we live in a society, we have to communicate with each other. As long as we communicate, we have to respond when being addressed. We, as members of society, have a duty to respond.

19 For example, Jean-Marie Le Pen, founder and leader of French *Front National*, declared in 2005 that “the German Occupation was not particularly inhuman,” causing a preliminary examination.

20 We could cite too many examples of self-justification by post-war Japanese politicians concerning World War II. For example, post-war Japan had five ministers who had to resign or be dismissed for their comments on contemporary history: Masayuki Fujio (Minister of Education in 1986, who said that “Korea is also responsible for its annexation by Japan in 1910”), Seisuke Okuno (Minister of National Land Planning in 1988, who said that “Japan had no intention of aggression in the Second Sino-Japanese War”), Shigeto Nagato (Minister of Law in 1994, who said “The Nanking massacre is a frame-up”), Shin Sakurai (Minister of Environment in 1994, who said that “Japan helped the independence of most Asian countries by damaging European colonial rule”), and Takami Etô (Minister of Management and Coordination in 1995, who said that “Japan did not annex Korea by force in 1910”).

21 Takahashi began his academic career by analyzing phenomenology, but his interest soon shifted to the theory of a post-modern philosopher, Jacques Derrida. Under the inspiration of Derrida’s argument on political philosophy, he started talking about war, responsibility, violence, and memory to construct his own thesis on post-war responsibility. He then applied it to a concrete case familiar to him, World War II in Asia.

22 See T. TAKAHASHI, *Sengo sekinin-ron* [On Postwar-Responsibility] (Tokyo 2005), especially chapter 1-1.



Takahashi's thesis on post-war responsibility, though based on excellent logic, has several problems. One proof of their existence is that Taka'ichi has never changed her opinion. Maybe Takahashi's arguments did not come to her mind.

In our opinion, the most problematic element in Takahashi's arguments lies in their excessively prescriptive nature. In other words, his thesis of "responsibility equals ability to respond" is very intrusive. He claims that we have a duty to respond when we are appealed to, but the "ability to respond" differs from the "duty to respond." What is more, to regard the non-response as a form of "response" sounds a bit like sophism. At least it could evoke the impression that he deliberately brings the facts into the discussion on a meta-level. As long as this excessive prescriptivism is part of his arguments, most ordinary people will not accept his thesis on post-war responsibility.<sup>23</sup>

Nonetheless, it is undesirable to accept the defiant self-justification represented in Taka'ichi's attitude, for in this way we would learn nothing (from the "tragic" history of Japan before and during World War II) and never forget anything (about its "glorious" history).<sup>24</sup> We thus have to find a way to rid Takahashi's arguments of their prescriptive overtones.

### 3. *From Responsibility-Based Collective Memory to Compassion-Based Individual History*

The annoyance about Takahashi's arguments on (especially post-war) responsibility is, in our opinion, due to its one-sidedness and collectiveness.

One-sidedness means that the address, call, or appeal goes only in one direction, that is to say, from the issuing side to the responding side. His arguments are structured unilaterally.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, in this case, there is no subjectivity or initiative on the responding side. The responding side would turn into something like the "forced-to-respond-

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23 If and when "responsibility" begins to mean a "duty to respond," the post-war generation would be obliged to stay ashamed by holding shameful memories, such as the "comfort women" system, for example. That is what Takahashi asks of the Japanese people. See *Ibid.*, 210. His claim was severely criticized by literature critic Norihiro Katô (born in 1948) in a controversy over whom we should mourn first in regard to World War II; this debate was held at the same time as that regarding "comfort women." See N. KATÔ, *Haisen-go ron* [On Post-Defeat] (Tokyo 1997). According to Katô, it would be impossible, or rather hard at least, for ordinary people to be mentally strong enough to stay ashamed. As for us, we agree with him about the difficulty of staying ashamed. (Until when? Forever? Until the call to responsibility is over?)

24 "Learn nothing and never forget anything" was a phrase used to characterize the French *Ultra-Royalistes* who tried to restore the *Ancien Régime* (pre-French Revolution society) under the *Restoration* monarchy (1814/15-30), i.e., after the Revolution.

25 Surely Takahashi claims scrupulously that the act of addressing is also a form of responding. Here, too, however, we found that he deliberately brings the facts on a meta-level into the discussion by saying that issuing is a kind of responding. Is it really impossible to imagine a form of issuing with no factor of response?

against-its-will-if-necessary” side. It must be annoying to be forced to respond, against one’s will, to any appeal.

When we say “collective,” we mean that the responding side is regarded to be in the plural. In the era of mass media, it is quite rare and difficult to have only one responding person in the relation of issuing and responding. Even if the address, call, or appeal is supposed to be for and toward one individual, it is easily multiplied by newspapers, Internet, TV, or radio to have a plural audience, i.e., a collective response side. Here again, there would be no subjectivity or initiative on the addressed side imposed with the role of respondent as a duty. In the case of the former “comfort women,” most of the Japanese post-war generation must have been surprised and annoyed to find themselves become a part of the responding or forced-to-respond-against-its-will-if-necessary side by a suit that the three Korean former “comfort women” filed not against them, but against the Japanese government.<sup>26</sup>

Exacting such a one-sided response is irritatingly prescriptive. What could and should be done to let the addressed side regain subjectivity, room for choice, and initiative?

For that purpose, we need to find some concept that could replace the “one-sided collective” responsibility. We found an answer in the “mutuality and individuality” in communication: not “one-sided” but “mutual,” and not “collective” but “individual.” Here we would like to refer to the theory of “sympathy” elaborated by the founder of economics, Adam Smith. As is well known, he claimed that every individual has the ability to imagine the situation of others. He named this ability “sympathy” and regarded it as the driving force in creating a society. This concept of sympathy contains the “mutuality and individuality” that we are looking for.<sup>27</sup>

If we consider specifically the pain and misery of the former “comfort women,” it may be more appropriate to use expressions such as “compassion” – i.e., “sharing of passion” (in a Christian sense) – rather than “sympathy.” The call of the former “comfort women” would and could carry us – in our imaginations, of course – to their position and make us share their pain and misery. This would allow no room for Taka’ichi’s self-justification nor for Takahashi’s annoyingly prescriptive overtones.

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26 Taking into consideration that this government is democratically chosen by Japanese electors, we have no intention of saying that the Japanese people have nothing to do with a suit filed against their government. What matters here is that, at least for them, they are not the original addressee of the appeal of the three former “comfort women.”

27 Smith is generally regarded as the founder of economics because he emphasized the importance of another concept – i.e., “self-interest” – for the formation of a society. This concept and “sympathy” could be regarded as opposite to each other, but in Smith’s theory they are complementary to each other. From the discovery of this complementarity emerged economics.

## VI. CONCLUSION

After following the controversy over “comfort women” and analyzing the logic of the post-war responsibility thesis developed mainly by Takahashi to contribute to deepening the controversy, we could say that, for the discussion over the responsibility of those not directly involved to be effective – i.e., future-oriented, and widely accepted, neither irritating nor annoying – we have to replace “memory” with “history,” “responsibility” with “compassion,” and “collectivity” with “individuality.” For the controversy to become productive (again), we should use these words and concepts. It is necessary to shift the discussion framework from a “responsibility-based collective memory” to a “compassion-based individual history.”

In our eyes, that is the biggest lesson that Japanese people have gained from the controversy over “comfort women” since the turn of the century.<sup>28</sup>

## SUMMARY

*This article intends to find some clues to a solution for an important question about the concept of responsibility, namely whether and (if so) how people who were not directly involved are able to take responsibility.*

*For that purpose, we begin by following and analyzing a controversy that has been present in Japan since the turn of the century over the question of how we should memorialize the wartime past, especially the so-called “comfort women” during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945). Participants in this controversy could and should be classified along two opposing axes, “affirmative vs. critical” toward the Japanese past, and “history vs. story” about the images of the past.*

*We then make some considerations on responsibility in history, focusing on the concept of “post-war responsibility” presented and argued in that controversy. This thesis is based on the original meaning of the word “responsibility,” i.e., the “ability to respond.” Its advocates claim that even those not directly involved have a responsibility when called by the involved, for they have the ability to respond.*

*Finally, we try to make this thesis more acceptable to more Japanese people by ridding it of its prescriptive overtones. The resulting annoyance is brought about by the fact that*

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28 Needless to say, this is not the only lesson gained from the controversy. As an example of other lessons, we could mention that a controversy over historical fact must be analyzed in two dimensions, that is to say, not only from a political, social, or economic standpoint (“affirmative vs. critical” in the case of the controversy over “comfort women”), but also in its attitude toward history (“history vs. story”).

*the post-war responsibility thesis is based on a one-sided, collective, and memory-oriented concept of responsibility. To make the discussion about the past and responsibility (especially for those who were not involved) productive, it will be necessary to shift the discussion framework from a "responsibility-based collective memory" to a "compassion-based individual history."*

#### ZUAMMENFASSUNG

*Dieser Aufsatz hat das Ziel, einige Lösungen zur Beantwortung einer wichtigen Frage über die Wahrnehmung von „Verantwortung“ zu erarbeiten, insbesondere, ob und (wenn ja) wie Menschen, die (an einem Geschehen, d. Red.) nicht direkt beteiligt waren, Verantwortung übernehmen können.*

*Zu diesem Zweck wird zunächst damit begonnen, die Kontroverse in Japan zu verfolgen und zu untersuchen, wie an die Vergangenheit des Krieges erinnert werden sollte, namentlich in Bezug auf die sogenannten „Trostrfrauen“ (i'an-fu) im zweiten Sino-Japanischen Krieg (1937-1945). Die Teilnehmer jener Diskussion können und müssen anhand zweier sich kreuzender Achsen eingeordnet werden: „bejahend gegen kritisch“ in Bezug auf die japanische Vergangenheit und „Geschichtsschreibung gegen Geschichten“ in Bezug auf das Bild dieser Vergangenheit.*

*Darauffolgend werden einige Überlegungen über Verantwortung in der Geschichte angestellt, mit einem besonderen Fokus auf das Konzept der „Nachkriegsverantwortung“, wie es in der Kontroverse vorgestellt und diskutiert wurde. Dieser Aufsatz basiert auf der ursprünglichen Bedeutung von „Verantwortung“, also der Fähigkeit zur Reaktion“. Deren Vertreter behaupten, dass sogar diejenigen, die nicht direkt beteiligt waren, eine Verantwortung tragen, wenn sie von den Beteiligten angerufen werden, da sie fähig zur Reaktion sind.*

*Schließlich wird versucht, dieser These zu mehr Akzeptanz im japanischen Volk zu verhelfen, indem sie von ihren belehrenden Untertönen befreit wird. Solche Irritationen werden von der Tatsache verursacht, dass die These der Nachkriegsverantwortung auf einem einseitigen, kollektiven und erinnerungsorientierten Verständnis der Verantwortung basiert. Deswegen wäre es notwendig, den Diskussionsrahmen von einer „verantwortungsbasierten, kollektiven Erinnerung“ hin zu einer „mitgefühlsbasierten, individuellen Geschichte“ zu verschieben, wenn man die Diskussion über Vergangenheit und Verantwortung (speziell der Nichtbeteiligten) produktiv machen möchte.*

*(Übers. d. Red.)*