

Sophia University Institute of Comparative Culture and the Global Concern Institute presents

# The Politics of Voice and Silence:

## Panel Discussion on Media Openness and Historical Revisionism in Contemporary Japan

June 28th, 2015; 3:00PM-5:30PM,  
Sophia University, Yotsuya Campus, bldg. 2, room 508

In the last five years, Japan has plummeted 50 places in a global ranking of media freedom and is now ranked 61 out of 180 nations, according to “Reporters Without Borders.” The group cites incomplete coverage of the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster and the passing of the “state secrets” act in 2014. Today, reporters for Japan’s biggest news organizations are regularly subject to censorship, and increasingly engage in self-censorship for fear of retribution. In addition, there are growing disputes over the representation of the past; textbook companies are being asked to rewrite the history of World War II that have generated public protests in many countries. Most prominent are disputes around the so-called “comfort women” issue. Echoing a public statement, “A Critique of the Japanese Government’s Stance on the Wartime “Comfort Women” Issue and its Coverage in the Media,” written by Japanese historians in the Historical Science Society of Japan, in May 2015, a group of historians and other Japan-studies scholars working mainly in the West issued an unprecedented Open Letter in Support of Historians in Japan to the Japanese government and the media, calling for “as full and unbiased

an accounting of past wrongs as possible" in this 70th anniversary year of the end of World War II.

Our panel participants include journalists, scholars, teachers, and activists, both in Japan and abroad, and we will try to address some of these issues. To our speakers, freedom of academic, scholarly and journalistic expression appears to be in danger in ways that seriously impact the flow of information needed in a democratic society such as Japan. What is happening today that is different from that of the past? Is there ever a right, let alone an obligation, for the state to correct what it sees as "distortions" of historical representations of Japan's past? And if so, with what mechanism and within what parameters? Internationally, how do these issues effect the perception of Japan abroad, both in other governments, and among those who study Japan? How should we evaluate and understand current efforts at historical revisionism, and in particular, the "comfort women" issue, and the limitation of information and expression with the academy, the press and society as a whole? What can we do – and what should we do - as journalists, scholars and activists?

### **Panelists:**

- **Andrew Gordon** (Professor of History, Harvard University)
- **David McNeill** (Journalist and Lecturer, Sophia University)
- **Koichi Nakano** (Professor of Political Science, Sophia University)
- **Takashi Uemura** (Journalist and Lecturer, Hokusei Gakuen University)
- **Mina Watanabe** (Secretary General, Women's Active Museum for War and Peace)
- **Tomomi Yamaguchi** (Associate Professor of Anthropology, Montana State University)

### **Moderator:**

- David H. Slater (Director of the Institute of Comparative Culture, Sophia University)

### **Interpreter:**

- Chie Matsumoto

### **Bios:**

• **Andrew Gordon** is the Lee and Juliet Folger Fund Professor of History at Harvard University. His teaching and research focus primarily on modern Japan. He has written, edited, or translated numerous books and has published articles in journals in the United States, Japan, Great Britain, France, and Germany. His most recent publication is *Fabricating Consumers: The Sewing Machine in Modern Japan* (University of California Press, 2011), on the emergence of the modern

consumer in Japan, using the sewing machine as window on that story. It has been translated into Japanese and published by Misuzu Shobo in 2013. He is one of the signatories to the OPEN LETTER IN SUPPORT OF HISTORIANS IN JAPAN

• **Takashi Uemura** is a former reporter of Asahi Shimbun, and currently an adjunct lecturer at Hokusei Gakuen University in Sapporo. Born in Kochi in 1958, he worked for the Asahi Shimbun as a reporter from 1982 until March 2014. In 1991 he wrote two articles on the first “comfort woman” to come forward, Ms. Kim Hak-sun. He has been criticized as a “reporter who initiated the comfort woman issue,” and a “reporter who fabricated his articles.” Intense attacks against him and his family became a major social issue in 2014. Aside from work experience in the city news sections in Osaka and Tokyo, Uemura also worked at the Asahi’s Teheran, Seoul, and Beijing Bureaus, and he ended his career with the Asahi as chief of the Hakodate Bureau.

• **Koichi Nakano** is Professor of Political Science at the Faculty of Liberal Arts at Sophia University. He specializes in the comparative politics of advanced industrial democracies, particularly Japan and Europe, and in political theory. In English, he has published articles in The Journal of Japanese Studies, Asian Survey, The Pacific Review, West European Politics, Governance, and a single-authored book entitled Party Politics and Decentralization in Japan and France: When the Opposition Governs (Routledge, 2010) among others. He is also a frequent commentator on Japanese politics for the international and Japanese media. He is one of the signatories to the OPEN LETTER IN SUPPORT OF HISTORIANS IN JAPAN

• **David McNeill** has a PhD from the University of Napier, and writes for The Independent, The Irish Times, The Economist and The Chronicle of Higher Education, and is an editor at the Asia-Pacific Journal. His work has also appeared in Newsweek, New Scientist, The New York Times, New Statesman, South China Morning Post and the International Herald Tribune, The Chicago Tribune, on the BBC. He is a lecturer at Sophia University, an ex-board member of the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan, where he currently chairs the events’ committee. He is co-author of Strong in the Rain (with Lucy Birmingham) about the 311 Tohoku disasters. He has received fellowships from both Daiwa and the Japanese Ministry of Education. He is one of the signatories to the OPEN LETTER IN SUPPORT OF HISTORIANS IN JAPAN

• **Mina Watanabe** is the secretary general of the Women’s Active Museum on War and Peace (WAM) based in Tokyo. She has been an activist for women’s rights since 1990, and has worked in NGOs and parliamentarians’ offices with a focus on women’s rights, and was actively involved in The Women’s International War Crimes Tribunal for the Trial of Japan’s Military Sexual Slavery held in Tokyo in 2000. She has published a number of articles, co-authored a book, and provided talks on the “comfort women” issue to various audiences.

• **Tomomi Yamaguchi** is an associate professor of Anthropology at Montana State University. As an anthropologist, her research has been focusing on social movements in Japan, especially feminism and conservative, right-wing movements. Her recent publications include “Feminizumu no Shiten kara Mita Kodo-hoshu Undo to Ianfu Mondai.” (“The Action Conservative Movement and the “Comfort Women” Issue from a Feminist Perspective”). *Journalism* (November 2013): .81-91, and “Gender Free” Feminism in Japan: A Story of Mainstreaming and Backlash.” *Feminist Studies*, 40, no.3 (Fall 2014): 54. She is one of the signatories to the OPEN LETTER IN SUPPORT OF HISTORIANS IN JAPAN

Discussion will be mostly in English / No prior registration required

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