

WORKSHOP

From Shame of Village to Human Rights Abuse: How Memories of Wartime Sex Slavery in Shanxi Province, China, Traveled to the Fin-de-siècle Japanese Law Courts

Monday, Dec. 10
16:30 – 18:00
Room 960, Bldg. 14, Waseda

From the mid-1990s onward, groups of Chinese survivors of various cases of civilian abuse during Japanese invasion (1931-1945) started to bring civil lawsuits to Japanese law courts, demanding apologies and compensations from the Japanese government. These plaintiffs were represented by Japanese lawyers and funded by Japanese civil organizations throughout their long-standing legal attempts.

This workshop focuses on the cases filed by victims of sexual slavery in Shanxi Province. The plaintiffs — elderly village women— were abducted as teenage girls, confined and repeatedly raped by the men of a Japanese military unit that came to occupy their villages in 1941. Exploring the processes through which these women's memories were unearthed from half-a-century of silence, three discourses at work were identified: the newly-emerged, popularized legal discourse within the People's Republic of China on the notion of "civil compensation"; the trans-Asian and trans-Pacific feminist discourse on the "comfort women" issue; and the medical-psychological theory of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) applied by Japanese pacifist lawyers to establish the plaintiffs' claim of continued suffering.

The presentation demonstrates how these discursive forces, intersecting with one another, transformed the perception of the victimhood suffered by these women from an object of shame in their local villages to a legal grounding for rights, and how the transformation was left unfinished after the eventual dismissal of their cases by the Japanese Supreme Court.

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