

# Abe in denial on 'comfort women' issue

Despite all the evidence and global condemnation, Tokyo refuses to accept responsibility for wartime sexual slavery

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe apologized in December 2015 to the government of South Korea for the Japanese military's use of South Korean "comfort women" during Japan's occupation of the country from 1932 to 1945.



Cai Hong

As further restitution, Japan offered \$8.3 million to a foundation to be established by South Korea for the surviving victims.

At the same time, the Abe administration has continued to deny that the wartime Japanese authorities were responsible for the ordeals of the "comfort women".

However, if the wartime Japanese government was not responsible for the plight of these women, then why did Abe apologize to South Korea on the issue?

On Feb 17, the National Archives of Japan submitted copies of 19 documents related to "comfort women" to the country's cabinet.

The records are a collection of the minutes of the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal and the trials of Japan's Class B and C war criminals. The files include the testimony of an Indonesia-based police officer who said he was ordered by the Japanese army to "take" about 200 women to Bali to serve as "comfort women".

Some Japanese scholars and

newspapers believe the documents reemphasize the fact that "comfort women" were forcibly mobilized.

On April 19, Koichi Hagiuda, Japan's deputy chief cabinet secretary, said there is no "direct" proof of forced mobilization of such women.

In 1993, then chief cabinet secretary Yohei Kono released a statement on a government study that began in 1991, which acknowledged that women, primarily Koreans, were "recruited against their will, through coaxing (and) coercion".

Kono said in his statement: "We shall face squarely the historical facts as described above instead of evading them, and take them to heart as lessons of history."

"We hereby reiterate our firm determination never to repeat the same mistake by forever engraving such issues in our memories through the study and teaching of history."

Kono also expressed his "sincere apologies and remorse".

When Abe was prime minister between 2006 and 2007, his administration said it had not found any descriptions by the Japanese military or state agencies to prove the forced mobilization of "comfort women".

The denial of historical facts has continued during Abe's second stint as prime minister, which began in December 2012.

In 2014, a government panel reviewed how the Kono statement was issued, calling it a product of diplomatic negotiations between Tokyo and Seoul.

The panelists argued that the

then Japanese government did not make further inquiries or check more facts to back up the testimonies of the 16 former "comfort women" from South Korea that the 1991 study's authors interviewed.

Asked in 2016 to provide written answers to questions by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Tokyo said forceful movement of "comfort women" by the Japanese military and government authorities could not be confirmed in any of the documents.

The issue of "comfort women" is so sensitive to the Abe administration that it has attempted to play it down. It argues that "comfort women" — an euphemism Japan uses for prostitutes — should not be described as "sex slaves", a term used by many Western media outlets, including *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Guardian* and CNN.

In the words of Japan's Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida: "The term 'sex slaves' doesn't match the facts."

Japan says there is no official record of the number of "comfort women". Estimates by Japanese historians range from 20,000 to 200,000.

In 2016, Abe told a parliamentary session that replacing the term *ianfu*, or "comfort women", with "sex slaves" was inaccurate, claiming that the widely used estimation of 200,000 "comfort women" was groundless. Abe expressed his sympathy for those women, but described them as victims of human trafficking.

In January, Japan recalled its ambassador to South Korea, Yasunaga Nagamine, when activists placed a statue commemorating Korean "comfort women" outside the Japanese consulate in Busan, the country's second-largest city.

Nagamine returned to Seoul on April 4, though the statue remains in place, and the two countries have reached no agreement about it.

Tokyo's decision to send Nagamine back to South Korea has disappointed many people in Japan.

The 82-year-old novelist Yasutaka Tsutsui, best known for his 1966 science-fiction book *The Girl Who Leapt Through Time*, blogged on April 4 that Nagamine's return amounted to capitulation by Japan.

The writer went further, calling the statue of the young girl in Busan "cute". "Everyone, let's go and ejaculate in front of her and shower her with semen."

When his obscene insult invited the ire of South Koreans, Tsutsui said his blog was "a joke".

Japan's rightists make absurd efforts to obscure unpleasant truths in the country's history.

In many cases, the evidence shows that women were tricked into serving in comfort stations by brokers who offered them work in restaurants or factories.

Since these brokers were working on behalf of the military, it is, as former Japanese prime minister Tomiichi Murayama said, "meaningless to try to parse whether the military had forced the women into prostitution".

The rest of the world has not forgotten those women.

Ten years ago, the United States House of Representatives endorsed a resolution that called for Japan to "formally acknowledge, apologize, and accept historical responsibility in a clear and unequivocal manner for its Imperial Armed Forces' coercion of young women into sexual slavery".

On March 27, the US Supreme Court refused to hear a case calling for the removal of a statue that symbolizes "comfort women" in California, putting an end to a three-year legal challenge initiated by US plaintiffs and supported by the Japanese government.

"By remembering the past, including the women who suffered immensely, we help ensure these atrocities are never committed again," said Ed Royce, chairman of the House of Representatives foreign affairs committee.

"Now that the highest court in the land has spoken, I hope those who've wasted years trying to rewrite history will finally move on."

In March, a statue of a girl symbolizing "comfort women" was installed in Germany's southeastern municipality of Wiesent.

There are currently more than 40 "comfort women" statues in South Korea and other countries, including the US, Canada, Australia and China.

*The author is China Daily's bureau chief in Tokyo. caihong@chinadaily.com.cn*

## New carrier marks naval milestone

Homegrown military vessel is the result of China's own development research and technology

By JIN YONGMING

China's first carrier, *CNS Liaoning*, was rebuilt from a former Soviet cruiser.

Its first totally home-built aircraft carrier, which was launched on April 26, relies on China's own research and technologies and marks a new milestone in the modernizing of the Chinese navy.

Besides the launch of its second aircraft carrier, the Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy has also disclosed a series of missions carried out in April as part of its long-term efforts to improve its combat readiness.

The launch of this first homegrown aircraft carrier will give a significant boost to China's naval strength and help safeguard the country's sovereign integrity, security, and development interests.

Hard and soft power are both needed to realize China's pledge to become a major maritime power. In this respect, hard power includes mature maritime industries and technologies as well as naval strength, while soft power is more about oceanic culture and the rule of law.

China's maritime strategic focus, according to President Xi Jinping, is more efficient exploitation

of resources, ecological protection, technological innovation, and securing national maritime interests. Developing the maritime economy lays the foundation for the path toward becoming a major maritime power, which also requires advanced technologies, quality education, the employment of top talent, and effective naval capabilities.

To achieve these goals, China is expected to not just map out and implement its maritime strategies, but also make extra institutional efforts to optimize the laws on territorial matters and streamline operations in the waters.

And there will be a wide range of challenges to overcome, including latent natural disasters, maritime disputes, and nonconventional security threats such as piracy. That is all the more reason for China to build up its navy in accordance with its role in global governance and the need to protect its security and development interests.

A viable approach to enhanced defense capability and efficiency would be about strengthening the bond shared by the military and civilians — in particular, State-owned defense enterprises and their private counterparts.

On the one hand, qualified pri-

vate companies can be involved in the defense industry, which will increase competition and prompt State-owned enterprises to stay innovation-minded, while on the other hand allowing certain defense materials and products to be used for civilian purposes.

Given careful guidance and policy support, China has great potential to strike a balance between a market-oriented economy and national defense buildup.

*The author is director of the China Ocean Strategy Studies Center at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences.*