

1. **Title:** Liberating Academic Discourse from the Shackles of Politics: Researching Comfort Women in Southeast Asia

2. **Convener:** YAMAMOTO Mayumi, Miyagi University, Japan

3. **Brief description and explanation of the chosen format:**

The format of this panel is “circulating speech” containing a convener/chair, 3-4 presenters and a discussant. Each presenter will provide an abbreviated research paper (2-3 pages) on some aspect of the history of comfort women in Southeast Asia for advance distribution.

In the panel, the convener will briefly explain the background of the comfort women discourse and the purpose of the panel. Each presenter will have 5 minutes to present the core of their own research paper. Following this round, discussion will follow the same order in a circle, with up to 2 volunteers from the audience (at the discretion of the convener) also included: each presenter/volunteer will have 3 minutes each round to add information or respond to other presenters’ papers or comments. Finally, as a conclusion, the convener or/and discussant will comment on the presented papers and circulating discussion.

4. **Brief description of panel:**

The existence of military prostitution/comfort women during World War II has long been known both inside of Japan and in many other countries. Some cases were even prosecuted in the B/C class war tribunal courts between 1946-1948. In 1990, however, the history of comfort women became a highly politicized issue in Japan, and subsequently around the world. This occurred at the tail-end of a Japan-bashing period in the US, close to the end of the military regime in South Korea, and at a time of intensive international focus on the mass violence against women in Bosnia. Reflecting these various situations, and deriving directly from Japanese domestic politics, the history of comfort women soon turned into a political issue, with politically appropriate information discovered (or created) and circulated both in academic and non-academic circles. The circulation between academic and non-academic publications in different languages and often without citations was ideal for maintaining a strong ideological lean and making non-ideological research nearly impossible for much of the last 30 years.

Papers for this panel will focus on factual data related to comfort women in any area of Southeast Asia, however limited, with a critical awareness of the discursive forces and other contexts shaping the sources used. The papers, presentations and comments will share information about the Japanese military prostitution system in Southeast Asia, including general knowledge of social conditions in WWII military occupied areas, while circular discussion will provide a check on the biases inherent in any sources and further information.

Each paper is expected to utilize some archival or published materials from an earlier period, preferably close to the wartime period. The utilization of these traditional types of sources are intended to provide a break from contemporary politicized discourse, thus to ensure a more reliable historical narrative, as well as to shed light on the problems induced by hegemonies over research on comfort women. Most importantly, the panel will enable and stimulate more liberated academic discussions on comfort women based on “traditional” methodologies shared by both historians and anthropologists.

5. Single session (1x90 min)

6. 1 discussant