

Inaugural Faculty Roundtable Addresses Local Impact on Korea-Japan Relations

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There has been a growing movement among Korean-American civic organizations to condemn Japan's comfort women system of World War II -- but discerning an appropriate American response has proven difficult. Dr. Thomas Ward, president of the Unification Theological Seminary (UTS), addressed this controversial issue on November 5, 2019 in his inaugural presentation for the UTS Faculty Roundtable Series: "Fanning the Flames: The Role of Local U.S. Governments in Undermining Korea-Japan Relations."

Tens of thousands of women were conscripted as "comfort women" during the course of the war. These women were made to travel with Japanese soldiers on the Pacific front, effectively acting as sexual slaves. Today, Korean-American activists seek to redress this tragic history by constructing memorials to comfort women in cities throughout the United States. Fifteen comfort women statues have been built since 2010 as a result of their advocacy, four of which are in New Jersey alone.

But Dr. Ward and colleague Professor William Lay have found through their research that the history of the comfort women system is not necessarily as simple as it at first seems.

The current push for memorials, for instance, is typically predicated on a one-sided narrative that indicts Japan for its wartime abuses while ignoring those of Korea and America. This narrative overlooks factors like Korean complicity in procuring women for the system; and it disregards the shocking fact that many American soldiers made use of the system during the first seven months after the war's end in 1945.

Dr. Ward stressed in light of these findings, "We have culpability. How can we be setting up statues in the United States just pointing at Japan when we have culpability? We have to accept our responsibility."

Failing to do so, Dr. Ward maintained, could have significant geopolitical consequences. The stability and peace of the Far East region at this time depends upon whether or not the United States, Japan, and Korea can work together to encourage China's movement as a nation toward greater democracy and respect for the rule of law. But Dr. Ward and Professor Lay have found that the unity among these three nations is seriously challenged when Korean-American activists and local American governments ignore the larger picture of the comfort women system in pursuit of their own aims and agendas.

Dr. Ward concluded, "If we as Americans take responsibility for our wrongdoing, we can also help Japan take responsibility. We can also help Koreans to understand and to realize that they can't just force a solution which considers only part of the picture. The picture is bigger than is being portrayed on either side."

The Roundtable Series will continue through 2020 with monthly presentations by the faculty of UTS. For details about upcoming events in the series, visit the schedule on our [website](#).



UTS Faculty Roundtable Series

The UTS Faculty Roundtable Series, a monthly event dedicated to presenting current academic research conducted by UTS faculty, alumni, and students. Each month will feature a new speaker and topic. The Faculty Roundtable is open to the public and will include time for discussion and refreshments following the presentation.

Upcoming Events in this Series

FACULTY
ROUNDTABLE
SERIES

TUESDAY | DEC 3
5-6 PM | OAK ROOM

Dr. Andrew Wilson
Professor of Scriptural Studies

Why is Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon Calling Herself the Only-Begotten Daughter?

4 W 43RD STREET
NEW YORK, NY 10036
OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

- Dec 3 - Dr. Andrew Wilson: "The Only-Begotten Daughter"
- Feb 25 - Dr. Keisuke Noda: "Paradoxes of Belief Systems: Viktor Frankl's Approach"
- March 10 - Dr. Kathy Winings
- March 31 - Dr. Michael Mickler
- April 14 - Mrs. Ute Delaney
- April 28 - Dr. Theodore Shimmyo
- May 5 - Ms. Mi Young Eaton