

Toyokeizai (Tokyo Business Today): Anatomy of the Open Letter

Interview of Professor Alexis Dudden and Jordan Sand on the scholars' open letter on the Japanese government's attempt to revise history

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OVERVIEW: Longtime Japan-based journalist Peter Ennis published this interview shortly after the May 5, 2015 publication of the “Open Letter” expressing international scholars’ concern with the Japanese government-led effort to whitewash histories of Japanese state-sponsored atrocities. Widely respected throughout his career at the *Toyo Keizai*, the significance of Ennis’ discussion with the coordinators of the letter campaign rests on his reputation as a broad-minded, factually grounded writer, neither “pro” or “anti” one position or another, but a true reporter of events.

Prologue: On Tuesday, May 5, 187 Japan scholars mostly from English-speaking countries came together in an [open letter](https://networks.h-net.org/system/files/contributed-files/japan-scholars-statement-2015.5.4-eng_0.pdf) (https://networks.h-net.org/system/files/contributed-files/japan-scholars-statement-2015.5.4-eng_0.pdf) to warn against what they see as a worrisome trend of intolerance in Japan towards journalists and scholars who express disagreement with the Abe government’s view of history issues, particularly “comfort women.” Since publication of the Open Letter in Support of Historians in Japan, the number of signatories has ballooned to close to 350, with the expanded list to be made public next week. The co-coordinators of the Letter were Professor Alexis Dudden of the University of Connecticut, and Professor Jordan Sand of Georgetown University. Both argue that the purpose of the Letter was to encourage a renewed effort to resolve the comfort women issue, and for Japan to redouble efforts for reconciliation with China and South Korea. Both deny that their intent, and that of the other signatories, was to criticize Prime Minister Abe, but they acknowledge that those who interpret the Letter as a rebuke are “not incorrect.”

We sat down with Professors Sand and Dudden for a joint interview, during which they described in detail the process that led to the writing and publication of the Open Letter with such a large list of signatories.