

Statement against Prime Minister SUGA's denial of the appointment of six academics who were recommended as new members of the Science Council of Japan

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Prime Minister Yoshihide SUGA rejected the appointment of six academics, including one modern Japanese historian, who were recommended as new members of the Science Council of Japan for its 25th term, which has just started. In total, 105 academics were recommended.

Article 7-2 of the Act on the Science Council of Japan (henceforth the Act) stipulates that council members are appointed by the prime minister on the basis of the recommendation laid down in Article 17, which stipulates that according to the method defined by the rules for member selection, the Science Council of Japan selects the council member candidates from among scientists who are conducting good research or who have made academic achievements and recommends them to the prime minister, following the Order of the Cabinet Office. This means that in the selection of the council members, paramount importance is accorded to the Science Council's recommendation, and the prime minister's role in this process is only a formality. The then Prime Minister Yasuhiro NAKASONE confirmed the validity of this process at the Committee on Education in the Upper House of the Diet on 12 May 1983, as follows: 'The selection of council members is made on the basis of recommendation from various academic societies or groups, and what the government does is nothing but formal. Therefore, the real right for recommendation is in the hands of academic societies or groups, and the activity of the government is only formal, and the academic freedom and independence is wholly guaranteed'.

In light of this framework, Prime Minister SUGA's conduct in denying the appointment of the six candidates completely runs counter both to the Act and to the government's previous stance, and we cannot condone it.

At the same time, the fact that the candidates whose appointment was denied are all humanity and social sciences researchers cannot be overlooked.

We regard it as extremely serious that the reason for denying their appointment has not been made public. It is widely assumed that the reason for the denial is that those six academics

publicly opposed such enactments by the former ABE cabinet as security laws, the secret information protection act, and the revision of the organised crime punishment law, which addresses punishment for conspiracy crimes. If this is the reason, it means that the government is compelling the Science Council to become an organisation that always supports government policies uncritically. The prime minister's actions completely contradict the stipulation laid out in Article 3 of the Act, according to which the Science Council should 'independently' discuss and materialise significant matters concerning science, act as a liaison between various fields of science, and promote efficient research. Ultimately, it infringes on academic freedom, which is guaranteed by Article 23 of the Japanese constitution.

The current situation reminds historians of past precedents before the Second World War, such as the Kunitake KUME incident of 1892, in which KUME was forced to leave Tokyo Imperial University after being officially reprimanded for his treatise, 'Shinto is an outmoded remnant of heaven worship', or the Sokichi TSUDA incident of 1940, in which TSUDA's books on ancient Japanese history were suppressed because of his rational interpretation of ancient texts. In these incidents, the academic results of historical research were politically denied, and the same political pressure led to the imposition of a historical education that ignored historical facts with the view of controlling people's thoughts.

When the Science Council of Japan was established in 1949 in a post-war democratic atmosphere, it declared: 'We deeply reflect on the past attitude of Japanese scientists and swear that henceforth, we will contribute to the peaceful reconstruction of our country and to the promotion of human welfare with the strong conviction that science is the foundation of a cultural and peaceful nation. . . . We will secure freedom of thought and conscience, academic freedom, and freedom of speech, all of which are guaranteed by the Constitution, and at the same time, we are ready to make all our efforts for the advancement of academic activities in order to secure world peace in cooperation with the international academic world' ('Declaration of our determination as scientists on the occasion of the foundation of the Science Council of Japan', 22 January 1949). The current incident is nothing but the total denial of the spirit expressed in this declaration.

We are also concerned about the fact that the academics whose appointment was denied are all engaged in research in the humanities and social sciences, the mission of which is to

discover political and social problems and propose ways to solve them. This is worrying because such an action can and will enhance the recent trend in some parts of the government circle to ignore and deny the meaning of the humanities and social sciences. For example, on 8 June, 2015, the then Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Hakubun SHIMOMURA sent a note to the governing bodies of national universities implicitly asking them to scale back in the humanities and social sciences. If this tacit directive had been followed, and the number of students who wanted to study humanities and social sciences had dwindled, then academic activities in Japan would be doomed to shrink.

We historians are well aware of the Science Council of Japan's past contributions in our academic field. Its report led to the creation of the current National Institute of Japanese Literature, which includes a section on historical archives, and its recommendation on the prevention of the dispersal of public records resulted in the foundation of the National Archives of Japan. We also know that the Science Council of Japan has always done its best to improve the basic conditions of research activities by issuing various recommendations and reports annually. In the field of history, the preservation of historical sources and cultural materials, as well as control of public records, are now urgently needed, and the Science Council of Japan's role in these matters is very important. We hope that it will strengthen its appeal to the government and to society as a whole.

Regarding the current situation, it is concerning that freedom of thought and conscience, academic freedom, and freedom of speech are likely to be neglected and infringed upon. The Japanese Historical Council, which comprises various historical studies organisations, has decided to issue this statement in cooperation with historical societies that are of the same opinion.

We strongly demand that the six academics whose appointment was denied be immediately appointed as council members of the Science Council of Japan.

Signed:

The Japanese Historical Council

Akita Kindaishi Kenkyukai (Akita Association for Modern History)

The Association for High School-University Collaboration in History Education

Association of Historical Science (Rekishikagaku Kyogikai)

Chiba Historical Society

Chihoshi Kenkyu Kyogikai (The Local History Conference)

Chiiki Joseishi Kenkyukai (Association for Local History of Women)
Chuo Shigakkai (Historical Association of Chuo University)
The Board of the Gender History Association of Japan
Hakusan Shigakukai
The Historical Association of Beppu University
The Historical Association of Senshu University
The Historical Science Society of Japan (Rekishigaku Kenkyukai)
The Historical Society of Akita University
The Historical Society of Hosei University
The Historical Society of Rikkyo University
The Historical Society of Tokyo Gakugei University
Historical Society, Sophia University
History Educationalist Conference of Japan
Institute of Science of Cultural History
The Iwate Society for Historical Studies
Japanese Association of Modern East Asian History
The Japanese Historical Society
The Japanese Society for Historical Studies (Nihonshi Kenkyukai)
The Japanese Society of the History of Transport and Communications
The Japan Society for Historical Research of Manners and Customs
Kanto Kinseishi Kenkyukai (Association for Early Modern History of Kanto)
Kyoto Historical Science Association
Kyushu Seiyoshi Gakkai (The Society for Research of Occidental History, Kyushu)
Nara Historical Society
The Osaka Association of Historical Sciences
The Osaka Historical Association
The Seiyoushikenkyukai (The Society for the Study of Occidental History)
Sengokushi Kenkyukai
Société d'anthropologie historique du Japon
The Society for Korean Historical Science
The Society for Research of Occidental History, Osaka University
Society for the Study of Diplomats in Japan
The Society of Historical Research
Society of Inner Asian Studies
Sogo Joseishi Gakkai (The Society for Research on Women's History)
Sundai Historical Association
Syutoken Keiseishi Kenkyukai (Association of History of Creation of Metropolitan Area)
Tohoku Historical Society
Tokyo Rekishigaku Kenkyukai (Tokyo Association for Historical Science)
Waseda Daigaku Toyoshi Konwakai (Forum of Oriental History of Waseda University)