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Tomomi Yamaguchi
Montana State University, USA

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Ramseyer, the Japanese Right-wing and the “History Wars”

By Tomomi Yamaguchi¹

Abstract

J. Mark Ramseyer’s publications on the topics of wartime “comfort women” and Japan’s minorities have become the focus of intense controversy. His article on “comfort women” in the *International Review of Law and Economics* gained global scrutiny following its coverage in Japan’s right-wing newspaper, *Sankei Shimbun*, and its English-language publication, *Japan Forward*. Ramseyer claims that “comfort women” willingly entered into sex-work contracts, denying responsibility by Japan’s military and government for the “comfort station” system. He also insists that naming this system “sexual slavery” is “pure fiction” – a stance shared by Japanese history denialists in Japan. Since the controversy over his publications, Ramseyer has been working closely with Japan’s right-wing faction, appearing in their symposiums and media.

The controversy over Ramseyer must be understood in the larger political context of widespread historical revisionism in Japan. In this chapter, I will situate Ramseyer’s writings and actions in the context of the so-called “history wars” by the Japanese right-wing and the Japanese government. In particular, I will discuss the Ramseyer controversy in the context of the “strategic communication” policy by the Japanese government, and the right-wing efforts to disseminate revisionist claims in English to academics and politicians abroad.

¹ Tomomi Yamaguchi is Associate Professor of Anthropology and the director of Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies Minor at Montana State University, specializing in feminism, nationalism, and social movements in contemporary Japan. She has been working on the constructions of gender and sexuality in post-WWII Japan, and her ethnographic and historical research on the feminist movement in Japan is longstanding. She has been working on her ethnographic studies of grassroots right-wing movements in contemporary Japan, including the conservative backlash against feminism and the new xenophobic ultranationalist movements, as well as the debate on wartime “comfort women” in contemporary Japan and the U.S. While her work is rooted in sociocultural anthropology, she is a scholar with a strong interdisciplinary background who works and writes bilingually in English and Japanese. She is a co-author (with Nogawa, M., Morris-Suzuki, T. and Koyama, E.) of *Umi o Wataru Ianfu Mondai: Uha no Rekishisen o Tou* (The “Comfort Woman” Issue Goes Overseas: Questioning the Right wing ‘History Wars.’), Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2016. Her sole-authored publications include “The ‘History Wars’ and the ‘Comfort Women’ Issue: The Significance of Nippon Kaigi in the Revisionist Movement in Contemporary Japan.” In *The Transnational Redress Movement for the Victims of Japanese Military Sexual Slavery*, edited by Min, P.G., Chung, T. and Yim, S. S., 261-272. Berlin/Boston: Walter De Gruyter and Oldenbourg, 2022, and “The ‘History Wars’ and the ‘Comfort Woman’ Issue: Revisionism and the Right-wing in Contemporary Japan and the U.S.” *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, Volume 18, Issue 6, Number 3, March 15, 2020.

Keywords: revisionism, right-wing, comfort women, Japan, J. Mark Ramseyer

Introduction

J. Mark Ramseyer's publications about wartime "comfort women" and Japan's minorities have become the focus of intense international controversy. His article, "Contracting for Sex in the Pacific War" posted in the online version of the *International Review of Law and Economics (IRLE)* (Ramseyer, 2021a), received global scrutiny following its coverage by scholar Fukui Yoshitaka in Japan's right-wing paper, *Sankei Shimbun* (Fukui, 2021), as did Ramseyer's own article, "Recovering the Truth about the Comfort Women," in *Japan Forward*, an English-language news magazine founded by Sankei (Ramseyer, 2021b).

Many scholarly critiques of and statements criticizing his "comfort women" article were published rapidly as Ramseyer's article gained international media attention first in South Korea, then in the U.S., Japan and other countries (Dudden, 2021; Gordon and Eckert, 2021; Wert, 2021; Suk Gersen, 2021; Stanley et.al, 2021; Chwe, 2021).² Moreover, many scholarly and activist organizations released statements criticizing Ramseyer's article (Chwe, 2021).³

Following this, Ramseyer's articles and working papers on topics related to Japan's colonial history other than the "comfort women" issue also received intense criticism from scholars, journalists, and activists in different academic fields and various countries, including the United States, Australia, the United Kingdom, Japan, Singapore, and others (Morris-Suzuki, 2021; Neary and Saito eds., 2021; Akuzawa and Saito, 2021; Okinawa Times, 2021). Some of the topics of his other papers include the massacre of Koreans during the Great Kanto Earthquake (Ramseyer, 2021d) as well as writings on Japan's minority populations, such as *burakumin*, Okinawans and *zainichi* Koreans (Ramseyer and Rasmusen, 2018; Ramseyer, 2019; Ramseyer, 2021c). As a result, some of Ramseyer's articles had been and are currently under review, with editors' notes by the *European Journal of Law and Economics* (Ramseyer 2021c) on his paper on Koreans in Japan, and "expression of concern" by the *International Review of Law and Economics* on his "comfort women" paper (Ramseyer 2021a). Ramseyer also had to significantly revise his chapter on the 1923 massacre of Koreans in Japan in the *Cambridge Handbook of Privatization* (Ramseyer, 2021d), although other journals, especially the journals that published his articles on *burakumin* (Ramseyer and Rasmusen, 2018; Ramseyer, 2019a), have not expressed any intention to consider the criticisms.

As historian Tessa Morris-Suzuki aptly pointed out, the controversy over Ramseyer must be understood in the larger political context of historical revisionism in Japan (Morris-

²For the list of statements and letters in protest against Ramseyer's publications, see the resource site by Michael Chwe, a professor of UCLA and a specialist in game theory. (Chwe, 2021)

³Michael Chwe's website (Chwe, 2021) includes statements by multiple activist and professional organizations in the U.S., South Korea, the Philippines and Japan, as well as a "comfort woman" survivor, Ok Seon-Lee and others.

Suzuki, 2021a). As scholars point out, Ramseyer himself indicates that his motivation to write his recent pieces is that he is frustrated that Japan Studies in the U.S. is dominated by “left-leaning” scholars and thus he wants to express a different view of Japan (Morris-Suzuki, 2021a), and he also uses Japanese Studies “as a means to vent opinions about race in the United States without incurring the blowback that would come from a more direct statement,” (Amos et. al., 2021) due to his perception of the “hyper-polarization within the academy” (Ramseyer, 2019b cited in Amos et. al., 2021). Regardless of his own motivations, as Morris-Suzuki argues, Ramseyer’s articles were published and spread in the context of the rise of revisionism by Japan’s right-wing forces and the Japanese government since around 2012, as part of their efforts in the so-called “history wars” (Morris-Suzuki, 2021a).

In this article, building on the discussion papers by Tessa Morris-Suzuki that look at the historical and political backgrounds concerning the reception of Ramseyer’s article in Japan (Morris-Suzuki, 2016; Morris-Suzuki, 2021a) as well as my co-authors’ and my own work on the topic of the “history wars” on the “comfort women” issue (Yamaguchi et. al, 2016; Yamaguchi, 2020; Yamaguchi, 2021), I will situate Ramseyer’s writings and actions in the context of the “history wars” by the Japanese right-wing and the Japanese government, in light of their attempts to disseminate their version of history internationally, especially in English.

First, after a brief examination of the common features of Japanese revisionist claims and Ramseyer’s articles on “comfort women” published in the *IRLE* and *Japan Forward*, I will explain the concept of “history wars” and the desire by right-wing historical revisionists in Japan to disseminate revisionist claims in English. In addition, I will discuss the Japanese government’s attempt to do so under the “strategic communication” policy, and how Anglophone scholars, such as Ramseyer, are significant, perhaps the primary targets of this policy. The reaction to Ramseyer’s “comfort women” article and the controversy it created for right-wing critics, activists and politicians, as well as the Japanese government, will also be examined. I will then show how Ramseyer, the Japanese right-wing and the Japanese government share the same understanding of himself as a victim of “cancel culture,” concerning the violation of academic freedom.

By looking at the Ramseyer controversy in the context of Japan’s “history wars,” I intend to demonstrate the seriousness of revisionism, not only by the Japanese right wing and the Japanese government, but as a collaborative effort involving Anglophone scholars.

Ramseyer’s Article on “Comfort Women”

In his article published in the *International Review of Law and Economics* (IRLE), Ramseyer basically repeats the same argument denying that the “comfort station” system was one of sexual slavery; he claims that “comfort women” willingly entered into sex-work contracts, while not presenting any of the actual contracts, and denies any responsibility by the Japanese military and government in the “comfort station” system. Hence, Ramseyer’s paper

makes the same old revisionist argument, just under a seemingly new and fancy package of game theory. He rejects the assertion of forcible recruitment of women by the Japanese military, and considers Korean brokers, not the Japanese military nor the government, to be the responsible party.⁴

In his *Japan Forward* article on “comfort women” written for the general public, Ramseyer writes, “We are not used to finding that the story is pure fiction. But that is the nature of the comfort-women-sex-slave story,” (Ramseyer, 2021b) showing more clearly than in his IRLE article how closely his stance aligns with that of Japanese revisionists. The argument by Ramseyer basically repeats the same claims made by history denialists in Japan since the 1990s (Min, 2021); that is, they deny the nature of “comfort stations” to be that of sexual slavery.

His IRLE paper has not been well-received in academic circles. It was not published in peer-reviewed journals that focus on Asian Studies or History, and scholars have criticized it for not meeting academic standards for publications (Dudden, 2021; Gordon and Eckert, 2021; Kim, 2021; Min, 2021; Morris-Suzuki, 2021; Stanley et al., 2021; Onozawa, 2022; Yoshimi, 2022), as other articles in this special issue discuss the shortcomings in detail. Historians and other scholars also held events and symposiums and released statements criticizing the article and asking for its retraction. As a paper on game theory in the field of law and economics, the article has not been recognized for its scholarly contribution and integrity either. It received harsh critiques by specialists in the field, as seen in an open letter criticizing Ramseyer’s article with over 3,000 signatories, including over 350 professors of game theory and 100 professors who work in law and economics (Concerned Economists, 2021).⁵ The letter says that “invoking game theory does not establish the absence of violent exploitation or predation. It does not allow one to conclude that such interactions were consensual. Game-theoretic principles do not provide some magical cover or authority for the article’s reckless claims.” The economists’ letter then strongly condemns Ramseyer’s article by claiming “because the article invokes game theory explicitly, is published in a law and economics journal, and casts itself as economics scholarship, our fields and subfields suffer harm, and we as practitioners take particular offense, to this article and any similar attempt in the future.” (Concerned Economists, 2021)

Although Ramseyer’s arguments lack any novel perspectives in history, game theory, law and economics, or even among revisionist works, his article in the IRLE was introduced in Japan’s most conservative daily newspaper, *Sankei Shimbun*, as “a peer-reviewed academic article by a renowned scholar in corporate law, as well as a big-name scholar in Japan studies” that “empirically and theoretically” demonstrated

⁴For more detailed criticisms of Ramseyer’s article in IRLE, see other articles in this special issue.

⁵Seven other statements and letters were released by economists. See Michael Chwe’s website. <http://chwe.net/irle/>

that “comfort women” were not sex slaves. (Fukui, 2021) The information on Ramseyer’s IRLE article spread, and the article was then appreciated enthusiastically in the right-wing media, as well as by critics, activists and organizations in Japan.

While Japan’s right-wing critics and media emphasized that Ramseyer’s article was published in a peer-reviewed journal, it became extremely controversial among scholars and activists in the international community, precisely because it was written by a scholar with academic authority – a professor at Harvard Law School – in the U.S., and was published in a peer-reviewed journal, seemingly giving authority to a historical revisionist.

Why has Ramseyer’s article received such an attention far beyond his own academic circle of law and economics? The context of the so-called “history wars” concerning the “comfort women” issue is crucial to an understanding of this phenomenon.

Japan’s “History Wars” in the U.S.

The term “history wars” was initially coined by *Sankei Shimbun*, in April 2014, in its new series entitled “The History Wars.”⁶ The series focuses on Japan’s disagreements with South Korea and China concerning historical events pertaining to Japan’s colonial history, and the “comfort woman” issue is the most prominent topic featured in the series. The series charges that Japan is a victim of “false indictment” by South Korea and China, and thus has had no choice but to fight against the accusations. *Sankei* views that the “comfort woman” issue was fabricated to inflame diplomatic tensions between Japan and South Korea, and to put forth a one-sided, unfair evaluation of Japan in the international community. The imagined “enemies” that inflamed the “history wars” are China, South Korea as well as the Japanese left and the liberal media, such as Japan’s liberal daily, *Asahi Shimbun*. Other right-wing media, intellectuals, and politicians, and even the Japanese government, quickly adopted *Sankei*’s terminology of “history wars” to refer to these conflicting depictions of history.

These “history wars” reified by the conservatives were occurring abroad, especially in the U.S., which the Japanese right-wing considered the “main battleground” or “*shusenjō*” of the “comfort woman” issue, as monuments and statues of “comfort women” were being built across the country in the early 2010s. (Yamaguchi et al., 2016; Yamaguchi, 2020). Other countries such as Canada, Australia, and most recently, Germany, became the “main battlefields” as well, as attempts to build “comfort women” memorials spread in those countries.

The Japanese right-wing began to pay attention to the statues and monuments commemorating the history and memory of “comfort women” beginning with the building of the Statue of Peace in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul in December 2011. The

⁶ According to philosopher Nogawa Motokazu, Japan’s right-wing media started to use the term, “*jōhōsen*” (information war) in the late 1990s and used it extensively during the first Abe administration. The term, “history wars” (initially *rekishi sensō*, which became *rekishisen*) began to appear under the second Abe administration that started in December 2012. See Nogawa 2016.

government of Japan, then under the control of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), which is generally considered to be a liberal party in the Japanese political spectrum, immediately demanded the statue's removal. The fact that the DPJ, not the conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), immediately demanded the statue's removal, indicates how deeply ingrained the denialism of the "comfort women" issue is among Japan's political leaders. The statue in Seoul became a major target of hostility by Japanese right-wing groups as well as by the Japanese government. When the LDP became the ruling party again under Prime Minister Abe Shinzo in December 2012, the Japanese government's stance to deny the history of the "comfort women" and its own responsibility, and to oppose the building of monuments and statues commemorating "comfort women" became far stronger.

Their ire increased when projects to build similar monuments commemorating "comfort women" started to spread in the U.S. (McCarthy and Hasunuma, 2018; Hasunuma and MaCarthy, 2019; Mirkinson, 2020; Schumacher, 2021). Preventing their construction became the core fight of their "history wars" in the U.S. as well as in Canada, Australia, Germany, and elsewhere. (Koyama, 2020; Yamaguchi, 2020; Norimatsu, 2020) Along with fighting against "comfort women" memorials, they also protested resolutions, museum exhibits, and textbook descriptions on the "comfort women" issue in the U.S.

As of November 2022, there are sixteen "comfort women" memorials in the U.S. and Canada, with more currently in the planning stages, including in the city of Philadelphia, as the city's Arts Commission approved the plan to install a statue commemorating "comfort women" in October 2022. (Vadala, 2022)

The first monument in the U.S. was built in Palisades Park, New Jersey in 2010. Then in April 2012, after the building of the Statue of Peace in Seoul, a Japanese right-wing magazine published an article by a journalist, Okamoto Akiko, criticizing the Palisades Park monument. (Okamoto, 2012) In the following month, the New York-based Japanese Consulate contacted the city of Palisades Park to ask for the removal of the monument. A delegation from Japan, with four Diet representatives from the conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), visited the city, again asking for the monument's removal. On November 6, another revisionist paid advertisement entitled "*Yes, we remember the facts*" was published in a local New Jersey paper, paid for by the same "Committee for Historical Facts," another attempt to disseminate their voice in an English-language publication. One of the signatories of the "*Yes, we remember the facts*" advertisement was Abe Shinzo, who was on the cusp of becoming Japan's prime minister for the second time in December 2012. (Yamaguchi, 2016; Yamaguchi, 2020)

When the conservative LDP resumed being the ruling party and Abe Shinzo returned as the prime minister in December 2012, the government started taking an even more active role in protesting against memorials abroad and rejecting any efforts to demand an official apology and compensation from the Japanese government. They have been actively interfering

with efforts to build similar “comfort woman” memorials in South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Australia, Germany, Canada, and the United States since then.

In particular, the Statue of Peace in a public park in Glendale, California in 2013, the first such “comfort women” memorial in the U.S., faced extensive protests from Japan and Japanese residents in the U.S. When the city council voted to build the statue and it was unveiled on July 30, 2013, right-wing groups were outraged, and conservative media, especially *Sankei*, reported on the story extensively. In February 2014, some Japanese residents in Southern California seeking the removal of the Glendale memorial filed a lawsuit against the City of Glendale; they first filed a suit in federal court, and later in the California state court as well. The plaintiffs, along with the Japanese right, established a new organization, the Global Alliance for Historical Truth (GAHT). GAHT lost the case in U.S. district and appeals’ courts, lost their California State court case, and were ordered to pay damages under the anti-SLAPP statute.⁷ Although their petition to the U.S. Supreme Court to review the circuit court ruling was denied on February 27, 2017, the Government of Japan filed an amicus curie brief to the U.S. Supreme Court in February 2017 in support of GAHT’s petition, a highly unusual move (Koyama, 2020; Yamaguchi, 2020). With this move by the Japanese government, the right-wing GAHT considered it a great success for their movement, despite the losses in the courtroom.

With the extensive bashing against Japan’s liberal daily, *Asahi Shimbun*, in 2014, the right-wing considered themselves to have “won” the “history wars” on the “comfort women” issue in Japan. With the controversy over the Glendale statue that started in 2013, as well as the building of more statues, including one in San Francisco—the first major U.S. city to build such a memorial in 2017—the government of Japan started to become involved in the “history wars” much more openly, and have made it into a more official effort since 2015 with their “strategic communications” policy that I will explain later.

Disseminating Revisionist History in English

In fighting their “history wars,” historical revisionists tried to persuade academics, journalists, politicians, and the general public abroad to buy into their version of the “correct history” of Japan. (Yamaguchi, 2020) In order to do so, they have considered a major weak point of their activism to be the lack of publications in English that conform to their perspective in fighting the “history wars” abroad. They consider that the lack of publications with their spin in English significantly weakens their activism designed to address the perceived information discrepancy. They have spread information with an extensive number of Japanese-language publications since the 1990s, mostly using popular media and the Internet, but very little in English.

⁷ Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation. Anti-SLAPP laws are intended to keep people from using courts and threats of lawsuits to intimidate people who are exercising their First Amendment Rights. <https://www.rcfp.org/resources/anti-slapp-laws/>.

The first time that the Japanese right-wing considered the dissemination of their version of history in English to be particularly crucial was when Iris Chang's non-fiction work on the Nanjing Massacre, *The Rape of Nanking* (1997), became a best-seller in the U.S. In 2000, Japan's biggest conservative organization, Nippon Kaigi, published a bilingual book from publisher Meiseisha in Japanese and English entitled, *The Alleged Nanking Massacre: Japan's Rebuttal to China's Forged Claims*. (Takemoto and Ohara, 2000) The book was advertised by the publisher as "a major blow against the anti-Japan campaign staged in the U.S.!" and "a necessary book for those who are going abroad to work or study to bring with them" on a wraparound band, the kind typically included on Japanese books, indicating that the bilingual version was published in order to persuade foreigners – especially Americans – and the Japanese people who were going abroad were expected to assume the role of historical revisionist disseminator by carrying the book with them. The other book that the Japanese right-wing published in English on the Nanjing Massacre around the same time was Tanaka Masaaki's *What Really Happened in Nanking: The Refutation of a Common Myth*, an abridged English-language translation of the original Japanese book by Tanaka, published. (Tanaka, 2000) The president of its publisher and translation company, Sekai Shuppan, is Moteki Hiromichi, who later founded the Society for Dissemination of Historical Facts in 2008. Moteki writes, "after the publication of Iris Chang's *The Rape of Nanking*, beyond the dissemination of general information (on Japan), I felt strongly that it was urgent to disseminate the information on historical issues relevant to Japan's honor." (Moteki, 2018: 5) Moteki then sent out the book to 5,000 members of the Association for Asian Studies in 2001.

Abe Shinzo became Prime Minister for the first time in 2006, and with the imminent passage of US House Resolution 121 in 2007, which asked the Japanese government for a formal apology for its engagement in the "comfort station" system, major attention was on the "comfort women" issue by the Japanese right-wing.⁸ Moteki was one of the earliest founders of groups promoting this revisionist history in English. He began it in 2007, at the time of H. Res. 121 that demanded the Japanese government apologize to former "comfort women," starting with a website and an email magazine by the Society for Dissemination of Historical Fact. He began regularly sending emails and introducing translated articles by right-wing intellectuals to the email addresses that he obtained through acquiring the mailing list for the

⁸ H. Res. 121 states that "the government of Japan should: (1) formally acknowledge, apologize, and accept historical responsibility for its Imperial Armed Force's coercion of young women into sexual slavery (comfort women) during its colonial and wartime occupation of Asia and the Pacific Islands from the 1930s through the duration of World War II; (2) have this official and public apology presented by the Prime Minister of Japan; (3) refute any claims that the sexual enslavement and trafficking of the comfort women never occurred; and (4) educate current and future generations about this crime while following the international community's recommendations with respect to the comfort women." <https://www.congress.gov/bill/110th-congress/house-resolution/121>

Association for Asian Studies. According to Moteki when I interviewed him in December 2018, the membership of his English listserv is under 4,000. Moteki writes that he came up with the idea for this new group by realizing that "rather than being stuck to paper publication, as long as we can get an English translation, we can disseminate more information" (Moteki, 2018: 5) on the Internet.

Another attempt by the Japanese right wing to disseminate their revisionist version of history on the "comfort women" issue in English was a paid advertisement in response to the House resolution, entitled "The Facts" in the *Washington Post*, published by a group of Japanese conservatives, the "Committee for Historical Facts," and endorsed by dozens of political and public leaders in Japan. However, the advertisement backfired, angering its intended American political audience, which resulted in the passage of H. Res.121.

In December 2012, Abe Shinzo became the Prime Minister for the second time. Right-wing organizations in Japan started to recruit Americans who may work for them to disseminate their version of the "comfort women" history, such as youtuber Tony Marano (a.k.a. Texas Daddy), writer Michael Yon, and TV talent Kent Gilbert. They also started to reach out to Japan studies scholars based in the U.S. as well as in other countries such as Australia, where controversies over building new "comfort women" statues were occurring.

Since 2014, when the *Asahi Shimbun* reviewed and corrected its past coverage of the "comfort women" issue and came under harsh attack, the Japanese right-wing has considered the dissemination of information in English to be even more important than fighting the issue in Japan, as they feel they have "won" the history wars domestically in Japan so they have moved their new "major battleground" to the U.S. (Yamaguchi, 2020). Since then, they have ramped up their publication of books and pamphlets in English on "comfort women" and send them to politicians, scholars, and journalists in the U.S. Those publications are mostly self-published pamphlets and books, and they are clearly propaganda materials, without any academic integrity and of dubious quality.

Particularly since around 2015, Japan studies scholars in the U.S. and Australia, and foreign correspondents covering Japan, have been bombarded with revisionist emails, books, pamphlets, and documents in English sent from Japan. The Japanese right-wing has sent these materials to academics in so-called "major battleground" areas and are seen as targets for conversion in order to promote Japan's revisionist history.

Those revisionist books and articles were also distributed by LDP politicians. In 2015, a member of the House of Councilors from the LDP, Inoguchi Kuniko, who is also a political scientist and former college professor, sent two revisionist books and a few right-wing news articles in English to Japan studies scholars based in the U.S. and Australia, and foreign correspondents based in Japan, as an "LDP's team effort," according to Inoguchi when I talked to her on the phone in October 2015. In the enclosed letter, she wrote:

Recently, a media company and a scholar respectively completed and made available a book written in English describing how regional history was distorted, including the background. I believe it is important for you, as a highly esteemed member of the academic circle, to look into the books which I am enclosing with this letter.

Sankei's *History Wars* (Sankei Shimbun, 2015) and conservative critic Oh Sonfa's book, *Getting Over It! Why Korea Needs to Stop Bashing Japan* (Oh, 2015) from the so-called "Hate Korea" genre, were included in the package by Inoguchi. The same books were also distributed to U.S. politicians by Kawai Katsuyuki, who was a Parliamentary Secretary at that time, during his trips to Washington D.C. (Yamaguchi, 2016).⁹ The content of those books is revisionist and racist, without any academic rigor. Thus, the reactions by academics and journalists who received those books and pamphlets were overwhelmingly negative (Morris-Suzuki, 2016; Yamaguchi, 2016).

Hence, there was a concern among the right-wing in Japan about the lack of academic books and peer-reviewed articles supporting their position and scholars who could produce such writings with academic authority. They had a strong desire to publish academic books from renowned academic presses, and peer-reviewed journal articles that would reflect their views in English. The publication of academic books in English from a publisher as prestigious as Columbia University Press, which published historian Yoshimi Yoshiaki's *Comfort Women* book (Yoshimi, 2002) seems to be one major goal, according to conservatives that I have talked to. They repeatedly told me that it was their dream to publish the English translation of Hata Ikuhiko's *Ianfu to Senjō no Sei (Comfort Women and Sex in the Battle Zone)*, originally published in 1999 in Japanese (Hata, 1999) and considered to be the most important and foundational text on the "comfort women" issue for them. Lacking academic sources, Japanese right-wingers utilized books by C. Sarah Soh (Soh, 2008) and an abridged, translated version of Korean scholar Park Yuha's *Comfort Women of the Empire* (Park, 2013) to deny the responsibility of the Japanese government for the "comfort women" system, and to question the trustworthiness of survivors' testimonies.

The situation of Japanese right-wing books being stuck in non-academic publications in English started to change in the late 2010s. A U.S. publisher, Hamilton Books, under Rowman & Littlefield, started to publish books written by revisionists, such as Koichi Mera, one of the plaintiffs in the Glendale case and the leader of GAHT (Mera, 2017). Most significantly, historian Hata Ikuhiko's *Comfort Women and Sex in the Battle Zone* was translated by Jason Morgan, an American historian of Reitaku University, who had been closely working with Japanese conservatives, and was finally published in 2018, also by

⁹ Kawai later became Justice Minister but was then arrested in 2020 for buying votes and was found guilty in 2021.

Hamilton Books (Hata, 2018). According to the publisher’s website, Hamilton Books “publishes a wide variety of high-quality nonfiction titles for scholarly and general interest audiences using an innovative model that combines the best features of self-publishing (quick decision making, a higher level of author control over the content, swift publication process) with the benefit of publishing with an established publishing house that will typeset, print, and market your book” (Rowman & Littlefield). Thus, the books from this press do not have to go through a peer-review process, which means that the academic rigor could be questionable. Even with the publication of Hata’s book, there are still no peer-reviewed papers or books from renowned academic presses that fully reflect their views in English.

Recruiting Anglophone Scholars for the Revisionist History

Besides publications, there have been attempts to recruit Anglophone scholars using Japan studies awards for fellowships and prizes. For example, Japan Institute for National Fundamentals—a right-wing think tank led by journalist Sakurai Yoshiko—started its “Japan Study Awards” in 2014, and many of the recipients of the award are foreign scholars, and recipients include American historians such as Kevin Doak and Jason Morgan. (Japan Institute for National Fundamentals). In addition, conservative research groups and institutes, such as the Historical Awareness Research Committee and the Institute of Moralogy, based at Reitaku University, sometimes invite Anglophone scholars as speakers and board members, including Ramseyer, and function as hubs of right-wing scholars.¹⁰

Moreover, the Japanese right initiated a new online news platform where Anglophone scholars and journalists can contribute. *Japan Forward* is an English-language news and opinion website established in June 2017 by Japan Forward Association, Inc., a new company created by Sankei. Naito Yasuo, *Japan Forward*’s editor-in-chief and an “expert advisor” of Sankei, writes that “it is necessary to create a conservative media in English out of Japan” because he was impressed by Nadeshiko Action (Japanese Women for Justice and Peace), a right-wing women’s organization working on the “comfort women” issue (Naito, 2019). The website of *Japan Forward* also states “Japan has long lagged behind other countries—all of which have their own points of view—in conveying her own take on the world around” (Japan Forward Editorial Team). Ramseyer has become one of the contributors of *Japan Forward*, along with other Anglophone scholars and writers, including his supporter, historian Jason Morgan of Reitaku University, who seems to be one of the most active contributors to *Japan Forward*.

The inclusion of Anglophone scholars in these right-wing communities is an important step toward understanding how Ramseyer’s article emerged, gained much attention, and has been used by right-wingers and the Japanese government to support their position.

¹⁰ For example, the Institute of Moralogy held an invited lecture by Ramseyer on July 1, 2019. https://www.moralogy.jp/190725_dokaken_lecture/

Japanese Government and its “Strategic Communications”

As the “history wars” intensified with the building of “comfort women” statues abroad, with the year 2015 marking 70 years since the end of WWII, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) of the Japanese government drastically increased its budget for strategic communications, allocating a total of 70 billion yen, “to strengthen the strategic communication, which provides information directly to the public overseas” (MOFA, 2016). With this increased budget, MOFA is working to convey “Japan’s views,” which includes “enhancing public awareness of issues concerning the recognition of history and the maintenance of territorial integrity” (MOFA, 2020). MOFA states that it is actively “communicating to the Governments of assigned countries, their citizens, and the media on Japan’s position and viewpoints on a range of subjects including the recognition of history and the maintenance of territorial integrity” (MOFA, 2020: 298). MOFA also emphasizes that “Japan is also engaged in efforts to strategically communicate information about matters on the recognition of history, including the issue of the so-called “comfort women” and various issues on Japan’s territorial integrity” (MOFA, 2020: 299).

With this “strategic communications” budget that ranges from around 50 to 75 billion yen per fiscal year, various measures have been taken by the MOFA in the U.S. on the “comfort women” issue. MOFA writes “when foreign media outlets publish reports that include factual errors, MOFA promptly sends rebuttal pieces or provides explanations under the name of ambassadors, consuls-general, or the Press Secretary of the ministry to ensure that media reports are made based on objective facts” (MOFA, 2020: 298). The letters and interviews that appear in the U.S. papers by the Japanese ambassador and consul generals are examples of “strategic communications” efforts, which explain the stance of the Japanese government on the “comfort women” issue in the U.S. (Yamaguchi, 2020).¹¹ The other prominent example is MOFA’s request in November 2014 to a U.S. textbook publisher, McGraw Hill, to revise the textbook description of “comfort women” (Debito, 2015). Morris-Suzuki (2021a) points out the Japanese government’s problematic use of taxpayer money to try to persuade the world of a version of history that is supported by particular groups but not by all citizens nor by experts of the issue.

Strategic communication also includes “expanding the circle of people with a great ability toward or knowledge of Japan” (MOFA, 2020), especially scholars, journalists, and politicians outside of Japan. There is no doubt that J. Mark Ramseyer is a person in this category, and Ramseyer won the “Order of the Rising Sun Award” for his “extensive

¹¹ An interview with a Japanese consul general in Atlanta, Takashi Shinozuka, is one such example of the Japanese government’s “strategic communication” effort, though the interview backfired with international outrage due to his claims that the Statue of Peace in Brookhaven is “a symbol of hatred,” and “in Asian culture, . . . , sometimes women become prostitutes to help families financially.” (Bugby, 2017)

contributions to the development of Japanese studies in the U.S. and the promotion of understanding of Japanese society and culture” in 2018 (Consul-General of Japan in Boston, 2018).

On January 27, 2022, a news show aired on Japan’s public broadcast station, NHK, said that a group called the “History War Team” was created with specialists under the second Abe administration that started in 2012 “for the purpose of collecting facts and examining them, and gaining international society’s understanding, based on the government’s view of history” (NHK, 2022). “The government view of history” is the key here—it is a view held by the government, not by the majority of academic historians, and it is clearly problematic because it can lead to censorship of viewpoints that are different from the government’s view.

For the purpose of “strategic communications,” then, the Japanese government wants “Japan-friendly” scholars to promote its view of history, denying that “comfort stations” were a system of sexual slavery and denying historical responsibility for the suffering of “comfort women.”

Advertising Ramseyer

Ramseyer’s “Contracting for Sex in the Pacific War” was published online in December 2020 in the *IRLE (International Review of Law and Economics)*. Yet, publishing an article in an academic journal seldom means that it gains much attention among the general public. In order to disseminate information on Ramseyer’s piece and enhance its impact, Japan’s right-wing daily newspaper, *Sankei Shimbun*, played a key role.

Sankei Shimbun also published an article in Japanese entitled “Rejecting the Theory of Comfort Women=Sex Slaves: Professor Ramseyer of Harvard University in the US Published an Academic Article” by Fukui Yoshitaka, a professor of Aoyama Gakuin University in Tokyo, on January 28, 2021. The article introduced Ramseyer as “being not only a renowned scholar of corporate law, but also a famed scholar in Japan Studies,” and added “it has an extremely important meaning for Professor Ramseyer to publish an academic paper that went through the peer-reviewed process by specialist scholars, and argued for the disagreement to the theory of “comfort women=sex slaves” (Fukui, 2022). The article then introduced a lengthy summary of Ramseyer’s paper. It is extremely rare for a daily newspaper to introduce the content of an academic paper in such detail. Even though Ramseyer’s article was published in a “law and economics” journal and not in a history or Asian Studies journal, it was introduced as if it were a history paper that was demonstrating a revolutionary finding on the history of “comfort women.”

Ramseyer’s article for general readers, “Recovering the Truth about Comfort Women,” was published in the January 12, 2021, issue of *Japan Forward*. In addition to publishing Ramseyer’s own piece and coverage on him, *Japan Forward* has published more articles than any other media group supporting Ramseyer’s “comfort women” paper in English by Japanese,

Korean and Anglophone scholars. These media by Sankei, including the tabloid paper *Yūkan Fuji* and monthly *Seiron* magazine, played a vital role in bringing attention to Ramseyer's article, both by its supporters and its critics. Other right-wing opinion magazines, including *WiLL* and *Hanada*, weekly magazines such as *Shinchō*, and online news sites like *Daily Shincho*, published articles by conservative scholars and journalists in support of Ramseyer.

As mentioned before, Ramseyer's paper was introduced by right-wing critics as an academic article that introduced a groundbreaking finding on the *history* of "comfort women." Yet interestingly, many of the articles by right-wing critics and journalists criticize statements by economists (Concerned Economists, 2021), but mostly ignore other letters by historians and other scholars with a few exceptions, such as Suk Gersen (2021), Gordon and Eckert (2021) and Stanley et al. (2021).

Moreover, while right-wing media and critics in Japan paid much attention to Ramseyer's "comfort women" article, they mostly ignored the controversy over his articles on Japan's minority populations, such as *zainichi* Koreans, Okinawans and *burakumin*. For example, scholars and journalists based in Japan, the U.S., the UK and Singapore published articles criticizing Ramseyer's works on *burakumin* (Neary and Saito eds., 2021), and major activist organizations, such as the Central Headquarters of Buraku Liberation League and the International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR) also issued statements against Ramseyer's articles (Buraku Kaihō Dōmei Chūō Honbu, 2021; The International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism, 2021). The reaction by right-wing scholars and activists, as well as social media users, was, however, scarce, and the media coverage on Ramseyer's works on Japan's minorities, including *zainichi* Koreans, Okinawans and *burakumin*, remained almost non-existent. Right-wing interest in the Ramseyer controversy was almost exclusively focused on the issue of "comfort women."

With these Japanese right-wing media stories covering Ramseyer's article, criticism against it soured quickly in the Korean and the U.S. media, and scholars started to release opinions criticizing Ramseyer as well as the IRLE that published the paper. Yet what remained quiet was the mainstream media in Japan, particularly the liberal media, on this issue.

Ramseyer as a Right-Wing Hero

As Ramseyer's article faced international scrutiny, right-wing organizations in Japan openly defended and supported Ramseyer. For example, the Historical Awareness Research Committee (HARC) released an "Open Letter in Support of Professor John Mark Ramseyer" signed by six academics (Ezaki Michio, Katsuoka Kanji, Jason Morgan, Nishioka Tsutomu, Shimada Yōichi and Takahashi Shirō) on February 8, 2021 (Ezaki et al. 2021). These scholars claim themselves to be "historians of modern Japan and East Asia," but actually include scholars outside of history, such as from political science and education. The letter states that Ramseyer's essay in IRLE is "a great achievement deserving of a praise" and emphasizes his

"native fluency in Japanese" and describes Ramseyer as "a legal specialist as well as a historian." The letter then writes that Ramseyer's article became the target of "cancel culture," and praised IRLE's "commitment to academic freedom" for publishing Ramseyer's article. (Ezaki et al. 2021)

Another right-wing organization that has been engaging the controversy over Ramseyer's article is the International Research Institute of Controversial Histories (iRICH) which shares its office with the Society for History Textbook Reform. iRICH held a symposium in support of Ramseyer on April 24, 2021, entitled "Emergency Symposium on the International Controversy on History Related to Ramseyer's Article" (iRICH, 2021). The organization then sent an open letter to the Science Council of Japan, asking it to respond to the petition drive demanding the retraction of Ramseyer's article. It held multiple press conferences criticizing the council for not responding to their letter. iRICH held another symposium on October 3 on the theme of the suppression of the freedom of scholarship, speech and press, and included the controversy over Ramseyer as one of the topics. From the statement issued by the chairman of iRICH, Sugihara Seishiro, it is clear that he, and the organization, consider the criticisms of Ramseyer's article as infringing "academic freedom," and he even characterizes the critics of Ramseyer as a "mob." (Sugihara, 2021)

Other right-wing organizations closely connected to iRICH, such as the Society for Dissemination of Historical Fact and Nadeshiko Action, have run many stories in support of Ramseyer on their websites, and in the case of the Society for Dissemination of Historical Fact, it sends information via its email magazine in English and Japanese, which reaches thousands of subscribers, including Anglophone scholars who never asked to subscribe to the organization's email newsletters.

Except for HARC, which has intellectuals with a close connection to Nippon Kaigi, a mainstream conservative organization, it should be noted that these right-wing organizations are non-mainstream ones, sharing core members with the Society for History Textbook Reform. In fact, many mainstream right-wing publications and movement groups did not deal with the Ramseyer issue much. As mentioned before, the liberal media in Japan did not cover this story much, either. Yet among a rather limited circle of right-wingers made up of the readers of right-wing magazines, online users—especially those on Twitter—and online streaming programs, Ramseyer emerged as their hero, someone fighting against the pressures of "cancel culture" from the left-wing supporters of "comfort women," as well as South Korea.

Ramseyer as their hero even became an anime character in a short video series created for the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Society for History Textbook Reform, also available on the group's YouTube channel. In the video, Ramseyer, carrying a sword and appearing with a Donald Trump-like character, is portrayed as a courageous and cool guy who fights against those who attack him with "fake" evidence, calling it "*Sagimetsu no Yaiba*," taken from "*Kimetsu no Yaiba*," a.k.a. the popular anime, *Demon Slayer*, by adding the word,

“sagi,” which means scam in Japanese (Tsukurukai CH02, 2022). In this right-wing context, “sagi” indicates the perceived “lies” by former “comfort women,” their supporters, and South Korea, and Ramseyer is portrayed as a hero who fights against such lies, armed with “facts.”

Online platforms, such as Twitter, has become another area where many right-wing individuals enthusiastically support Ramseyer, and attack individuals who are critical of his works. In particular, Waseda University Professor Arima Tetsuo, who wrote articles supporting Ramseyer in right-wing print and online media such as the *Daily Shinchō* and *WiLL*, utilized Twitter to attack critics of Ramseyer’s work, particularly targeting women historians who released statements or articles criticizing Ramseyer, and actively voiced their perspectives as historians on Twitter. Other “*netto uyoku*,” or online right-wingers, follow and attack Anglophone historians extensively. (Curtis, 2021a; Curtis, 2021b)

Arima also published a book in Japanese in support of Ramseyer, entitled *All ‘Comfort Women’ Had Agreement Contracts – a Shocking Article by Harvard Professor Ramseyer*, which includes a preface by Ramseyer (Arima 2021). In the book, Arima attacks the critics of Ramseyer’s paper for censoring speech and being “contemporary Nazis.” This book was then translated into English by the Society for Dissemination of Historical Fact and distributed to Anglophone scholars via his email list. Arima is a scholar who was not visible online and also in the right-wing print media before the Ramseyer controversy, but through this issue, he became one of the most outspoken people defending Ramseyer and attacking and degrading Anglophone scholars – especially women – who criticize Ramseyer’s articles, along with other Japanese users of Twitter, as Curtis (2021a; 2021b) demonstrates.

LDP Politicians and the Japanese Government Support Ramseyer

In addition to right-wing critics and activists, some right-wing LDP politicians actively voice their opinions to support Ramseyer. Aoyama Shigeharu, a member of the House of Councilors, writes in his blog that Ramseyer’s article has been peer-reviewed, and thus, its academic validity is proven. Aoyama has also said that since Ramseyer is under harsh bullying from Korean organizations, the Japanese government should support him as he wrote a “pure academic paper,” with his academic freedom (Aoyama, 2021a). In his blog dated March 1, 2021, Aoyama also suggests the Japanese readers of his blog send emails to Ramseyer to encourage him (Aoyama, 2021b).

Yamada Hiroshi, another LDP member of the House of Councilors, tweeted “I think the Japanese government should protect Professor Ramseyer from unjust mass violence against him. I will deal with it with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs” (Yamada, 2021), indicating that he would get the government involved in the Ramseyer matter. Sugita Mio, a member of the House of Representatives known for her active engagement in the “history wars,” tweeted on August 29, 2021, “I said my opinion (at a LDP gathering) that we should consider using the

budget for diplomacy to save foreigners under unjust attacks just because they disseminate the correct history of Japan" (Sugita, 2021).

Most importantly, Arimura Haruko, a right-wing politician in the House of Councilors supported by Nippon Kaigi, asked a question on the Ramseyer issue in a Diet session at the Committee on Education, Culture and Science of the House of Councilors on March 22, 2021. MOFA's bureaucrat responded, characterizing the issue as a "one-sided request to ask the retraction of a peer-reviewed academic paper" and claimed that there was a "concern over academic freedom" (Sangiin Minutes, 2021a). The Minister of Education, Culture and Science, Hagiuda Koichi, also answered, "it is important to honor that scholars can conduct research autonomously and freely without any interference from outside forces, and publish the result of the research freely," and "I consider it is only meaningful when the criticisms of the research results of a scholar is done based on other researchers' research results." Hence, Hagiuda's answer, while he used vague language, also hinted the idea that the request for retraction was not right, and it was an infringement of one's academic freedom.

Arimura asked a question once again on the Ramseyer issue in a session held at the Audit Committee of the House of Councilors on May 31, 2021. In her question, she stated that Ramseyer came under heavy fire "by the international public opinion led by South Korea," and she argued that he was attacked because the base for "the principle of sexual slavery" of the comfort station system, supported by international public opinion led by South Korea, would collapse. Answering the question, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Moteki Toshimitsu, answered that "honestly speaking, South Korea always moves the 'goal posts'," blaming South Korea for making unreasonable requests and changing them constantly. Moteki then stated that Japan would work hard to obtain just understanding from the international community on the Japanese government's stance. (Sangiin Minutes, 2021b) Concerning this question, these politicians placed the blame for the Ramseyer controversy on South Korea.

Therefore, conservative LDP politicians and the Japanese government share the same stance that Ramseyer is a victim of "cancel culture." It is clear that Ramseyer's supporters are making him into a "hero" who fights against unjust attacks against him by Koreans and left-wing Anglophone and Japanese scholars, and they are defending him on the basis of his article being peer-reviewed, of their own idea that his article presents the "historical fact" of "comfort women" not being an example of sexual slavery and making the issue into one of academic freedom.

Ramseyer's Response and Japan's Right-wing

Ramseyer remained silent for a few months after the publication of his "comfort women" piece. On April 24, 2021, a Japanese right-wing organization, iRICH, held an "Emergency Symposium on the International Controversy on History Related to Ramseyer's Article," and there, he delivered a video message (iRICH, 2021). In the video, Ramseyer portrays himself as

a victim, and characterized the controversy as an issue of academic freedom, the same argument as the other revisionists in Japan, as well as the Japanese government. He also contributed a Preface entitled “To Japanese Readers” to the book defending him by Arima Tetsuo and presents his understanding of the situation as a one-sided attack against him again (Ramseyer, 2021e). He also wrote a memoir in the popular *Weekly Shinchō* magazine in February 2022, in which he again repeats the same understanding that he is the victim, while attacking Anglophone scholars who criticize him as “extreme left” motivated by their political ideology (Ramseyer, 2022a).

Moreover, Ramseyer has published two working papers in the discussion paper series of the John M. Olin Center of Harvard Law School; one is a sole-authored rebuttal against his critics (Ramseyer, 2022b), and the other is a co-authored piece with Arima Tetsuo, entitled “Comfort Women: The North Korean Connection” (Arima and Ramseyer, 2022), though both Arima and Ramseyer are not specialists in history, nor in Korea. The fact that Ramseyer has appeared in Japanese right-wing symposiums, contributed articles in Japanese right-wing media, and now has worked on a co-authored piece with Arima, indicates that he is becoming more deeply involved in the circle of right-wing intellectuals and activists in Japan.

Conclusion

The controversy over Ramseyer’s “comfort women” paper, along with the deeper engagement of the Japanese government in the “history wars,” highlights the seriousness of historical revisionism permeating not only right-wing groups and individuals, but also the Japanese government. The reaction to the Ramseyer controversy by Japan’s right-wing, as well as the Japanese government, demonstrates that they try to frame it as an issue of “academic freedom” and “cancel culture,” using catchphrases used by the right-wing, to suppress voices demanding justice and human rights by disadvantaged people, such as “comfort women” survivors. In making this argument, they utilize the fact that Ramseyer’s “comfort women” article was published in a peer-reviewed journal and characterize it as if it were an article that presented a groundbreaking finding and analysis in *history*.

This year, MOFA posted an announcement on its website, asking citizens to report any information they find that has a “description that does not match our country’s position or description based on a misunderstanding of our country by people abroad” (MOFA, 2022). The website for reporting the information was created after a LDP member of the House of Councilors, Onoda Kimi, demanded in a Diet session the creation of such a website for the purpose of “history wars.” (Sangiin Minutes, 2022) Answering a question asked by a local daily newspaper, *Kanagawa Shimbum*, MOFA responded that it was created for MOFA to collect information widely, so if someone were to submit scholarly and journalistic descriptions, the information could be shared in the ministry and sections within the ministry could discuss

what to do with the information if it is relevant to them.¹² While the Japanese government uses “academic freedom” in its defense of Ramseyer, it flips the script in the case of scholarly and journalistic views that do not match those of the government, demanding that they have to be reported; furthermore, it is not clear what MOFA does with this information. Obviously, there is a major contradiction here, and it easily demonstrates that for the Japanese government, academic freedom is not the true issue of concern regarding the Ramseyer controversy.

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¹² Personal correspondence with a reporter of Kanagawa Shimbun, October 31, 2022.

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