

THE RECEPTION OF THE RAMSEYER 'COMFORT WOMEN' ARTICLE IN JAPAN: HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND

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KEY POINTS

- In this discussion paper, I argue that disturbing new developments in the Japanese government's response to the 'comfort women' problem and other important historical issues are currently playing out within Japan and internationally.
- Since 2006 and particularly since 2012, the Japanese government, while nominally stating for diplomatic purposes that it has 'inherited' the August 1993 Kōno Statement on the 'comfort women' issue, has been seeking to erode the credibility of the content of the statement, in the eyes both of domestic and international opinion, by obscuring the role of the state and the military in the supervision and operation of 'comfort stations' and denying the forcible or coercive recruitment of women by the military.
- In the international context, at least since 2015, the government has used an expanded 'strategic overseas dissemination' budget to propagate these views in the US and elsewhere.
- In February 2021, the government took a further step in this process by stating that the term 'military comfort women' or 'so-called "military comfort women"' was no longer to be used in an official context in Japan. Then in March 2021, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) announced that a further strengthening of 'strategic overseas dissemination' is one of its main objectives for the coming year.
- In this context, Professor J. Mark Ramseyer's recent article on the 'comfort women' issue, 'Contracting for Sex in the Pacific War', issued online by the peer-reviewed *International Journal of Law and Economics* (IRLE) in December 2020¹, has particularly important political resonance in Japan. Ramseyer's paper claims that: (i) Japan's wartime 'comfort stations' were run by private entrepreneurs, the Japanese military's only direct role being the maintenance of hygiene in the establishments; (ii) that 'comfort women' freely negotiated contracts with the 'comfort station' owners, reflecting their personal interests and following the 'basic game theoretic principles of credible commitments'.
- This article evoked a wave of objections from Japan scholars, legal scholars, economists and others who pointed out that Ramseyer had entirely ignored the recruitment of 'comfort women' in places other than Japan and Korea and had failed to produce any evidence of the existence of the contracts which he claimed to analyse, and that his article contained multiple examples of mis-citation, cherry-

picking of facts, misinterpretation of the content of sources and other flaws of research quality and integrity.² The IRLE article appeared almost simultaneously with a series of equally contentious articles (two of them published in peer-reviewed journals) in which Professor Ramseyer makes what many critics see as misleading and demeaning comments about the Hisabetsu Buraku, Korean and Okinawan minorities in Japan.³

- Please note that I am *not* arguing that Prof. Ramseyer wrote any of his articles because he was influenced by any of the trends or groups discussed below. His motivation for writing his recent articles seems clearly set out in a 2020 essay in *Japan Forward*, where he expresses frustration that US Japanese Studies is dominated by 'left-leaning' scholars. His articles appear to express his determination to present a different view of Japan.⁴
- However, the historical and political trends discussed below are essential context for understanding the way in which his articles (particularly his article in IRLE) are being received and weaponised in Japan.

BACKGROUND: THE JAPANESE GOVERNMENT'S CHANGING POSITION ON THE 'COMFORT WOMEN' ISSUE

- In December 2015, Japan and South Korea issued a joint statement which was intended to resolve the 'comfort women' issue 'finally and irreversibly', but this failed to have the desired effect.
- One reason for this was that, at the time the statement was issued, the Japanese and South Korean official positions on the issue were not converging but growing further apart.
- Following public testimony by survivors of the 'comfort women' system and investigations by Japan and Korea, in August 1993 Japan had issued the Kōno Statement. This stated that, although many comfort stations were run by private operators, the military were 'involved directly in the establishment and management of the comfort stations by such means as granting permissions to open the facilities, equipping the facilities [and] drawing up the regulations for the comfort stations' and that 'in some areas there were cases in which the then Japanese military directly operated comfort stations'⁵. The statement also acknowledged that some 'comfort women' had been 'recruited against their own will, through coaxing, coercion, etc., and that, at times, administrative/military personnel directly took part in the recruitments'. In his statement, Kōno went on to promise that 'we hereby reiterate our firm determination never to repeat the same mistake by forever engraving such issues in our memories through the study and teaching of history'.⁶
- In response to the Kōno Statement, a number of school history textbooks in Japan began to include brief mentions of the 'comfort women' issue, but a fierce backlash from neo-nationalist groups such as the Japan Society for History Textbook Reform

(*Atarashii Rekishi Kyōkasho o Tsukuru Kai*), founded in 1996, reversed the trend. A key part in this backlash was played by a group of right-wing politicians known as the 'Association of Young Parliamentarians for Considering History Textbooks'. The Executive Secretary of this group was future Prime Minister Abe Shinzō.⁷

- The *Nippon Kaigi* (Japan Conference), established one year later in 1997, also emerged as a central force in promoting the backlash against the implementation of Kōno's promises, and quickly grew into the largest right-wing political organization in Japan, with Abe Shinzō and many key ruling party politicians playing central roles in its activities.⁸ By 2014 none of Japan's authorised history textbooks included any information on the 'comfort women' issue.
- During the first Abe administration, the Japanese government revised its interpretation of the issue to insist that there had been no forcible recruitment of 'comfort women' 'in the narrow sense of the word'.⁹
- During the second Abe administration (2012-2020), the Japanese government's official position (despite a wealth of evidence to the contrary¹⁰) was that 'no description directly showing forcible removal [of comfort women] by the army or government officials can be found'.¹¹
- At a press conference in 2014, Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga Yoshihide (now Japan's Prime Minister), stated that this applied even to the Semarang case, where Dutch women were marched straight from an internment camp into a military 'comfort station'.¹²
- In 2014, Suga oversaw a review of the background to the issuing of the Kōno Statement. This review cast doubt on the validity of key parts of the Statement, and seriously discredited its contents in the eyes of the Japanese public.¹³
- Also in 2014, sections of the media (notably, the Sankei newspaper group) and other lobby groups launched a fierce assault on media and journalists who had reported sympathetically on the 'comfort women' issue. Some of these journalists experienced severe online harassment and death threats. The result was a worrying stifling of debate on the issue in Japanese media and in some sections of academia.¹⁴

'STRATEGIC OVERSEAS DISSEMINATION' AND THE 'COMFORT WOMEN' ISSUE

- In 2014-2015, the Japanese ruling Liberal Democratic Party and government developed a new policy on 'strategic overseas dissemination' (*senryakuteki taigai hasshin*).
- A key body involved in the formulation of this policy was the LDP's International Information Investigation Committee (*Kokusai Jōhō Kentō linkai*), headed by parliamentarian (later Minister for the Environment) Harada Yoshiaki. This committee was set up in March 2014 to 'focus on investigating the propaganda activities of China and South Korea in the United States', and to consider ways to 'invigorate Japan's own information dissemination strategy'.¹⁵ As Harada stated, the position of the

International Information Investigation Committee on the two most contentious aspects of the Japan's wartime history was that 'there was no Nanjing Massacre', and that 'there may have been "comfort women" as a social system, but it is not a fact that the state forced them into military facilities'.¹⁶

- Another important body was the Headquarters for Studying History and Thinking about the Future (*Rekishi o Manabi Mirai o Kangaeru Honbu*), established within the LDP in November 2015. This body was answerable directly to Prime Minister Abe, and was headed by Tanigaki Sadakazu, generally regarded as a liberal within the party.¹⁷ However, a central figure in the establishment of the Headquarters was the more hawkish Chair of the LDP's Policy Research Council, Inada Tomomi, who explained its purpose as follows: 'to re-examine history from an objective perspective and escape from the Tokyo Trials view of history'.¹⁸
- Until 2015, the Japanese government had a quite modest budget for what it calls 'strategic overseas dissemination' (*senryakuteki taigai hasshin*), running at around 20 billion yen (US\$ 165 million) a year; but in 2015, this budget line jumped to 41.2 billion (about \$ 341 million).¹⁹ By 2018, it had risen further to 59 billion yen (about \$518 million).²⁰
- This budget is used to support general cultural diplomacy projects (the building of 'Japan Houses', cultural and academic exchanges etc.). However, an important part of its purpose is also to convey to the world the government's image of 'Japan's correct stance / the true nature of Japan' (*Nihon no tadashii sugata*) on issues of territory (particularly the Senkaku/Diaoyu issue) and history (particularly the 'comfort women' issue). One way of doing this is through the 'cultivation of cohorts who are pro-Japanese and knowledgeable about Japan' (*shinnichiha, chinichiha no ikusei*).²¹
- The problem with the application of this funding to the 'comfort women' issue is that the Japanese government is using its taxpayers' money to try to persuade the rest of the world of a version of history which, though strongly espoused by certain political groups in Japan, is by no means accepted by all Japanese citizens, and is contradicted by the work of almost all experts on the issue. Besides, this version of history directly contradicts the factual contents and the promises of the 1993 Kōno Statement: a statement which the Japanese government has never officially rescinded.
- As senior Ministry of Foreign Affairs official Andō Toshihide explained to a session of the Lower House Foreign Affairs Committee in 2017, the government likes to put a 'cushion' between itself and the history related events which it supports. To do this, it focuses on 'cultivating' foreigners who are 'pro-Japanese / knowledgeable about Japan' and on supporting overseas NGOs and think-tanks etc. as a means to channel its views to an international audience.²²
- An important part of the strategy for communicating the Japanese government's view of the 'comfort women' issue and related historical issues to overseas audiences has therefore been support for seminars and other network building activities carried out via a range of think-tanks and similar organizations at home and abroad. In 2015, for

example, 4.8 billion yen (around US\$44 million) was spent on communicating ‘Japan’s correct stance’, of which, 970 million yen (over \$8 million) was paid directly to overseas think-tanks to ‘strengthen collaboration’.²³ Funding also goes to Japanese think-tanks for the same purpose. The aim (as Foreign Minister Kishida emphasised in 2016) was not simply to cultivate individuals sympathetic to Japan’s position on territorial and history issues, but also to help these individuals form international networks.²⁴

- Examples of the use of funding to project ‘Japan’s correct stance / the true nature of Japan’ include the use of funding from the supplementary budget to finance a Japan Chair at the Hudson Institute, a conservative US think tank founded by Herman Kahn. The chair was established in 2019. In 2013, Prime Minister Abe had received the Herman Kahn Award from the same institute. As Japan’s Foreign Minister Kōno Tarō observed at the time, ‘at present, in relation to various events taking place in international society, it is effective to promote understanding of Japan in international society by carrying out overseas dissemination from the standpoint of a third party who has a correct understanding of Japan. With this in mind, we wish to establish a chair related to Japan here [at the Hudson Institute]’.²⁵
- In many cases, though, the precise use made of ‘overseas dissemination’ funding is opaque. In 2015, for example, funds from Japan’s strategic overseas dissemination budget helped to support 107 seminars internationally,²⁶ but, as a Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson explained, ‘in relation to such seminars, given the nature of things, there are actually numerous cases where it is not necessarily desirable for the involvement of the Japanese government to become known. Among these, there are also occasions when supportive think-tanks run multiple seminars with the appearance that there is no financial support from the Japanese government.’²⁷

PRIVATE LOBBY GROUPS

- The period since the late 1990s, and particularly since the start of the second Abe government, has seen the proliferation of a mass of interlocking private lobby groups supporting the domestic and international projection of the view that there was no forced recruitment of ‘comfort women’. Many of these groups also deny the Nanjing Massacre and reject what they call the ‘Tokyo Trials view of history’. Some have close ties to politicians in the LDP and other right-of-centre parties. These groups are too numerous and complex to document in full, but I shall just give a few examples here.
- The *Shōheijuku* (literally translated, ‘Victorious Soldier Academy’) is one of a number of such ‘Academies’ which flourish in Japan – an academy, in this sense, being an association of politicians, business leaders, public figures and others who get together regularly to take part in seminars or lecture series, often led by a prominent entrepreneur or social thinker. The core philosophy of the *Shōheijuku* is its founder Motoya Toshio’s desire to free Japan from its ‘masochistic view of history’ (*jigyaku*

shikan) and revive 'a Japan to be proud of'.²⁸ Motoya is founder and head of the APA Hotel Group, one of Japan's largest hotel chains, and is believed to be among the richest men in Japan.²⁹

- The *Shōheijuku* has about 200 'special scholars' (*tokutaisei*), sixty-nine of whom are parliamentarians, of whom fifty-nine represent the ruling Liberal Democratic Party.³⁰ A particularly active figure in this group is Harada Yoshiaki, the LDP politician who founded and headed the party's International Information Investigation Committee, and who has been a lecturer or panellist at Shōheijuku monthly meetings 45 times since 2013.³¹
- In September 2015, as the Japanese government's new *taigai hasshin* strategy was taking shape, Harada took part in a published discussion with APA's Motoya Toshio, in which the two discussed the projection of Japan's views of history to the world. Motoya suggested the use of marketing companies, and argued the need to 'consider secret funds or donations from private citizens. It is not necessarily right to make all of these things open.'³² Motoya later claimed that he had hired a US public relations company to spread his views of history internationally³³, although this is difficult to confirm.
- Motoya's vision of modern history as expressed in his discussion with Harada is that Japan only went to war with the US because 'Japan made enemies of the Jewish people' through its strategies of railway building in Manchuria. Since (according to Motoya) Jewish people 'have gained control of worldwide media, finance, and marketing... Japan should leverage the power of the Jewish people... All influential marketing companies are funded by Jewish people. Japan should ask these American marketing companies to undertake publicity activities overseas and also in Japan.' This power, he argues, should then be used to promote the view that 'World War II was a defensive war', the Nanjing Massacre never happened, and the dropping of the atomic bombs was a crime against humanity which (he appears to believe) exceeded those of Nazi Germany – 'even Adolf Hitler didn't do things like slaughtering hundreds of thousands of civilians with no warning' (sic).³⁴ Motoya goes on to claim that the US possesses documentary evidence showing that the 'comfort women' were 'simple wartime prostitutes', but deliberately conceals this because 'denying it [i.e. the forced recruitment of 'comfort women'] would mean losing the legitimacy of its reasons for dropping the atomic bombs'.³⁵
- The APA Group also supports networking around history issues through a wide range of other activities, including offering very well-funded book and essay prizes, whose recipients are key members of groups engaged in their own private international dissemination of neo-nationalist visions of history. For example, LDP parliamentarian and energetic denier of the forced recruitment of 'comfort women' Sugita Mio received a 2014 APA Group Prize for True Interpretations of History, valued at three million yen (about US\$25,000), as a reward for a very short essay (published in English

and Japanese) entitled 'The Comfort Women and Abnormal Reporting that Underlies this Issue'.³⁶

- The APA Group also gives an even more generous book prize, the APA Japan Revival Prize, valued at ten million yen (roughly US\$95,000), to books which disseminate views of history close to its own. Recipients have included Moteki Hiromichi, Sugihara Seishirō and Ara Kenichi.³⁷ Sugihara is a former head of the Japan Society for History Textbook Reform (*Atarashii Rekishi Kyōkasho o Tsukuru Kai*), one of the earliest groups demand a stop to school teaching about the 'comfort women' issue. He is also an advisor to the Society for the Dissemination of Historical Fact (*Shijitsu o Sekai ni Hasshin suru Kai*, SDHF, established in 2015), which specialises in disseminating material in English denying the Nanjing Massacre and the forced recruitment of 'comfort women',³⁸ and Chair of the International Research Institute of Controversial Histories (iRich, est. 2013), which focuses on distributing English language denialist literature on the 'comfort women' issue to the United Nations and related bodies.³⁹ His Deputy Chair is Sugita Mio's collaborator and co-author Yamamoto Yumiko (see below). In addition to his Japan Revival Prize, Sugihara received a special APA Group Prize for True Interpretations of History in 2013. Ara is an advisor to the 'Society for the Restoration of Sovereignty' (*Shuken Kaifuku o Mezasu Kai*), established in 2006, whose main argument is that the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty deprived Japan of its sovereignty, and that this sovereignty must be regained so that Japan can embark on major military expansion.⁴⁰ Moteki Hiromichi, who shared the 2019 prize with Sugihara and Ara, is a Senior Research Fellow of iRich (of which Sugihara is President), and Deputy Chair of the SDHF (of which Sugihara is an advisor).
- The international networking of private lobby groups and think-tanks in Japan and the US is well illustrated by the case of the Global Alliance for Historical Truth (*Rekishi no Shinjitsu o Motomeru Sekai Rengōkai*, GAHT), another denialist group, founded in 2014 in both Japan and the US to 'protect the honour of Japan'.⁴¹ GAHT was the central force in the campaign against a comfort women memorial erected in Glendale, California, in 2013. It is frequently presented to the public as being a US-based initiative by local Japanese-American residents: 'a nonprofit organization created by Koichi Mera, a Glendale resident, and other Japanese Americans'.⁴² In fact, though, it is a joint venture in which a very energetic Japanese wing is driven by a range of denialist figures including Sugihara Seishirō and Fujii Genki (also spelled Fujii Gemki, and also known as Fujii Noboru).⁴³
- Fujii is a Harvard graduate and founder of the Cambridge Forecast Group of Japan (linked to the US-based Cambridge Forecast Group). He has dedicated much of his career to creating links between right wing politics in Japan and the US. Together with Aeba Hiroaki (also known as Aeba Jikidō, a prominent figure in the political wing of the new religion Happy Science), Fujii is a central figure in the Japanese Conservative Union (known since 2020 as CPAC Japan) which is the Japanese partner of the US Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC).

- Happy Science has played a central role in driving campaigns against ‘comfort women’ memorials in Australia and elsewhere⁴⁴, and Fujii has written or contributed to a number of articles in the Happy Science newsletter, praising former US President Donald Trump and touting ‘deep state’ conspiracy theories.⁴⁵ At the 2021 CPAC conference, Fujii presented a sensational video depicting Trump as a ‘modern samurai’, which raised eyebrows even amongst the Conference’s conservative audience.⁴⁶ These connections highlight the fact that historical denial activists in Japan derived great comfort and energy from the Trump Presidency and the rise of right-wing populist groups in the US during that presidency.
- A more academic form of international networking is illustrated by the exchange programs run by Reitaku University, a relatively small private university established in 1935 by Hiroike Chikuro, whose ‘Institute of Moralogy’ retains a close connection to the university.⁴⁷ ‘Moralogy’ is a form of business ethics centred on syncretic religious ideas. By 2000, the Institute of Moralogy had become closely aligned with the aims of the right-wing *Nippon Kaigi*, whose fifth anniversary was celebrated by the current Institute of Moralogy President, Hiroike Mototaka, with a warm message of support lamenting the era since the end of the Pacific War as Japan’s ‘lost fifty years’, and calling for an end to ‘masochistic history education’.⁴⁸
- In 2016, a group led by Reitaku University professors Nishioka Tsutomu and Takahashi Shirō established the ‘Historical Awareness Research Committee’ (*Rekishi Ninshiki Mondai Kenkyūkai*), based on the university campus. The Committee’s publications focus on denying the forced recruitment of ‘comfort women’ and other wartime labourers, denying the reality of the Nanjing Massacre and criticizing the Tokyo War Crimes trials for giving Japanese people a ‘masochistic view of history’.⁴⁹ Nishioka was a founding member of the Japan Society for History Textbook Reform and is a key figure in *Nippon Kaigi*, while Takahashi is (inter alia) a special fellow of iRich.⁵⁰
- In 2016, Reitaku University signed an agreement with a non-profit body, the Japan Global Initiative, which promotes exchanges between US and Japanese students, thus becoming one of just four Japanese universities to have such an agreement. The agreement enables it to fund US students to take programs at Reitaku University, and Reitaku students to undertake programs in Washington DC, where they study English and network with a range of people in the DC educational and political worlds.⁵¹

THE RECEPTION OF THE RAMSEYER ‘COMFORT WOMEN’ ARTICLE AND JAPAN’S RETREAT FROM THE KŌNO STATEMENT

- The Ramseyer ‘comfort women’ article appeared at a time when a new upsurge of debate about the ‘comfort women’ and the Kōno Statement was developing in Japan.
- In March 2020, Japan’s ‘textbook wars’ broke out again, when the Japanese Ministry of Education announced the results of the screening processes through which all textbooks must pass if they are to be accepted for official use in Japanese school

classrooms. For the first time since 2013, a Middle School history textbook containing a very brief mention of the ‘comfort women’ issue was authorised for use in schools. This textbook, compiled by Yamakawa Publishing Co., contains this sentence (in the context of a discussion of the Asia-Pacific War): ‘women from Korea, China, the Philippines etc. were brought together (*atsumerareta*) in “comfort facilities” set up in the war zones (the so-called “military comfort women”)’. This might not seem terribly controversial, since it does not specify who set up the ‘comfort facilities’, who brought the women together, how they were brought together, or for what purpose.⁵² But it evoked a fierce response from neo-nationalist groups, with the right-wing Sankei Newspaper (so often central to these debates) and the Japan Society for History Textbook Reform leading the charge to demand a change to the outcome of the screening.

- The focus of their protests is the use of the term ‘so-called “military comfort women”’ (*iwayuru jūgun ianfu*). The word ‘*jūgun*’ literally means ‘attached to the military’, and critics argue that its use in the textbook ‘induces the misconception that comfort women, like war correspondents, were under the direct management of the military.’⁵³ An intense campaign by a coalition of right-wing groups then began to get the Ministry of Education to remove the word ‘*jūgun*’.
- This campaign is not simply about a word in a textbook. Since the expression ‘so-called “military comfort women”’ appears in the 1993 Kōno Statement, far right politicians are also using this ‘correction of language’ issue as a lever to try to get the Suga administration explicitly to renounce the Kōno Statement (something that it has so far refused to do since, since it is clearly aware of the huge diplomatic backlash that this would unleash, not least from the US).⁵⁴ Questions posed in the Diet by right-wing parliamentarians have even argued that the term ‘military comfort women’ was not in use until it appeared in the Kōno Statement. This is completely incorrect – a word search of the Nikkei Telecom newspaper database indicates that the term had been used in media articles over 4000 times before August 1993. Nonetheless, some of the critics of the term have urged the government to ‘be courageous’ in rolling back the Kōno Statement.⁵⁵
- As the protests reached a peak at the beginning of this year, Professor Ramseyer’s article on the ‘comfort women’ dropped into the laps of nationalist campaign groups like manna from heaven. One of the first groups to leap to Ramseyer’s defence was the Reitaku University based Historical Awareness Research Council, whose members had already established connections to Ramseyer’s work as early as January 2019.⁵⁶ On 8 February 2021, just as protests against the article were emerging, the Research Council’s Vice President, along with five other members, wrote to the editors of the IRLE, strongly supporting Ramseyer’s ‘persuasive’ research and urging them to resist calls for the article’s retraction.
- On 24 February 2021, a group of neo-nationalist organizations including the Society for History Textbook Reform and the Society for the Dissemination of Historical Fact

organized an ‘Emergency Gathering to Stop the Reappearance of Mention of the “Military Comfort Women” in Middle School Textbooks’. Five parliamentarians including Harada Yoshiaki and Sugita Mio made presentations at the gathering denouncing the idea that there was any forcible recruitment of ‘comfort women’. Speeches at this gathering (for example, by LDP politician Takaichi Sanae) also highlighted the role of the Kōno Statement in promoting the use of the term ‘military comfort women’.⁵⁷

- One of the two keynote speeches at the gathering was given by Yamamoto Yumiko, for long a central figure in claims that ‘comfort women’ were merely prostitutes. Under the name Sakura Yumiko, Yamamoto was previously a central figure in the *Zaitokukai*, a well-known Japanese ‘hate speech’ group. She now heads a group known in Japanese as Nadeshiko Action and in English as ‘Japanese Women for Justice and Peace’⁵⁸, and is active in a number of other action groups including iRich.
- Yamamoto Yumiko’s keynote address consisted in its entirety of a detailed explication of Ramseyer’s ‘scholarly analysis’ of ‘comfort women’ contracts.⁵⁹ She has also given separate lectures expounding Ramseyer’s theory that ‘comfort women’ signed contracts on the basis of ‘credible commitments’, and revealing the ‘discovery’ of a 1991 article in which Ramseyer wrote about the use of contracts in prostitution in early twentieth century Japan.⁶⁰ These lectures are broadcast to viewers on the video channel run by the Japan Society for History Textbook Reform.⁶¹ Many other of the ‘comfort women’ denialist groups and their allies have also mobilized the article for their cause. For example, the Society for the Dissemination of Historical Fact, iRich, and the Global Alliance for Historical Truth have all posted articles in English and Japanese on their websites, arguing that Ramseyer’s article is proof positive that there was no forced recruitment of ‘comfort women’.

JAPANESE POLITICS AND THE RAMSEYER ARTICLE

- The campaign by various groups around the textbook issue has had a little-noticed but significant effect in prompting a further retreat by the Japanese government from the Kōno Statement. One symptom of this was the fact that the Foreign Ministry has quietly removed the text of the Kōno Statement from its website. Another was a new government pronouncement on the language surrounding the ‘comfort women’ issue. Until last year, ruling party politicians and ministers themselves, including then Prime Minister Abe, had used the terms ‘military comfort women’ or ‘so-called “military comfort women”’.⁶² But in March 2021, Chief Cabinet Secretary Katō Katsunobu stated in the Diet that ‘in recent years’ the Japanese government had ceased to use the term ‘military comfort women’, and now only uses the term ‘comfort women’.⁶³
- At the same session, though, Prime Minister Suga stated that the Japanese government’s ‘fundamental position’ is that it ‘inherits the Statement made by the

Chief Cabinet Secretary on 4 August 1993' and that 'as a government, we are not considering revising' this statement.⁶⁴

- Interpreted, what this means is that the Japanese government, while nominally 'inheriting' the Kōno Statement, is further gutting its content, so that the government now not only denies the role of the military in running 'comfort stations' and denies the use of coercion in the recruitment of women, but intends to remove the very term 'military comfort women' from official discourse. Far from engraving the memory of these issues in the nation's consciousness, it is engaged in a policy of trying to engrave in national and international consciousness the false memory that there was no state or military involvement in any forcible or coercive recruitment of 'comfort women', and that the 'comfort women' were not 'controlled by' or 'attached to' the military.
- In this context, it is important to note that on 1 March 2021, the LDP announced the main focuses of its actions for the rest of the year, with one of its core aims being to strengthen diverse methods of strategic overseas dissemination in relation to the 'history wars'.⁶⁵
- The dissemination of Ramseyer's article within Japan at this important moment in the evolution of the issue may be fortuitous, but the potential role of the article as a weapon in these debates has not been overlooked by politicians.
- For example, LDP parliamentarian and *Shōheijuku* 'special scholar' Aoyama Shigeharu raised the issue of Ramseyer's article in a meeting of the LDP Foreign Affairs and Security Section's Foreign Affairs and Security Research Committee, which was held on 9 February and chaired by Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Satō Masahisa. Aoyama has also posted articles in English and Japanese on his website, arguing that Ramseyer's article is proof that there was no forced recruitment of 'comfort women'.
- At the 9 February meeting, Aoyama asked what the government was doing to protect Professor Ramseyer from criticism by Koreans and others. Aoyama noted that a number of participants in the meeting were already clearly already aware of the Ramseyer article when he posed his question, and that the atmosphere in the meeting became tense, with one Ministry of Foreign Affairs official who was present busily taking notes as he spoke. His conclusion from the responses he received was that the Japanese government felt unable to become publicly involved in the issue, but was working to support Ramseyer 'beneath the surface'. Aoyama, in the video blog where he reported the events of this meeting, went on to urge his supporters to write to Harvard defending Ramseyer from criticism, and even gave them helpful suggestions as to how to phrase their messages – saying that they should write them in simple English, using expressions like 'Mr. Ramseyer is doing good work'.⁶⁶

SOME CONCLUSIONS

- Current developments around the 'comfort women' issue and the Kōno Statement need to be monitored closely in the context of rising political tensions

in East Asia and escalating efforts by the Japanese government to influence overseas views of history.

- The case of the Ramseyer article highlights the risks of scholarship being ‘weaponized’ for political purposes.
- It is, of course, inevitable that political groups will take up and quote academic research which suits their purposes, but this makes it more than ever essential for universities, scholarly journals etc to ensure that the material they produce is based on rigorous scholarly standards.
- Universities need to ensure that they have effective systems in place to protect against research misconduct in the humanities and social sciences, while also firmly protecting freedom of speech.
- Academic publishers need to re-examine their peer review processes to ensure the scholarly integrity of the work they publish. Professor Ramseyer’s contentious articles appear to have been published because they had been submitted to theory-focused journals, and were never reviewed by scholars with the appropriate area studies knowledge. This points to important flaws in the current peer review process.
- More broadly, this story highlights the problem of our ability to preserve memory and truth in a rapidly changing international environment. At a time when most political and media attention is focused on very real concerns about the rising power of China, we need, more urgently than ever, to have a deep understanding of unfolding trends in *all* the countries of the Indo-Pacific, because this is a geopolitical shift that contains multiple moving parts in many places. And we need to remember that ultimately this is not a story about Harvard professors or Korean protestors or Japanese politicians and lobby groups. It is about a very large number of women who suffered sexual violence in war, and whose story – along with the story of others who suffered similarly in other wars and places – must be remembered if we are ever to learn anything from the past.

NOTES

¹ J. Mark Ramseyer, 'Contracting for Sex in the Pacific War', *International Review of Law and Economics*, published online 1 December 2020.

² For example, 'Letter by Concerned Economists Regarding "Contracting for Sex in the Pacific War" in the International Review of Law and Economics', signed (as of 19 March 2021) by 3482 economists - <http://chwe.net/irle/letter/> (accessed 20 March 2021); Jeannie Suk Gersen, 'Seeking the True Story of the Comfort Women', *New Yorker*, 25 February 2021; Amy Stanley et al., "'Contracting for Sex in the Pacific War": The Case for Retraction on Grounds of Academic Misconduct', *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, vol. 19, issue 5, no. 13, 1 March 2021, <https://apjif.org/2021/5/ConcernedScholars.html> (accessed 5 March 2021); Fight for Justice / Japan Society for Historical Studies (*Rekishigaku Kenkyūkai*) and others, 'Aratana Yosōi de Arawareta Nihongun "Ianfu" Hiteiron o Hihan suru Nihon no Kenkyūsha, Akutibisuto no Kinkyū Seimei', on the website of the Japan Society for Historical Studies, 16 March 2021 - <http://www.nihonshiken.jp/> (accessed 19 March 2021).

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⁹ See, for example, reply by Prime Minister Abe Shinzō to a question in the Budgetary Committee of the Upper House of the Japanese Diet, 5 March 2007, in the online official record of the Japanese Diet (*Kokkai Gijiroku*) - <https://kokkai.ndl.go.jp/#/>.

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¹² Suga Yoshihide, press conference 5 September 2014; video available on the website of the Prime Minister's office: www.kantei.go.jp/tyokanpress/201409/5_p.html (accessed 18 September 2014 – cached).

¹³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan, 'Details of Exchanges between Japan and the Republic of Korea Regarding the Comfort Women Issue – From the Drafting of the Kono Statement to the Asian Women's Fund: Provisional Translation', 20 June 2014; Martin Fackler, 'Japan to Revisit Apology to Wartime Sex Slaves', *New York Times*, 28 February 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/01/world/asia/japan-to-review-apology-made-to-wwii-comfort-women.html> (accessed 8 May 2020).

¹⁴ See, for example, Tomomi Yamaguchi, 'Press Freedom Under Fire: The Asahi Affair and Uemura Takashi' in Jeff Kingston ed. *Press Freedom in Contemporary Japan*, London and New York, Routledge, 2016, pp. 135-151.

¹⁵ 'Jimin Kyō nimo Jōhō Kentōin: Chūkan Hannichi Senden Taisaku Hassoku', *Sankei Shinbun*, 27 March 2014.

¹⁶ 'Tōkyō Saiban, Nankin Daigyakusatsu – Jimin ga Kenshō Shinsoshiki', *Chūnichi Shimbun*, 9 December 2015.

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¹⁸ Inada Tomomi, 'Jimintō Seichō Kaichō, Inada Tomomi: 'Dentō to Sōzō – Shakai no Kadai – Dekiru koto kara'', *Sankei Shimbun*, 19 December 2015.

¹⁹ Statement by Minister of Foreign Affairs Kōno Tarō to the Security Committee of the Japanese Diet, 1 December 2017, in the online official record of the Japanese Diet (*Kokkai Gijiroku*); 'Kokusai Kōhō no Aratana Shuppatsuten', *Hokkoku Shimbun*, 16 January 2015. US dollar estimations factor in changes in the exchange rate.

²⁰ 'Gaimushō Sannenburi Yosan 7000 Oku Koe', *Sankei Shimbun*, 14 December 2018.

²¹ Statement by Foreign Minister Kishida Fumio to the Third Subcommittee of the Budgetary Committee of the Lower House Japanese Diet, 10 March 2015, in the online official record of the Japanese Diet.

²² Andō Toshihide, replying to a question from parliamentarian Maruyama Hodaka during a session of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Lower House of the Japanese Diet, 30 March 2017, in the online official record of the Japanese Diet.

²³ Ōtaka Masato replying to a question by parliamentarian Maruyama Hodaka during a session of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Lower House of the Japanese Diet, 20 April 2016, in the online official record of the Japanese Diet.

²⁴ Foreign Minister Kishida Fumio, addressing the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Lower House of the Diet, 18 May 2016, in the online official record of the Japanese Diet.

²⁵ Foreign Minister Kōno Tarō, replying to a question by parliamentarian Adachi Shinya during a session of the Budgetary Committee of the Lower House Japanese Diet, 6 February 2019, in the online official record of the Japanese Diet; see also the website of the Hudson Institute, <https://www.hudson.org/policycenters/39-japan-chair> (accessed 14 March 2021).

²⁶ Ōtaka Masato replying to a question by parliamentarian Maruyama Hodaka during a session of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Lower House of the Japanese Diet, 20 April 2016, in the online official record of the Japanese Diet.

²⁷ Ōtaka Masato replying to a question by parliamentarian Maruyama Hodaka during a session of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Lower House of the Japanese Diet, 1 April 2016, in the online official record of the Japanese Diet.

²⁸ See the website of the *Shōheijuku* - <http://shoheijuku.com/about> (accessed 14 March 2021).

²⁹ See the Forbes list of Japan's richest people, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/japan-billionaires/list/#tab:overall> (accessed 31 March 2021).

³⁰ See the PDF list of lecturers and special scholars, downloadable from the academy's website - <http://shoheijuku.com/about> (downloaded 15 March 2021)

³¹ See the list of *Shōheijuku* speakers on the *Shōheijuku* website - <http://shoheijuku.com/koushilit> (accessed 16 March 2021).

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- ³⁵ Harada and Motoya, 'Strategy is Necessary for Transmitting Information Overseas'.
- ³⁶ Mio Sugita 'The Comfort Women and Abnormal Reporting that Underlies this Issue, 2013 http://ronbun.apa.co.jp/book_ronbun/vol7/einglish.html (accessed 15 March 2021).
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- ³⁹ See the iRich website, <https://en.i-rich.org/> (accessed 17 March 2021).
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- ⁵¹ See the list on the website of the Japan Global Initiative: <https://jgi.or.jp/visit/> (accessed 21 March 2021).
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