

Chapter 8: Jeannie Suk Gersen's "Buck-Passing Rhetoric"

Jeannie Suk Gersen led the criticism

Looking into the sources of criticism on Ramseyer in Korean and other media has revealed that many of these criticisms have depended on the same set of criticisms and magazine articles. As such a source, one essay is frequently mentioned, "Seeking the True Story of the Comfort Women," written by Jeannie Suk Gersen for *The New Yorker*.⁽⁶⁵⁾

Korean media reports and criticisms from Japanese citizens' groups, in particular, are apparently based on this essay. Accordingly, this chapter discusses Suk's article.

I first downloaded the Japanese version of the Suk's article for careful reading and attempted to analysis the content, which researchers often do with newspaper articles and TV shows.

Starting with my conclusion, Suk frequently employs the tactic of using other people's words to criticize someone without the use of her own words at all. This tactic could be called "passing the buck," so to speak. She also employs repeatedly mentioning matters most provocative to the readers, not at all relevant to the main subject, thereby increasing one's bad impression of Ramseyer. This is "impression manipulation".

Components of the essay

Here is a specific analysis of the content. Her essay consists of the following three components:

(1) Her own commentary on the column and article written by Ramseyer. The column is "Recovering the Truth about the Comfort Women," posted on the *JAPAN Forward* website on January 12, 2021. The article is "Contracting for Sex in the Pacific War" published on the Web around the same time.

(2) Comments by researchers, other than Suk, on Ramseyer's work (not necessarily the column or article mentioned above but his work in general).

(3) Discussion of the Japanese, U.S. and Korean governments not directly related to Ramseyer's work and U.S. public opinion on the comfort women issue.

First, I figured out how much space, out of the entire essay, she devoted for each of these components by using the character count function. I used the text of the Japanese version of the essay for this purpose.

The result is approximately 8.8% for (1), 32% for (2) and 21.6% for (3). Her essay contained 16,286 words in total and she used only 1,442 characters, or 8.8% of the total, to comment on Ramseyer and his work with her own words.

Meanwhile, she used 5,208 words, approximately 32% of the total, for criticism of Ramseyer using other people's words. That is, she used other people's words about 3.8 more times than her own words, clearly revealing her rhetorical tactic.

She criticizes Ramseyer and his work with other people's words, rather than her own, to which to link the description of movements of the Japanese, U.S. and Korean governments.

In fairness to her, those who employ this tactic in criticizing others are not uncommon in Japan, either. It is a familiar ploy, of saying, "So-and-so says you are a nasty woman," when that is what the speaker is actually thinking.

In the first place, Suk is not a researcher or expert on the comfort women. It may be that, therefore, in her position, she cannot help but depend on "experts". She has expressly presented herself as the first Asian American woman, and the only Korean, to receive tenure at Harvard Law School. Setting aside how good she is in her specialty, her knowledge about the comfort women is lacking: she cannot write a paper on the comfort women on her own, which gives her no choice but to depend on others.

Incidentally, Harvard University has granted tenure to many Japanese. For example, Ex-Professor Akira Irie, Andrew Gordon's predecessors, served as the president of the American Historical Association.

The heart of Suk's argument

Now, let's see what she has to say in (1), commentary with her own words. In the first half, she says the following--it is a little difficult to understand and I have summarized the points after the citation:

“I posted a brief critique of Ramseyer’s arguments on social media, explaining that contract analysis assumes voluntary bargaining by free agents, and that when sex is mandatory, without the option to refuse or walk away, it cannot fairly be described as contractual. I was confident that he would not have described it as such if he believed comfort women’s accounts of having been conscripted and confined by force, threats, deception, and coercion. It seemed to me that his view reflected a prior choice not to credit those accounts because he deemed them inconsistent, or, as he wrote, “self-interested” and “uncorroborated.”

Let me itemize her points:

- “Comfort women” have stated that they were “conscripted and confined by force, threats, deception and coercion.”
- However, Ramseyer has made a prior choice “not to credit those accounts.”
- Seeing that the women did not have the option to refuse sex or leave voluntarily, it cannot be said that there was a “contract” between the women and the comfort stations, by Suk’s logic.

This is the heart and the only point of her criticism of Ramseyer. That is, if Ramseyer believed Korean comfort women’s accounts, that they were “conscripted and confined by force, threats, deception, and coercion,” he would not have written the paper that he did. (Come to think of it, Andrew Gordon and Carter Eckert, who I will introduce later, also believed the testimonies of Korean women who purported to have been comfort women.)

Then, she asserts that “contract analysis assumes voluntary bargaining by free agents, and when sex is mandatory, without the option to refuse or walk away, it cannot fairly be described as contractual,” which is why what Ramseyer calls a contract in his paper cannot be regarded as a contract.

Is Suk’s criticism reasonable?

Let’s study Suk’s assertions. First, let me take up the point she made that Ramseyer did not believe the accounts of the Korean women. He clearly stated that the comfort

women's statements were "pure fiction" in his *JAPAN Forward* article. While Suk rejects such an assessment, this viewpoint is not peculiar to Ramseyer. It is well-known that the comfort women's statements often change, which raises the issue of their credibility. For example, Kim Hak-sun, who was the first to come forward to identify herself as a former comfort woman, initially stated that she was taken by her father-in-law to China, where she was handed over to a comfort station.

This is a typical pattern, of being deceived and sold by a dishonest Korean recruiter. In an *Asahi Shimbun* article, however, this pattern was changed to "forceful taking away by the Japanese army." Accordingly, what was supposed to be a small-scale criminal act conducted by an unscrupulous Korean was replaced by a national crime—the Japanese army's "forceful abduction". This is just a small part of the problem.

No evidence has been found to support the comfort women's accounts. Still, as I have stated earlier, it is true that some women were deceived into this profession. Ramseyer also recognizes this point in his paper. However, the women were deceived by dishonest recruiters, not by the Japanese government or by the Japanese army. The official view of the Government of Japan is that no evidence has been found, up through today, showing that the army deceived them.

Next, let's focus on that which Suk regards as a "contract." She argues that, if the conditions do not include the option to "refuse" sex or to "walk away," then there cannot be a "contract."

Due to the nature of their work, comfort women in those days could not simply refuse or just walk away before their terms expired. Therefore, according to Suk's logic, her argument is that comfort women were not under contract and in a state of enslavement. However, she has apparently given a one-sided definition of a "contract" only to argue at the same time that "comfort women were in a state of enslavement without any contract."

In his paper, Ramseyer stated that there was a certain "contract" between the woman (and her parents) and the recruiter and presented many supporting documents. He asserts that there was an agreement that can be described as a "contract" based on the fact that various conditions, such as the "up-front advance" and "term of service," were discussed and agreed upon.

However, Suk introduces totally different definitions of a “contract” here. Let me repeat that, by her definition, the option to “refuse” sex and “walk away” is a condition for a “contract” to be effective. Of course, she is free to express such an opinion but whether such a definition is generally accepted is open to question.

What is a contract?

Take the sex industry, for example. Even now, brothels are legal in some countries, such as Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Austria and Australia. Women working there must have an agreement with their employer and are obligated to work, even if they are reluctant. First of all, they cannot freely exercise their “right”, at any time, to “refuse” sex or “walk away” without consideration of their income.

Now, are they “under no contract” and in a “state of enslavement”? No, they are not and that should be why they are not regarded as “sex slaves” and their existence, as prostitutes, is legal, even in this day and age of promoting “women’s human rights”. Under no circumstance would the German and Dutch governments leave “sex slaves” as they are.

Let’s consider jobs other than in the sex industry. In many companies, employees cannot refuse to do the job that they are assigned. They must comply even if the type of job is not to their liking. Generally, they should be able to quit at will, but if they have made an agreement on the term of service, such as a contract for a certain period of years or a loan from the company, they would be obliged to pay a penalty when they quit. It is the same as in the cases of the comfort women who have to pay back debt (the up-front advance) when they quit. So, are these employees “under no contract” and in a “state of enslavement”? The answer is “No.”

Prostitution is illegal in most countries around the world. Nevertheless, the sex industry exists. It is true that there are no agreements from the beginning for women who are forced into brothels, confined and forced to work, as is the case in some countries.

Now, does illegal prostitution not involving human trafficking or confinement put all women under no contract and in a state of enslavement? Is it not that they are working under some kind of an agreement, if illegal and not meeting ideal conditions?

The fact is apparently that there are certain arrangements between the women and the managers, which are fulfilled by both parties because they benefit from them one way or another. That is a conclusion deduced from Ramseyer's game theory. I think this is the reality.

Suk takes the view that contracts cannot exist unless they met ideal conditions (as she defines them). As described above, however, within the real world, her position is very peculiar.

Her argument may hold water in a society in which details are generally worked out in a contract, as in the present day. However, between private citizens in the prewar period, it seems to be fairly unreasonable to argue that failing to meet ideal conditions nullifies a contract.

Ramseyer's aim

Ramseyer has a track record of taking the Japanese licensed and unlicensed prostitution and comfort women system that existed as a subject of study to make clear that there was a certain contract, if not as adequate as today's contracts, as visualized by Suk, between a manager and a prostitute and that both parties fulfilled it by "credible commitments" according to game theory.

According to "Indentured Prostitution in Imperial Japan: Credible Commitments in the Commercial Sex Industry," an article Ramseyer published in 1991, it was assumed that managers exploited prostitutes for their own benefit, extended the terms of service at will and kept women in a state of sex enslavement for a long time. In fact, statistics on licensed and unlicensed prostitution showed that "credible commitments" worked and many women gained a fairly substantial amount of money and left the sex industry well before their term of service was up. Subsequently, not a few of them lived a "respectable" life by working, for example, as a nurse or school teacher.

This "licensed and unlicensed prostitutes" model has been applied to comfort women, which has revealed that "credible commitments" functioned in the same way and comfort women acquired a substantial amount of money that allowed them to leave their comfort station after a two-year term. Note, however, that there were cases, such as the Myitkyina comfort station in Myanmar, in which the term of service was six months to

one year, and some women stayed at the comfort station rather than go home even after their two-year term of service expired.

Among those who stayed after the completion of their term of service, there were cases in which the worsening war situation made it impossible for them to go home safely or they were dissuaded by the manager because of their popularity, but, in some cases, they apparently made their own decision to stay to make more money.

That is, not all cases were in accordance with the principle for various causes. Nevertheless, a legal-economic model applies in which comfort women made good money by “credible commitments” and left the comfort station after a period of service, which is a theory put forward by Ramseyer.

Ramseyer knows very well that the contracts in these licensed and unlicensed prostitution and comfort women systems do not satisfy Suk’s ideal conditions. He is also well aware that those contracts are not based on written agreements as in the case of the present day.

On the premise of this, he chose contracts not based on written agreements and those that did not satisfy ideal conditions as the subject of his research and tried to make clear how those contracts were functional for both parties, for comfort women and their employers. It can also be seen as his attempt to rationalize the principle of behavior of those involved in this profession in those days. In his essay, Ramseyer did not try to judge the behavior of the people of those days with the present-day values—this was not the aim of his paper.

The conclusion of the paper does not change

It is true that, as I have noted up to now, there were various women, including those who were deceived, voluntarily agreed or persuaded by their parents and agreed but not quite voluntarily, and the level of their “voluntary consent” differed in each case.

However, they went to the police together with their parent(s) and signed a letter of consent, on which they obtained a travel permit and underwent many checks of documents and contract details before they arrived at battlefield comfort stations.

In most cases, women were given an opportunity to express their refusal. In reality, it must have been difficult to go against their parents’ wishes but, in those days, it probably

did not apply only to this type of work. In those days, parents customarily decided their children's jobs and marriage partners.

Now, here is the point. At comfort stations, based on the comfort station management rules of the Japanese army, women who were deceived, as well as those who accepted the contract, shared the same basic terms of contract, such as the share of the lodging and food expenses, division of earnings between the manager and the woman, fees and contract period. That is, the result of Ramseyer's analysis of the legal-economic model does not change.

Suk pretends not to notice this reality, saying that the women were under no contract because "ideal" conditions were not met and they were in a state of enslavement because they were under no contract. However, Ramseyer tried to make clear how the contract, which existed, functioned.

If Suk is a fundamentalist who aims at explaining the past based on a current sense of values, then Ramseyer is a realist who attempts to explain the past based on a sense of values from those days.

In short, Suk's criticism of Ramseyer comes from a difference in footing and is one-sided. No wonder their arguments do not mesh at all.

Threatening email

Apart from the discussion on the rights and wrongs of Ramseyer's paper, what caught my attention is a phrase in an email message that Suk sent to Ramseyer. In her essay, she wrote this about her message:

"After I spent time digesting my colleague's [Ramseyer's] reasoning, I spoke with him [by email] to say that we were about to have a public disagreement, but that I would not be joining or encouraging any possible calls for institutional penalty for his exercise of academic freedom to engage in scholarship or express his opinion."

What does "institutional" of "institutional penalty" mean?

In a country with academic freedom and freedom of speech, university authorities do not punish or penalize teachers for “exercising academic freedom through research activities or expression of opinions.” If they did, then the teacher in question would immediately sue the university, which would lose and be exposed to criticism from the media, and the head of the university would be driven to resign. It is the same whether in Japan or the U.S. Therefore, it is unthinkable that Harvard University would inflict any “institutional penalty” on Ramseyer.

If this had a literal meaning, there would have been no need to expressly mention it. There is no need, but she specifically writes this in her essay. Does this have any special meaning? What did she really intend to say?

I presume that “institutional penalty” does not mean “penalty by the university” but “penalty by the organization.”

That is, penalties by the Korean Council for Justice and Remembrance for the Issues of Military Sexual Slavery by Japan (KCJR) and its affiliated organizations, Korean media or Korean government, which were quite responsive to Suk’s statements.

Suk said that she “would not be joining” such calls for an institutional penalty. However, one can interpret her wording as a specific hint at the existence of such a penalty. It may be viewed as a threat. That is how I would interpret her wording if I received an email like this.

Suk’s cherry picking

Major Ramseyer critics who appear in (2) include Andrew Gordon (History) and Carter Eckert (Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations) at Harvard University, Tessa Morris-Suzuki (History) at the Australian National University and Alexis Dudden (History) at the University of Connecticut. Due to space constraints, I cannot take up all of their arguments.

This roster shows that neutral comments on Ramseyer’s paper cannot be expected from anyone.

They are authors or scholars who have adopted the “200,000 comfort women forceful mobilization” thinking or “comfort women sex slave” thinking (“comfort women massacre” line of thinking for some) or articles written along those lines.

Eckert, who is Yoon Se Young Professor of Korean History, is unavoidably pro-Korean. Gordon is the one who issued a statement opposing a request by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan to delete inaccurate expressions about the comfort women in a U.S. history textbook.

This history textbook said that “the Japanese army forcibly recruited, conscripted, and dragooned as many as two hundred thousand women age fourteen to twenty to serve in military brothels, called ‘comfort houses’ or ‘consolation centers.’” It also said that the Japanese military “massacred large numbers of comfort women to cover up the operation.”

The Japanese government’s official position is that there is no evidence of these events and, among scholars, many do not adopt these lines of thinking. As I mentioned earlier, even Yoshimi Yoshiaki revised his recognition of actual conditions and stopped asserting “coercion in the narrow sense,” changing his argument to the problem of “coercion in the broad sense,” or being forced to work against the women’s intention.

Tessa Morris-Suzuki has set forth a thinking in her book, *Exodus to North Korea: Shadows from Japan's Cold War* (Japanese translation published by Asahi Shimbun Publications), that the postwar repatriation project of Koreans living in Japan was a Japanese government plot, which considered Koreans in Japan as burdens.

Alexis Dudden is, in the words of Komori Yoshihisa, Special Professor at Reitaku University, a scholar “who, when any argument grounded on facts advanced by Japan comes close to disproving their argument, has repeatedly employed a technique of collecting signatures of many relevant parties in the U.S. and Europe to attack the argument of Japan.”

It should be difficult for them to read Ramseyer’s paper with an open mind. It is natural that critical views are expressed in the academic world. However, when commenting on an article written by a third party, citing opinions convenient to one’s own assertion does not sound like a fair approach to take.

She engaged in cherry picking, that is, selecting items that conveniently suited her argument.

Suk knowingly misled readers

In addition, there is a problem in the following part of Suk's essay:

“Reviewing Ramseyer's footnotes, they [Gordon and Eckert] found that there were no contracts involving Korean women at wartime comfort stations cited, nor secondary sources detailing those contracts, nor even any third-party accounts that confirm the relevant terms. When they examined the one cited source that seemed as if it might lead to data about relevant contracts, from 1938, they found that it provided sample contracts for employment of a Japanese woman as a “barmaid”—“*shakufu*” in Japanese, a job understood to involve sex work.”

However, as I checked the “Statement by Andrew Gordon, Professor, Department of History, Carter Eckert, Professor, Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations, Harvard University,” this statement did not contain the phrase “found that there were no secondary sources detailing those contracts, nor even any third-party accounts that confirm the relevant terms.”⁽⁶⁶⁾

I wonder if Suk communicated with them, separate from the statement, and was told that they “found” that there were no contracts or secondary or third-party sources. If not, then it means that she misused their names.

In addition, as I wrote earlier, Ramseyer mentions a large number of “secondary sources detailing those contracts and third-party accounts that confirm the relevant terms” as if it would never be enough. This is what I would like readers to confirm what Ramseyer said by reading his paper included at the end of this book.

Anyone who only read Suk's essay would think that “the Ramseyer paper was written without any sources or evidence.” If this was so, then this would be outrageous but, in fact, this is not true. On this score, one may even call her a liar.

There is a more serious problem in the next part of Suk's essay: “When they examined the one cited source that seemed as if it might lead to data about relevant contracts, from

1938, they found that it provided sample contracts for employment of a Japanese woman as a “barmaid”—“*shakufu*” in Japanese, a job understood to involve sex work.”

This part of her essay also contains a lie.

As I will make clear in Chapter 9, *shakufu* is a euphemism for a prostitute and can either be a licensed or unlicensed prostitute or comfort woman, depending on the context. Gordon and Eckert, who lacked this fundamental knowledge, literally interpreted this word as a “barmaid.”

That is why they argued that “Ramseyer was supposed to be discussing comfort women but presented sample contracts for women recruited as barmaids as a primary source,” as I will take up in detail in the next chapter.

In reality, however, *shakufu* in the source refers to “unlicensed prostitutes” (who may have subsequently become comfort women). That is, Gordon and Eckert, lacking fundamental knowledge, are the ones who are mistaken.

Suk, who mentioned “*shakufu* in Japanese, a job understood to involve sex work,” is aware of her colleagues’ mistake. However, as can be seen from the citation, she takes advantage of this to mislead readers into thinking that “Ramseyer is cheating by showing the terms of contracts for barmaids, instead of comfort women.”

With knowledge of the truth, she made use of their mistake to mislead the readers. This is not truthful and an act of treachery to the readers of *The New Yorker* who trusted her.

Suk used a considerable amount of space to cite Tessa Morris-Suzuki’s critique addressed to the editors of the *International Review of Law and Economics* but, in fact, in parts of the critique she did not mention, there was constructive criticism to Ramseyer’s article.⁽⁶⁷⁾

Tessa Morris-Suzuki’s Southeast Asian perspective complements the Ramseyer article

Tessa Morris-Suzuki, who was teaching at the Australian National University, takes a serious view also of Asian countries other than Far East, such as Indonesia (Dutch East Indies at the time of the war), Malaysia and the Philippines. Her criticism is that women

who became comfort women of the Japanese army in these countries are excluded from the scope of the Ramseyer article.

It is true that, reports of the U.S. Army mentioned examples of local brothels used as comfort stations of the Japanese army and local women (assumed to be mostly prostitutes) employed as comfort women. On that score, Morris-Suzuki's comment functioned to suggest important points of view for the Ramseyer article.

The problem is that documents such as the comfort station rules enforced by the Japanese army mention contracts with Japanese, Korean and Chinese comfort women but include no description about local comfort women. In particular, no information is available about the price, duration of service and savings. There is no way of telling whether there was a "contract of agreement."

Accordingly, Ramseyer did not ignore them because their existence was inconvenient but because a lack of sources prevented him from examining them.

If sufficient sources were available, he would have attempted to clarify a legal economic model of comfort women adapted to local women. This requires detailed research into the sex industry of those days in Asian countries occupied by Japan at that time, which, if at all possible, would take a long time.

Morris-Suzuki claimed that there were as many as 60,000 "sex victims," other than Japanese, Korean and Chinese, mainly local women. This number is assumed to be the total number of rape victims and comfort women but cannot be proven from official documents.

I fail to see the fairness of making the number look bigger for impression manipulation in the first place. It would be more constructive to do some research on actual conditions to find out the real number of local comfort women and the realities of contracts before making a criticism--or work with Ramseyer.

In this way, Morris-Suzuki can, if she is able to be open-minded, cooperate with Ramseyer to give a clear picture of actual conditions of local comfort women, a theme on which not much light had been shed until now.

Suk, on the other hand, only shows interest in the human rights of Korean comfort women, despite her emphasis on “women’s human rights.” She looks at the comfort women system through a preconceived notion that Korean women were the only “victims.” That is why Suk closes her eyes to the constructive aspect of Morris-Suzuki’s criticism.

If Suk argues that comfort women are victims, then she should take interest in “women’s human rights” of the comfort women all over Asian other than Korean comfort women. She should also take up the Lai Dai Han issue.

What she refers to as Japanese history revisionists

Let me move on to (3).

What is most loathed about Japan by American liberal intellectuals, or the readers of *The New Yorker*, is probably “history revisionism” movement of “Japanese conservative reactionaries.” In the context of the comfort women issue, in particular, “history revisionism” refers to the movement led by former Prime Minister Abe Shinzo to revise the Kono Statement.

Suk’s strategy is to create a perception of similarity, between the revision of the Kono Statement and Ramseyer’s paper, to incite hatred and revulsion in the minds of the readers of *The New Yorker*.

To that end, Suk first gives a very sympathetic and detailed explanation of what the Kono Statement is all about:

“In 1993, Japan issued the watershed Kono Statement, which admitted the Japanese military’s involvement in the comfort stations and in recruiting women ‘against their own will,’ and said that ‘they lived in misery at comfort stations under a coercive atmosphere.’ Japan extended ‘sincere apologies and remorse,’ and promised to ‘face squarely the historical facts’ with ‘firm determination never to repeat the same mistake by forever engraving such issues in our memories through the study and teaching of history.’”

After this, Suk states that former Prime Minister Abe Shinzo tried to annul the Kono Statement. Symbolic of this movement, she says, is the request by the Ministry of Foreign

Affairs of Japan for erasure of some of the description of comfort women in a history textbook. She explains:

“But after Prime Minister Shinzō Abe took office, in 2006, Japan appeared to back away from the Kono Statement’s apologetic stance. Under Abe, the environment in Japan became ‘inhospitable to objective historical inquiry’ on the subject of comfort women, as Alexis Dudden, a historian of modern Japan and Korea at the University of Connecticut, put it. A key example was an attempt by the Japanese Foreign Ministry, in 2014, to pressure McGraw Hill to erase several paragraphs on comfort women from one of its world-history textbooks; the publisher refused, citing scholars’ work in establishing historical facts. Abe lamented the outcome, saying, ‘This kind of textbook is being used in the United States, as we did not protest the things we should have, or we failed to correct the things we should have.’”

American liberal intellectuals know very well that former P.M. Abe is a grandson of Kishi Nobusuke, who was a suspected war criminal. Therefore, from the liberal intellectuals’ perspective, the attempt by a grandson of a politician who was among those at the helm of the Empire of Japan, which launched the Pearl Harbor Attack, to correct the Kono Statement appears to be a movement of “history revisionism” to justify the Greater East Asia War, which caused human suffering throughout Asian and the U.S.

Suk used Dudden’s phrase to point out that, because of this movement, “Under Abe, the environment in Japan became ‘inhospitable to objective historical inquiry’ on the subject of comfort women.” She shows sympathy for Japanese historians who have been rendered unable to pursue “objective historical inquiry” on account of former P.M. Abe.

The truth is that, independent of the government’s intention and so forth, it was made clear as verification progressed that claims of “200,000 Korean comfort women,” “comfort women forceful mobilization,” “comfort women sex slaves” and “Korean comfort women massacre” were all false, based on primary sources.

In the first place, no Japanese or South Korean or anyone else in the world has ever seen any primary sources that back up these assertions. There are many primary sources that prove otherwise, some of which are mentioned in the References of Ramseyer’s paper.

While Suk refers to “objective historical inquiry,” the only grounds for these assertions claimed by South Korea are emotional and subjective statements which keep undergoing changes made by women who claim to have been comfort women.

That is, contrary to her judgment, “objective historical inquiry” into comfort women was in fact making progress during the Abe administration. It was used as the basis for the request by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan for erasure of some of the depictions of comfort women included in a world history textbook published by McGraw-Hill.

The present standpoint of Japan

Due to the course of these events, in the 2015 Japan-South Korea Agreement, South Korea agreed “not to use the term ‘sex slaves’ because it contradicts historical facts.” This is clearly stated as the official view of the Japanese government.

The standpoint currently taken by the Japanese government, of denouncing the “200,000 Korean comfort women,” story “comfort women forceful mobilization” and the “comfort women sex slave” story, can be said to be an extension of the Japanese government’s official view mentioned earlier.

Naturally, Suk does not touch on the Lai Dai Han issue, in which during the Vietnam War, the South Korean army committed every conceivable form of sexual violence against local women, the Japan-South Korea Agreement in 2015 or the embezzlement of donations to the KCJR scandal.

On the other hand, she argues that “history revisionist” activities are found among former P.M. Abe and people around him and writes in such a way that it would be regarded in the same light as Ramseyer’s paper. She employs impression manipulation like this so that revulsion toward former P.M. Abe is directed toward Ramseyer’s paper. However, the rights and wrongs of Ramseyer’s paper have nothing to do with Japanese political and public opinions.

As I have described up to now, objectively speaking, Suk’s criticisms (essay) include tricks of thinking. To prevent from being tricked, it would be best to at least properly take into consideration the content of the Japan-South Korea Agreement.

Having said that, it can be pointed out that Suk's arguments and logic have been made possible by the Kono Statement, as in the following:

“Comfort stations were operated in response to the request of the military authorities of the day. The then Japanese military was, directly or indirectly, involved in the establishment and management of the comfort stations and the transfer of comfort women. The recruitment of the comfort women was conducted mainly by private recruiters who acted in response to the request of the military. The Government study has revealed that in many cases they were recruited against their own will, through coaxing, coercion, etc., and that, at times, administrative/military personnel directly took part in the recruitments. They lived in misery at comfort stations under a coercive atmosphere.

“As to the origin of those comfort women who were transferred to the war areas, excluding those from Japan, those from the Korean Peninsula accounted for a large part. The Korean Peninsula was under Japanese rule in those days, and their recruitment, transfer, control, etc., were conducted generally against their will, through coaxing, coercion, etc.” (August 4, 1993.)

It is true that this statement allowed for the interpretation that Japan admitted to “forceful taking away.” This gives ground to stand on for those who criticize Ramseyer.

Subsequently, however, the Japanese government has shown:

- “Forceful taking away” of comfort women by the Japanese military and government authorities could not be confirmed in any of the documents that the Government of Japan was able to identify.
- The expression “sex slaves” contradicts the facts so that it should not be used. This point was confirmed with South Korea at the occasion of the Japan-South Korea Agreement, December 2015, and the expression “sex slaves” is not used in the agreement.
- The figure “200,000 persons” lacks concrete foundation. As stated in the report of the result of the Government study, August 4, 1993, it is virtually impossible to determine the total number of comfort women as no documents have been found which either indicate the total number or give sufficient ground to establish an estimate. (Source: Japan's Efforts on the Issue of Comfort Women.)

This is the present standpoint of Japan and the thought that may be raised is that, in order to make this clear, the Kono Statement must be retracted.

However, implementing a retraction would undoubtedly require considerable political strength. Just a paper written by a university scholar, at a prestigious university, caused much turmoil. A retraction was not implemented even by the Abe administration, which was a long-running administration. Still, we must definitely accomplish this task.

Notes

(65) “Seeking the True Story of the Comfort Women,” *The New Yorker*, February 15, 2021, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/annals-of-inquiry/seeking-the-true-story-of-the-comfort-women-j-mark-ramseyer>

(66) “Statement by Andrew Gordon, Professor, Department of History, Carter Eckert, Professor, Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations,” Harvard University, February 17, 2021, <https://apjff.org/2021/5/Gordon-Eckert.html>

(67) Tessa Morris-Suzuki, The ‘Comfort Women’ Issue, Freedom of Speech, and Academic Integrity: A Study Aid (*The Asia-Pacific Journal*), March 1, 2021, <https://apjff.org/2021/5/MorrisSuzuki.html>